Università
Ca' Foscari
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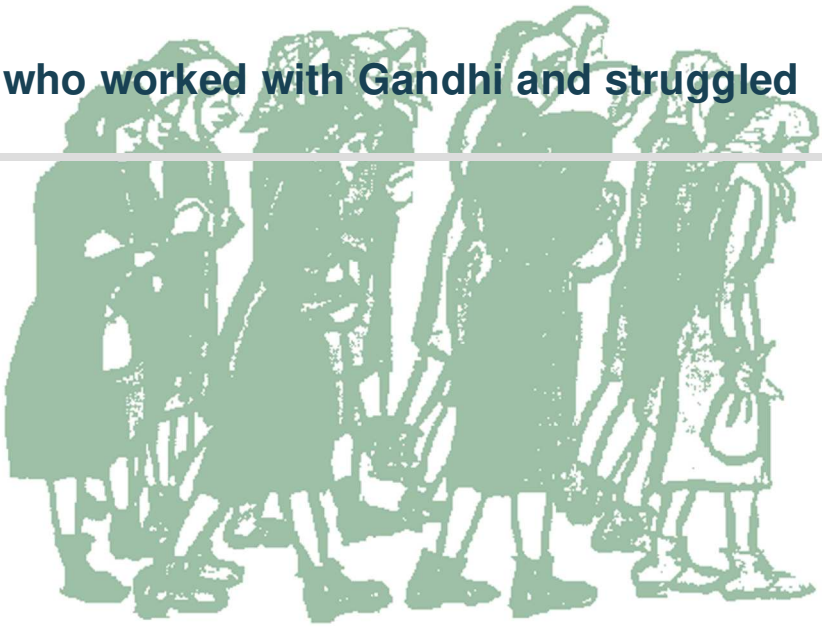
DEP
Deportate, esuli, profughe
RIVISTA TELEMATICA DI STUDI SULLA MEMORIA FEMMINILE

Numero 37 – Luglio 2018
Numero monografico

Issue 37 – July 2018
Monographic Issue

Stronger than Men. Women who worked with Gandhi and struggled for women's rights



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ISSN: 1824-4483

DEP 37
Numero monografico

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Introduzione

di

Chiara Corazza

Questo numero monografico vuole contribuire a fare luce sull'esperienza – a partire dagli anni Venti fino alla seconda metà del Novecento – delle donne che collaborarono con Gandhi prendendo parte attiva nel movimento di disobbedienza civile e/o come "social workers" e che, in seguito a questo "laboratorio politico", intrapresero percorsi indipendenti ed originali. Il tema è stato a lungo controverso. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, prima ministra della Salute e collaboratrice di Gandhi, ha affermato che le donne – in particolare le donne indiane – hanno con Gandhi un "debito speciale di gratitudine"[1], per le sue proteste contro la vedovanza forzata, il matrimonio infantile, la poligamia e il *purdah*.

Certamente, il pensiero e l'esperienza di Gandhi hanno aperto prospettive nuove per il ruolo della donna in India e nel mondo[2], sebbene con luci ed ombre. Ombre che assumono la drammatica realtà dei matrimoni precoci[3] – Gandhi e Kastur si sposarono a 13 anni e Gandhi stesso ricorda il suo ruolo di marito severo e costrittivo nei confronti di Kastur[4] – o quella delle violenze nel corso della partizione[5]. L'incapacità di offrire una via all'emancipazione femminile che spezzasse le catene della tradizione ha fatto sì che Gandhi sia stato spesso additato come un misogino, tacciato di sciovinismo maschile. Come ha recentemente affermato Debali Mookerjea-Leonard, nel suo studio *To be pure or not to be: Gandhi, Women, and the Partition of India*, Gandhi ha fallito nell'offrire una risposta politica adeguata al dramma della partizione, una "patologia di genere", secondo l'autrice, di cui gli uomini erano affetti, ma di cui le donne furono le vittime. Scrive Mookerjea-Leonard: "Focalizzando l'attenzione sulla purezza delle vittime, Gandhi, nei sui discorsi pubblici, ha fallito nel discorso [sulle violenze alle donne] a causa della sua compartecipazione alla logica patriarcale nella violenza di

[1] Rajkumar Amrit Kaur, *Gandhi and Women*, Sarvodaya Mandal and Gandhi Research Foundation, http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-articles/gandhi-and-women.php

[2] Si veda Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *To the Women*, Allahbad Journal Press, Allahbad 1941; Id., *Women and Social Injustice*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad 1942; Sushila Devi, *Mahatma Gandhi's Influence on Hindu Women*, typescript, 1922.

[3] Tema già toccato da DEP, in particolare attraverso l'attività di Eleanor Rathbone in India contro tale pratica. Si veda il saggio di Bruna Bianchi *"Più numerose di tutte le croci del Fronte Occidentale". Eleanor Rathbone e il dibattito sui matrimoni precoci in India (1887-1934)*, e *Eleanor Rathbone. Il Minotauro indiano*, in DEP 16/2011.

[4] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments of Truth*, General Press, London 2018.

[5] Si veda Debali Mookerjea-Leonard, *To be pure or not to be: Gandhi, women, and the Partition of India*, in "Feminist Review", 94, 2010, 1, pp. 38-54.

 ISSN 1824 - 4483

massa contro le donne a quel tempo"[6]. Anche l'idea di donna, secondo Gandhi, è legata al paradigma delle due sfere, delle differenze biologiche. Ha scritto Gandhi: "La donna è l'incarnazione di *Ahimsa* (non-violenza). *Ahimsa* significa amore infinito che, al contempo, significa capacità infinita di sofferenza. Chi, se non la donna, la madre dell'uomo, dimostra questa capacità al massimo grado?"[7]. Secondo Gandhi, la donna ha autonomia nella misura del suo servizio per il prossimo (il marito, i figli, la patria); ella è libera, ma entro i vincoli del matrimonio. L'emancipazione femminile è subordinata all'indipendenza della nazione indiana, ma il legame tra le due battaglie è tenue: sono collegate, ma non interconnesse. Il vero fallimento di Gandhi è stato quello di non aver riconosciuto che un'indipendenza dell'India senza l'emancipazione femminile, non sarebbe stata una vera indipendenza.

Nonostante i limiti del pensiero e della politica gandhiana, l'esperimento della disobbedienza civile ha contribuito a gettare le basi per la costruzione di un'identità politica delle donne in India e una collaborazione delle donne tra Occidente e Oriente. Le donne furono esse stesse ispiratrici dei metodi che Gandhi scelse di impiegare. Ispiratosi alle suffragette che coraggiosamente avevano intrapreso scioperi della fame[8], Gandhi forgiò il movimento non violento.

Le idee di Gandhi sul ruolo della donna hanno contribuito a mutare le visioni del riformismo del secolo precedente. Al contempo, grazie alla partecipazione di massa nella lotta per l'indipendenza, le donne sono uscite dalla sfera domestica e hanno occupato uno spazio nella sfera pubblica. Il senso di sacrificio, la pace, la cura sono valori che Gandhi esalta come "femminili" e che egli stesso accoglie e propone come valori universali, che uomini e donne devono seguire. La "differenza biologica", tuttavia, resta sostanziale. Infatti, Gandhi estende la sfera domestica alla vita pubblica, muta l'idea di matrimonio rispetto alla tradizione, ma non libera la donna dalla necessità del matrimonio; la famiglia resta l'unità di base della società. Come scrive Sujata Patel, in *Construction and Reconstruction of Woman in Gandhi* – di cui pubblichiamo in questo numero la traduzione in italiano – "la nuova immagine di donna che Gandhi propone è tratta da un peculiare contesto sociale e storico e per un ben definito obiettivo: unificare i diversi strati sociali in India contro l'imperialismo"[9].

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[6] "By focusing on the moral or purity status of the victim, Gandhi, in his public statements, failed to draw attention to the issue [the partition] because of his own participation in the patriarchal logic at work in the mass violence against women at that time", Ivi, pp. 52-53.

[7] "Woman is the incarnation of Ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love which again, means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure?" Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Woman and Social Injustice*, cit., p. 21.

[8] Sul legame tra i metodi gandhiani e il suffragismo inglese, si veda il saggio di Geraldine Forbes, *Gandhi's Debt to Women and Women's Debt to Gandhi*, pubblicato nel presente numero e Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Deeds Better than Words*, "Indian Opinion", 26 Ottobre 1906, in *Gandhi on Women: Collection of Mahatma Gandhi's Writings and Speeches on Women*, Centre for Women's Development Studies & Navajivan Trust, New Delhi 1988, p. 3.

[9] "The new image of women that Gandhi creates is drawn from one particular historical and social setting and for one particular political goal: to unite the different strata in India against imperialism"; Sujata Patel, *Construction and Reconstruction of woman in Gandhi*, "Economic and Political Weekly", 20 Febbraio 1988, p. 378.

Per quanto ci siano numerosi studi che affrontano il ruolo delle donne indiane nella disobbedienza civile e il pensiero di Gandhi sul ruolo delle donne[10], questo tema continua ad essere dibattuto. Pertanto abbiamo scelto di dedicare questo numero alle donne che affiancarono Gandhi nella lotta per l'indipendenza e per la costruzione di una cultura di pace, donne che hanno tuttora ricevuto scarsa attenzione dalla storiografia, oppure sono state oggetto di una sorta di "mitizzazione", che rischia di svilire la complessità delle loro esperienze, il ruolo autonomo che esse seppero ritagliarsi nel grande movimento politico avviato da Gandhi. Sono numerose le donne che si sono impegnate attivamente sul piano sociale, politico e culturale, maturando esperienze di rilievo da cui il femminismo indiano ha attinto. Per questo motivo il presente numero non può certo soddisfare in termini di esaustività il quadro complesso ed articolato, sia sul piano della ricostruzione storica che su quello del rapporto tra il pensiero gandhiano e quello femminista indiano. Tuttavia, i saggi qui raccolti, hanno il pregio di proseguire una ricerca che merita ancora di essere approfondita, mediante approcci interdisciplinari e indagini che consentano di documentare la storia delle donne in India nel Novecento. Alcuni saggi prediligono l'analisi di una singola figura, altri invece offrono un quadro più ampio – è il caso del quadro storico offerto dal saggio di Geraldine Forbes (Oswego University), come dell'analisi, focalizzata sul rapporto di collaborazione tra Gandhi e numerose donne occidentali di Thomas Weber (La Trobe University) tratta dal volume *Going Native* e pubblicata per DEP in traduzione italiana. Quadro esaustivo sul pensiero gandhiano e l'idea del ruolo della donna, per tutto l'excursus dell'attività politica di Gandhi, è offerto dallo scritto di Sujata Patel (Hyderabad University), vero e proprio punto di riferimento per una analisi del tema, qui pubblicato in traduzione italiana. Prospettive biografiche sono offerte dalle analisi di Sharon MacDonald (Saint Mary's University), Bidisha Mallik (Tacoma University) e Holger Terp, che approfondiscono il tema del rapporto di collaborazione tra le donne occidentali e Gandhi, che è sbocciato poi nelle esperienze autonome di Marjorie Sykes. di Sarala Behn e Ellen Hørup; il saggio di Chiara Corazza (Università Ca' Foscari) offre un'analisi postcoloniale dell'opera di Sarojni Naidu, la "poetessa del Mahatma", mentre Julie Laut (Illinois University) affronta l'esperienza di Vijayalakshmi Pandit, la sorella di Jawaharlal Nehru, della "gendered politics" nel dialogo internazionale alla Conferenza delle Nazioni Unite. La sezione saggi del numero è corredata da un capitolo tratto dall'autobiografia di Sarala Behn, la cui traduzione

[10] Sull' idea di Gandhi del ruolo della donna, si veda il già citato articolo di Sujata Patel, *Construction and Reconstruction of Woman in Gandhi*, op.cit., Sita Kapadia *A Tribute to Mahatma Gandhi: His Views on Women and Social Change* Vol 1, Nov. 29th, 1995," Journal of South Asian Women's Studies"; Madhu Kishwar, *Gandhi on Women*, "Economic and Political Weekly", 20, 40, 5 Ottobre 1985, pp. 1691-1702; in generale sul ruolo delle donne nel movimento per l' indipendenza, si veda Radha Kumar, *A History of Doing. An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1990*, Zubaan, Bombay 1997; Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India,* Cambridge Universirty Press, Cambridge 2012; Aparna Basu, *The Role of Women in the Indian Struggle for Freedom* in *Indian Women from Purdah to Modernity*, ed. B.R. Nanda, Vikas, New Delhi 1976; sul rapporto tra Gandhi e le donne occidentali, si veda Thomas Weber, *Going Native: Gandhi's Relationship with Western Women*, Roli Books, Delhi 2011, il cui capitolo "Gandhi and Western Women" è pubblicato in traduzione italiana in questo numero.

dall'hindi è stata curata da David Hopkins. Il numero si chiude con una memoria di Kastur, la moglie del Mahatma, scritta per DEP da Aaron Gandhi, il nipote del Mahatma, e il contributo di Radha Bahtt, donna chipko ed erede spirituale di Sarala Behn, che ha scritto per la nostra rivista una riflessione sulla sua esperienza e il suo rapporto di collaborazione con Sarala.

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Introduction

by

Chiara Corazza

This monographic issue sets out to shed light on the women who worked with Gandhi from the 1920s to the late 20th century, playing an active role in his movement of civil disobedience either as "social workers" or, after this "political workshop", undertaking independent and original paths. The theme has been much debated. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, the first Health Minister and long-time collaborator of Gandhi, claimed that women – especially Indian women – owed Gandhi "a special debt of gratitude"[1], because of his protests against forced widowhood, child-marriage, polygamy and *purdah.*

Without doubt, Gandhi's thought and experience have produced interesting writings on the role of women in India and the world[2], albeit with checkered results. Among the more negative aspects explored is the dramatic experience of child-marriage – a topic dealt with by DEP, especially the work of Eleanor Rathbone in India against this Indian practice[3], – Gandhi and Kastur married at 13 and Gandhi himself recalls his severe and constrictive behaviour towards Kastur[4]. Other shadows were the violence against women during Partition[5], and Gandhi's inability to open up to women's emancipation thus breaking the chains of tradition. Gandhi has often been accused of misogyny and male chauvinism. As Debali Mookerjea-Leonard has recently claimed in her article *To be pure or not to be: Gandhi, Women, and the Partition of India*, Gandhi failed to put forward an adequate political response to the drama of Partition, what she calls a "gender pathology", to which men were subject but of which women were victims. Mookerjea-Leonard writes: "By focusing on the moral or purity status of the victim, Gandhi, in his public statements, failed to draw attention to the issue [the partition] because of his own participation in the patriarchal logic at work in the

[1] Rajkumar Amrit Kaur, *Gandhi and Women*, Sarvodaya Mandal and Gandhi Research Foundation, http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-articles/gandhi-and-women.php

[2] See Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *To the Women*, Allahbad Journal Press, Allahbad 1941; Id., *Women and Social Injustice*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad 1942; Sushila Devi, *Mahatma Gandhi's Influence on Hindu Women*, typescript, 1922.

[3] On child-marriage and the work of Eleanor Rathbone in India see Bruna Bianchi, *"Più numerose di tutte le croci del Fronte Occidentale". Eleanor Rathbone e il dibattito sui matrimoni precoci in India (1887-1934)*, and *Eleanor Rathbone. Il Minotauro indiano*, in DEP 16/2011.

[4] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments of Truth*, General Press, London 2018.

[5] See Debali Mookerjea-Leonard, *To be pure or not to be: Gandhi, women, and the Partition of India* in "Feminist Review", 94, 2010, 1, pp. 38-54.

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mass violence against women at that time"[6]. In Gandhi's thought, the idea of woman is linked to the paradigm of two spheres, of biological difference. Gandhi wrote: "Woman is the incarnation of Ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love which again, means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure?"[7]. In Gandhi's view, a woman is independent in the measure of her service for those close to her (her husband, her children, her country); her freedom is limited to the confines of marriage. Women's emancipation is subordinate to the independence of India, but the link between the two struggles is tenuous; they are related but not interconnected. Gandhi's real failure was that of not recognizing that the independence of India without women's emancipation would not be true independence.

Despite the limitations of Gandhi's thought and politics, the experiment of civil disobedience helped create the basis for the construction of women's political identity in India and for the collaboration between Indian and western women. The women themselves inspired the methods Gandhi chose to use. Gandhi looked to the English suffragists who bravely undertook hunger strikes to forge his non-violent movement[8].

Gandhi's views on the role of women helped transform the reformist ideas of the previous century. At the same time, thanks to their mass participation in the fight for independence, women had emerged from the domestic sphere and had taken up their place in the public sphere. Sacrifice, peace, and care are values Gandhi lauded as being "feminine" and values he embraced and proposed as universal, to be followed by both men and women. "Biological difference", however, remained as a guiding perspective. Gandhi extended the domestic sphere to public life, modifying the traditional idea of marriage, but did not free women from the need for marriage. He considered the family as the basic and important unit of society. As Sujata Patel writes in *Construction and Reconstruction of Woman in Gandhi* – which appears in this issue in Italian translation – "the new image of women that Gandhi creates is drawn from one particular historical and social setting and for one particular political goal: to unite the different strata in India against imperialism"[9].

Although numerous studies examine the part played by Indian women in the civil disobedience and Gandhi's thought on the role of women[10], the theme

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[6] Ivi, pp. 52-33.

[7] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Woman and Social Injustice*, cit., p. 21.

[8] On the links between Gandhi's methods and English suffragism, see the essay by Geraldine Forbes, *Gandhi's Debt to Women and Women's Debt to Gandhi* in this issue and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Deeds Better than Words*, "Indian Opinion", 26 October 1906, in *Gandhi on Women: Collection of Mahatma Gandhi's Writings and Speeches on Women*, Centre for Women's Development Studies & Navajivan Trust, New Delhi 1988, p. 3.

[9] Sujata Patel, *Construction and Reconstruction of woman in Gandhi*, "Economic and Political Weekly", 20 February 1988, p. 378.

[10] On Gandhi's ideas on the role of women, see the article by Sujata Patel, *Construction and Reconstruction of Woman in Gandhi*, cit., Sita Kapadia *A Tribute to Mahatma Gandhi: His Views on Women and Social Change*, Vol 1, Nov. 29th, 1995, "Journal of South Asian Women's Studies"; Madhu Kishwar, *Gandhi on Women*, "Economic and Political Weekly", 20, 40, 5 October 1985, pp.

continues to invite debate. We have therefore chosen to devote this issue to the women who worked alongside Gandhi in the fight for independence and for the construction of a culture of peace. These are women to whom historiography has paid little attention or who have been "idealised", which risks undervaluing the complexity of their involvement, and the independent roles they managed to carve out for themselves in the great political movement Gandhi set in motion. Many women worked actively in the social, political and cultural fields, gaining important experience on which Indian feminism drew. This issue cannot hope to provide a full coverage of the complex and rich picture, both in terms of historical reconstruction and of the relationship between Gandhian thought and Indian feminist reflection. Nevertheless, the articles published here have the advantage of continuing a line of research that deserves further study using interdisciplinary approaches and studies that permit documentation of the history of women in India in the 20th century.

Some articles focus on the work of a single figure; others provide a wider view, such as the study by Geraldine Forbes (Oswego University), and the analysis of the collaboration between Gandhi and several western women by Thomas Weber (La Trobe University) from his *Going Native: Gandhi's Relationship with Western Women*, which is published here in Italian translation. The article by Sujata Patel (Hyderabad University), published in Italian translation, is a detailed overview of Gandhi's thought and his conception of the role of women throughout his political activity. Sharon MacDonald (Saint Mary's University), Bidisha Mallik (Tacoma University) and Holger Terp provide biographical studies that explore the theme of the collaboration between western women and Gandhi, in particular the individual experiences of Marjorie Sykes, Sarala Behn and Ellen Hørup. The article by Chiara Corazza (Ca' Foscari University of Venice) is a post-colonial analysis of the work of Sarojni Naidu, the "Nightingale of India", while Julie Laut (Illinois University) looks at the experience of Vijayalakshmi Pandit, sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, of "gendered politics" in the international discussion at the United Nations Conference. The issue also publishes a chapter from the autobiography of Sarala Behn, translated from Hindi David Hopkins. The issues closes with a recollection of Kastur, Mahatma's wife, written for DEP by Aaron Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma, and the contribution of Radha Bahtt, Chipko activist and spiritual heir of Sarala Behn, who has written a reflection on her experience and her collaboration with Sarala.

1691-1702; more generally on the role of women in the independence movement, see Radha Kumar, *A History of Doing. An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1990*, Zubaan, Bombay 1997; Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012; Aparna Basu, *The Role of Women in the Indian Struggle for Freedom* in *Indian Women from Purdah to Modernity*, ed. B.R. Nanda, Vikas, New Delhi 1976; on the relationships between Gandhi and western women, see Thomas Weber, *Going Native: Gandhi's Relationship with Western Women*, Roli Books, Delhi 2011, of which the chapter "Gandhi and Western Women" is published in this issue in Italian translation.

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Gandhi's Debt to Women and Women's Debt to Gandhi

by

Geraldine Forbes[*]

Abstract: This essay focuses on the specific ways Gandhi, in developing his campaign against the British, owed a substantial debt to women. Following that, I reflect on how Gandhi's attention to women and gender changed women's lives. In considering Gandhi's debt first, I propose that women inspired Gandhi's course of action and influenced the development of his woman-friendly political strategy.

The story of women's role in the freedom struggle is closely linked to Gandhi's leadership of the movement. History books tell us Gandhi brought women "out of their homes" to join demonstrations and become political actors. Gandhi gave, Aparna Basu wrote, "new direction, strength and inspiration to the freedom movement and drew into it women in large numbers"[1].

According to Lakshmi Menon, this was for women "an opportunity to break away from the past with all its frustrations"[2]. Books and articles written by Indian women who themselves or their mothers joined the political movement give central place to women's participation and to Gandhi's friendships with and reliance on women. Moreover, women feature prominently in Gandhi's autobiography, newspaper articles, speeches, and letters. Despite the centrality of women and gender topics in Gandhi's own writing and that of women close to him, historians have either neglected the topic or, more recently, denounced Gandhi for his inability to accept women as equals.

Thomas Weber, in his 2011 book *Going Native: Gandhi's Relationship with Western Women*[3], addressed the discrepancy between Gandhi's focus on women, attention to women's issues, and long and significant relationships with women and

[*] Geraldine Forbes is Distinguished Teaching Professor Emerita in the Department of History at State University of New York Oswego. She has written extensively on the lives of women in Colonial India.

[1] Aparna Basu, *The Role of Women in the Indian Struggle for Freedom*, in Bal Ram Nanda (ed.), *Indian Women from Purdah to Modernity*, Vikas, New Delhi 1976, p. 20.

[2] Lakshmi N. Menon, *Women and the National Movement*, in Devika Jain (ed.), *Indian Women*, GOI Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi 1975, p. 23.

[3] Thomas Weber, *Going Native: Gandhi's Relationship with Western Women*, Roli Books, Delhi 2011, p. 12.

 ISSN 1824 - 4483

the lack of scholarship on Gandhi and women[4]. Weber reminds us that Gandhi is inextricably linked with the story of India's freedom struggle, a story primarily about men confronting men. Moreover, the men involved, for example Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel, played monumental roles in independent India. In comparison, only a few women, such as Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Vijayalakshmi Pandit, went on to illustrious careers. While these women have received some attention from historians, most of the women involved in the freedom movement have faded from view.

This essay focuses on the specific ways Gandhi, in developing his campaign against the British, owed a substantial debt to women. Following that, I reflect on how Gandhi's attention to women and gender changed women's lives. In considering Gandhi's debt first, I propose that women inspired Gandhi's course of action and influenced the development of his woman-friendly political strategy.

Gandhi's Satyagraha

Gandhi's method of struggle – *Satyagraha* – a method that went beyond civil disobedience and non-violence to focus on the struggle for Truth, owed a debt to his childhood and adult experiences of women's strength. Among the women who greatly influenced the development of young Mohandas was his mother and child wife Kasturba, and later, in South Africa, the English suffragettes. These women taught him about strength of character, the power of self-suffering, and the impact of the performance of femininity in political arenas.

Gandhi's mother, Putlibai, his father's fourth wife and a member of an eclectic Hindu sect that was tolerant and respectful of other religious faiths, impressed him with her commonsense, devotion, self-sacrifice, and personal strength. A "saintly" woman, Putlibai visited the Vaishnava temple every day but she also visited other temples, Gandhi tells us in his *Memoir*. He also noted that she observed the most difficult vows without flinching and kept herself well informed about politics, which she readily discussed with her friends[5]. Above all, he remembered her strength of character. Kasturba, who Gandhi married when he was 12 and she 13 years of age, resisted his tyranny and established that she was a person to be reckoned with. Enamored with advice manuals that explained the ideal conjugal relationship, Gandhi explained to his child wife his plan teach her to read and write, instruct her in what he knew, and help her align her "life and thoughts" with his. The nighttime lessons didn't work: Kasturba was tired from her day's work and uninterested in learning to read and write while her instructor was more

[4] Two excellent articles on Gandhi and women were published in the 1980s: Madhu Kishwar's *Gandhi on Women*, in "Economic and Political Weekly", 20, 40, 5th October 1985, pp.1691-1701 and n. 41, pp. 1753-1758; and Sujata Patel's *Construction and Reconstruction of Woman in Gandhi,* in "Economic and Political Weekly", 23, 8, February 20, 1988, pp. 377-387. The twenty-first century has seen considerably more attention to this topic, for example, Thomas Weber, *Going Native* cit.; Girja Kumar, *Brahmacharya Gandhi and His Women Associates*, Vitasta, Delhi 2008 and a number of articles in magazines and newspapers.

[5] Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Beacon Press, Boston 1993, pp. 4-5; 33.

interested in romance than teaching[6]. When Mohandas tried to restrict his wife's movements, Kasturba left the house without his permission. Meanwhile, the families of the children kept them from what Gandhi called his "devouring passion"[7].

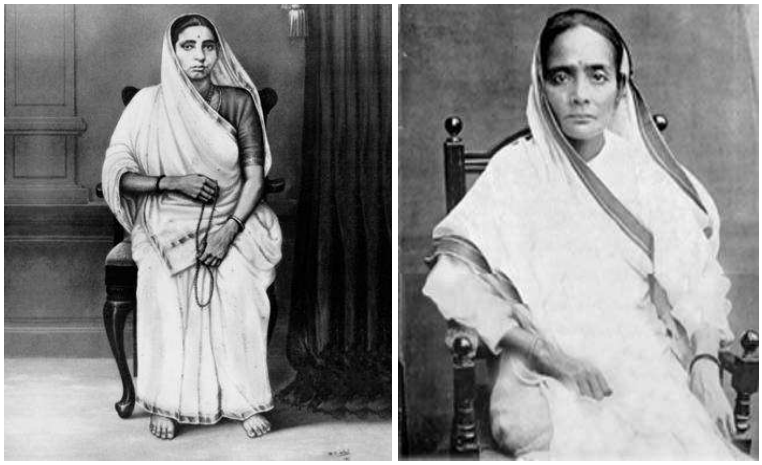

Figure 1 and 2. Putlibai Gandhi and Kasturba Gandhi, 1915[8]

Gandhi's life was shattered by the death of his father when he was 16; two years later, at age 18, he left his wife and baby son to study in England. He completed his law degree in 1891, returned to India for two years, and then traveled to South Africa, which was to become his home for the next two decades. It was in South Africa that Gandhi came face-to-face with racial prejudice and increasingly dissatisfied with his life.

1906 was momentous for many reasons: Gandhi took the vow of *brahmacharya*, read Tolstoy, Thoreau and Ruskin, explored religious texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Christian Bible, and visited England to lobby against the Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance of 19069.

Between his trip to England and launching of the campaign against the Black Act in 1907, Gandhi wrote about the militant Women's Social and Political Union whose members had chosen "Deeds not Words" as the motto of their campaign for

[6] Arun Gandhi, *Kasturba: a Life*, Penguin Books, New Delhi 2000, p. 20.

[7] Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, cit., pp. 12-13.

[8] Putlibai Gandhi. By Unknown.gandhiserve.org. Public Domain.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=169924; Kasturba Gandhi, 1915. Photographer Unknown. Public Domain. http://www.mkgandhi-sarvodaya.org/gphotgallery/1869-1914/images/b.jpg

[9] Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man, His People and the Empire*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2007, pp. 117-120.

women's suffrage in England[10]. In a number of articles in the Gujarati paper *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi praised the actions of these women, many of them well educated and from respectable families, who defied social norms by demonstrating in public for the right to vote. Refusing orders to retreat, they were arrested and jailed when they refused to pay their fines. Using words like "brave", "remarkable", "courage," and "tenacity" to describe these English women and their actions, Gandhi made no effort to hide his admiration. Even though people laugh at them, they are "undaunted" he wrote, and "work on steadfast in their cause"[11]. Gandhi expressed great faith in the outcome: "They are bound to succeed and gain the franchise for the simple reason that deeds are better than words"[12].

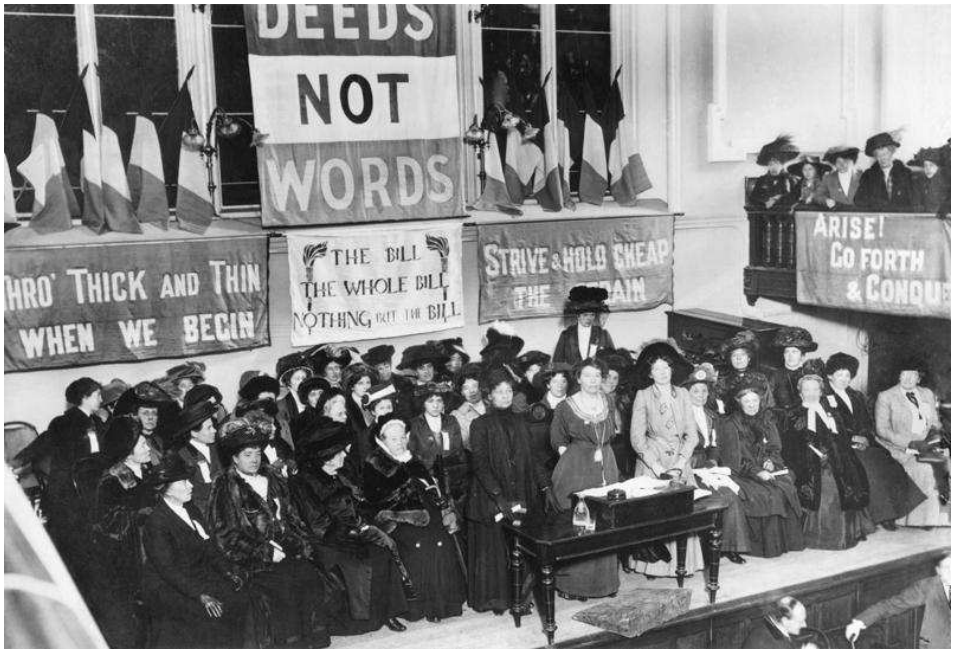

Figure 3. A suffragette meeting in Caxton Hall, Manchester, England circa 1908[13].

[10] The Women's Social and Political Union was cofounded by Emmeline Pankhurst in Manchester in 1903.

[11] "Deeds Better than Words", *Indian Opinion* (Oct 26, 1906), in Pushpa Joshi (ed.), *Gandhi on Women: Collection of Mahatma Gandhi's Writings and Speeches on Women*, Centre for Women's Development Studies & Navajivan Trust, New Delhi & Ahmedabad 1988, p. 3.

[12] *Ibidem*. See also: "Brave Women", *Indian Opinion* (Dec. 12, 1906), in Pushpa Joshi (ed.), *Gandhi on Women*, cit., p. 4. "When Women are Manly, Will Men be Effeminate?" *Indian Opinion* (Feb 23, 1907) in Ivi, pp. 6-7. "Brave Women of Britain", *Indian Opinion* (Mar 3, 1907), Ivi, p. 6; "Brave Women of England", *Indian Opinion* (Jun 29,1907), Ivi, pp. 6-7.

[13] A suffragette meeting in Caxton Hall, Manchester, England circa 1908. The New York Times photo archive, via their online store, here, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2953666

These influences – mother, wife, and the suffragettes – played an important role in Gandhi's first *Satyagraha* against the "Black Act" to restrict Indian immigration to the Transvaal and require Indians to register for and carry passbooks. Speaking out against the draft of the Asiatic Registration Ordinance at the Empire Theatre in Johannesburg in September 1906, Gandhi urged his audience to oppose these laws and continue protesting when threatened with imprisonment[14]. When Abdul Gani, Chairman of the Transvaal British Indian Association, spoke, he was clearly aware of Gandhi's admiration for the tactics of the Women's Social and Political Union: "This is for us the time for deeds, not words. We have to act boldly; and in doing so, we have to be humble and non-violent"[15]. In his *Indian Opinion* article "Deeds Better than Words", Gandhi directly connected the South African struggle and that of the suffragettes. If the Transvaal Indians emulated these women and courted arrest, Gandhi predicted, "the bonds" of Indians would snap by themselves[16].

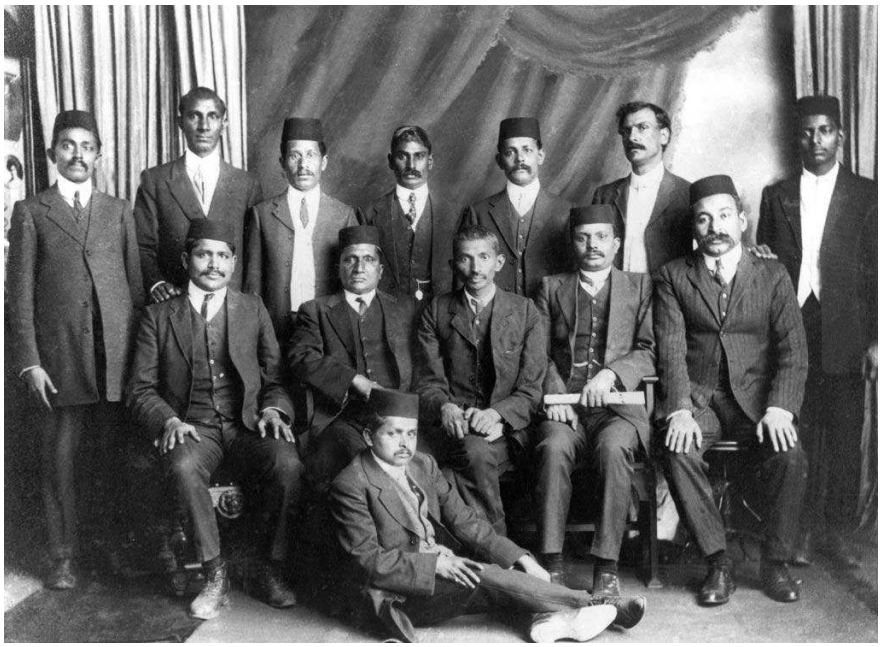

Figure 4. Gandhi with the leaders of the non-violent resistance movement in South Africa[17].

[14] **"**The Mass Meeting", Johannesburg (September 11, 1906), *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (hereafter CWMG), v. 5, Government of India, Publications Division, Electronic Version. 1999, p. 333. http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL005.PDF

[15] "Johannesburg Letter" (Sept. 11, 1906), *Indian Opinion* (Sep 15, 1906), in CWMG, v. 5,1999, pp. 338-342.

[16]"Deeds Better than Words", *Indian Opinion* (Oct., 26, 1906), in Pushpa Joshi (ed.), *Gandhi on Women*, cit., p. 3.

[17] Gandhi with the leaders of the non-violent resistance movement in South Africa. Photographer Unknown. http://web.mahatma.org.in/pictures/images/piccat0007/sa_1024_0023.jpg, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=169972

This was Gandhi's first call for *Satyagraha*, or truth force, the militant non-violent strategy for political, social and moral change, which has continued to influence movements for social justice around the world. He called on men, challenging them in gendered terms: "Hence we ask: will Indian men be effeminate? Or will they emulate the manliness shown by English women and wake up?"[18]. While Gandhi admired English women for demonstrating in the streets, he did not envision Indian women marching in public and going to jail.

What Can Women Do?

From very early in his political career, Gandhi was aware of Indian women's participation in politics but he did not imagine them going beyond supportive roles until women joined demonstrations and courted arrest. In India in 1901, he attended the Calcutta meeting of the Indian National Congress where he listened to a chorus of 56 young women sing a patriotic song composed by Saraladevi Ghosal. Reading about the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, he could not have missed the activities of women who introduced spinning wheels and looms into their homes and those of their neighbors and urged women to produce their own Durga puja saris. Other women were encouraged to take the vow of *Meyer Kanta* [woman's chest] to daily set aside a handful of rice for the motherland[19]. While he was fully cognizant of women's support of the Swadeshi movement and impressed by the political activities of the English suffragettes, he did not encourage women to become political activists until they stated their willingness to join the Tranvaal *satyagraha* of 1913.

In the years between 1907 and 1911, Indian men fought discriminatory laws in South Africa by lobbying in England, rallying support in India, courting arrest, and suffering imprisonment. In October of 1912 Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the much respected leader of the Indian National Congress and founder of the Servants of India Society, arrived in South Africa to discuss Indian grievances. Received as a state guest, Gokhale returned to India full of hope that the situation would improve[20]. To Gandhi it was clear that the "unwritten pledge" was broken when the government of South Africa decided not to repeal the £3 tax on Indians who had served their contracts and wished to remain in Natal[21]. The immigration bill that emerged in March of 1913 imposed restrictions on individual unable to read and write in a European language and those who seemed "unsuited" on economic or other grounds to live in South Africa[22]. Further restricting the rights of indentured

[18] "When Women are Manly, Will Men be Effeminate?", *Indian Opinion* (Feb. 23, 1907) in Pushpa Joshi (ed.), *Gandhi on Women*, cit., pp. 5-6.

[19] These examples of women's participation in the Swadeshi Movement are listed by J.C. Bagal, *Jattiya Andolane Bangla Nari*, Vishva-Bharati, Bhadra 1361 B.S., Calcutta 1954.

[20] Robert A. Huttenback, *Gandhi in South Africa: British Imperialism and the Indian Question, 1860-1914*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1971, pp. 300-30.1

[21] "£3 Tax Disappointment", *Indian Opinion* (Apr. 26, 1913), in CWMG, v. 13 (GOI: 1999 Electronic version), p. 89. http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL013.PDF

[22] Robert A. Huttenback, *Gandhi in South Africa*, cit., p. 304.

laborers, one section of the new legislation stated that the wives and children of residents would be allowed only from monogamous marriages that had been "duly celebrated according to the rites of any religious faith" prior to entering the Union of South Africa[23].

The courts followed suit, first denying entry to wives in polygamous marriages. This was followed by other rulings: that all polygamous marriages were illegal and only Christian marriages or those registered by the Registrar of Marriages were legal[24]. This meant, Gandhi wrote in *Indian Opinion*, that Indian wives were reduced to the status of "concubines"[25]. While he frequently referred to women's anger at this declaration, he did not encourage them to join public demonstrations. There was no need for women to put themselves in harm's way, Gandhi argued: "Cannot men go to goal for women's honour and their own?"[26].

In May, the Transvaal Satyagraha Association and the British Indian Association promised *Satyagraha* if the Government did not accept its demands[27]. The next day, May 4th, members of the Transvaal Indian Women's Association sent a telegram to the Minister of the Interior promising that they would offer "passive resistance" unless the ruling regarding Indian marriages was changed[28]. Gandhi, who had written a month earlier to Gokhale about Kasturba's resolve to join the struggle[29] and reminded his readers of the bravery of the English suffragettes[30], now praised "our plucky sisters who have dared to fight the Government." At the same time, he urged men to come forward and end the struggle before women had to step forward[31]. Privately he warned Kasturba that she should not commit to the movement unless she was certain she could live up to his expectations[32].

The Immigration Act that came into effect in August of 1913 did not solve the issue of immigration, the £3 tax, or Indian marriages. In response, Gandhi initiated a new campaign on September 13th and women responded[33]. On September 15th, 12 men and four women, including Kasturba, Chhaganlal Gandhi's wife Kashi, Maganlal Gandhi's wife's Santok, and Dr. Pranjivan Mehta's daughter Jeki, left Phoenix Farm to cross the Transvaal border. Kasturba and her companions were

[23] Ivi, p. 306.

[24] Ivi, p. 307; Rajmohan Gandhi, *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, His People, and an Empire*, Penguin Books India, Delhi 2006, pp. 157-160.

[25] "The Marriage Imbroglio", *Indian Opinion* (Apr. 12, 1913), in CWMG, v. 13, cit., pp. 55-56.

[26] "Indian Marriages", *Indian Opinion* (Mar. 29, 1913), in CWMG, v. 13, cit., p. 26.

[27] "The Campaign", *Indian Opinion* (May 3, 1915), in CWMG, v. 13, cit., pp. 112-116.

[28] "Indian Women as Passive Resisters", Telegram dated May 4, 1913, *Indian Opinion* (May 5, 1913), in CWMG, v. 13, cit., pp. 121-122.

[29] "Letter to G.K. Gokhale", (Apr, 19, 1913), in CWMG, v. 13, cit., pp. 85-86

[30] "Mrs. Pankhurst's Sacrifice", *Indian Opinion* (Apr, 19, 1913), in CWMG, v. 13, cit., pp. 81-82; "Letter to Hermann Kallenbach", (Apr. 25, 1913), in CWMG, v. 13, cit., pp. 87-88.

[31] "The Women's Resolution", *Indian Opinion* (May 5, 1913), in CWMG, v. 13, cit., p. 123.

[32] Rajmohan Gandhi, *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man*, cit., p. 171.

[33] Robert A. Huttenback, *Gandhi in South Africa*, cit., p. 314; "Letter to the 'Natal Mercury", *The Natal Mercury* (Sept. 25, 1913), in CWMG, v. 13, cit., pp. 312-313.

detained and later sentenced to three months in prison[34]. Less than a month later, 11 women from Tolstoy Farm entered Natal and walked to Newcastle to persuade mine workers to protest the tax imposed on ex-indentured workers[35]. They were arrested and sentenced to join their sisters in Pietermaritzburg jail. Notable among the women courting arrest was Bai Fatima, the wife of Gandhi's nemesis Sheikh Mehtab, who left Durban and was arrested with her mother Hanifa Bai and seven year old son[36].

News of the imprisonment of women and the hardships they endured mobilized public opinion and brought support for the cause. Sadly, prison conditions gave the movement its first female martyr: Valliamma Moonsamy Mudaliar who died shortly after her release from prison[37]. Gandhi wrote in 1914 that women "were fired with the desire to be in gaol"[38]. Observing their actions and resolve, he praised their strength and fortitude, characteristics he had been observing in women since childhood.

Return to India

When Gandhi returned to India in 1915, he was reunited with women like Ramabai Ranade, Dr. Kadambini Ganguli, and Jaiji Jehangir Petit who had supported his work in South Africa. These women, long engaged in efforts to ameliorate the sufferings of women and encourage social change, were keenly aware of the importance of political action. While male reformers organized the first women's associations, women soon arranged their own meetings to discuss social issues. The Bharata Mahila Parishad, the Indian Women's Conference of the National Social Conference, first met in 1904. The meeting was arranged by women who decided men would not be allowed to enter the hall. At the 1904 meeting, Ramabai Ranade, the widow of the well-known reformer Justice M. G. Ranade, urged women to work together for the regeneration of the nation[39]. The next year, women discussed the need for education, the lack of medical care, early marriage, and child welfare[40]. Saraladevi Choudhurani used the Women's Conference to propose the formation of a women-only organization: Bharat Stree Mahamandal [The Great Circle of Indian Women] that held its first meeting in Allahabad in 1910. A few years later, a branch of the Mahamandal, called the Tamil Women's Association, merged with a women's improvement society begun

[34] Ramchandra Guha, *Gandhi Before India*, Penguin Books, Gurgaon 2013, pp. 464-467.

[35] Martin Green, *Gandhi: Voice of a New Age Revolution*, Axios, Mount Jackson VA 2009, p. 283; Joseph Lelyveld, *Great Soul: Mahatma Gandhi and His Struggle with India*, Vintage Books, New York 2011, p. 109.

[36] *Ibidem.*

[37] "Letter to Hermann Kallenbach", (Feb. 22, 1914), in CWMG, v. 14, Electronic version, 1999, p. 74. http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL014.PDF

[38] "The Last Satyagraha Campaign: My Experience", Golden Number, *Indian Opinion* (1914), in CWMG, v. 14, cit., p. 268.

[39] *The Indian Ladies Magazine* (Feb, 1904), p. 259.

[40] *The Indian Ladies Magazine* (Jan, 1905), pp. 219-220.

by two foreign women belonging to the Theosophical Society to form the Women's Indian Association [WIA]. The aim of the new organization, according to one of its founder members, Kamalabai L. Rau, was to educate women and make them "conscious of their place in the growing society of the land"[41]. In 1917 a delegation of women activists met with Edwin Montagu to ask for the vote for women. By this time there were women's organizations throughout India capable of articulating women's issues and launching projects to achieve their goals.

Gandhi's first long and well-developed speech on women in India was made in 1918 to the Bhagini Samaj, a Gujarati women's organization founded in 1916 in memory of Gokhale. In this talk, Gandhi argued that efforts for "women's regeneration" were necessary to overcome the subordination of women supported by religious texts, laws, and customs. Drawing on his experience traveling in Bihar, Gandhi asserted that women understood and abhorred customs that prevented them from enjoying equal rights and participating in "the activities of man". As a remedy, he prescribed: education, awakening women to their condition, nurturing women leaders, and encouraging women to fight for their rights – issues that women's organizations had been discussing for over a decade. Seconding the resolve of women's organizations to solve their own problems, Gandhi talked about Bihari women who observed purdah but neither liked nor believed in the custom. He said "I wanted them to have the strength themselves to win their freedom"[42]. In other writings and speeches, he echoed the sentiments of women like Ramabai Ranade and Saraladevi Chaudhurani who asserted men were to blame for keeping women subordinate. When women were no longer "dolls or slaves," Gandhi predicted they would take their place side-by-side with men as full actors in the new nation[43].

Despite his rhetoric about women working side-by-side with men, Gandhi's first efforts to involve women in the freedom struggle were consistent with essentialist gender roles: they would spin and wear Khadi. Paying close attention to the sequence of events between 1918 and 1920, we can observe the evolution of Gandhi's ideas about women's activism. When Gandhi delivered his first formal address to a women's organization, he chastised them for placing men in executive roles and urged them to fight for their rights. Advocating the importance of *swadeshi* to the nation in 1919, Gandhi exhorted women to take the *swadeshi* vow – to no longer wear foreign cloth and switch to cloth produced in the country. Explaining that *Satyagraha* meant more than disobeying laws, Gandhi met with women's groups in the Punjab and western India to reiterate that nation building required women's participation. The economy of India could never advance, Gandhi told his women audiences, until women gave up foreign textiles and began

[41] Kamalabai L. Rau, *Memoirs of a Brihan Maharashtrian*, Trans. Indirabai M. Rau, Unpublished manuscript, 1972, p. 14. This was later published as *Smrutika: The Story of My Mother as Told by Herself*, Dr. Krishabai Nimbkar, Pune 1988.

[42] "Speech at Bhagini Samaj, Bombay", (Feb, 20, 1918), in Pushpa Joshi (ed.), *Gandhi on Women*, cit., pp. 17-21.

[43] "Address at All India Social Service Conference", Calcutta (Dec, 17, 1917), in Pushpa Joshi (ed.), *Gandhi on Women*, cit., p.17.

wearing cloth produced in India. The home was the site of domestic consumption where women were in charge; in this battle, women were more important than men[44].

Speaking mostly to middle- and upper-class women, Gandhi reproached them for their ignorance of poor women for whom spinning could be a lifeline and chastised them for complaining *Khadi* saris were heavy and uncomfortable. Gandhi reminded them that women joyfully carried extra weight during pregnancy and then suffered giving birth. "This is the time for the birth of a new India," he told them, "You can make India free only if you bear this burden"[45].

After Congress declared April 6-13, 1921 *Satyagraha* Week, women across the country held meetings to show their support. At one of the several meetings Sarojini Naidu addressed, women decided to form their own independent political organization, Rashtriya Stree Sangha [RSS], which required its members to join District Congress Committees. Speaking to this group in August, Urmila Devi, the widowed sister of the Bengali Congress leader C. R. Das, urged women to be ready to leave their homes to serve the country. By November, 1,000 Bombay women were demonstrating against the Prince of Wales' visit to India[46]. In Bengal, events took an even more dramatic turn. C.R. Das, the most important Congress leader in eastern India, decided volunteers should sell *Khadi* on the streets of Calcutta to test the government's ban on political demonstrations. After the first batch of volunteers, including C. R. Das' son, were arrested, his wife Basanti Devi, sister Urmila Devi, and niece Suniti Devi, were arrested selling *Khadi.* Word of their arrest resulted in a huge crowd of "Marwaris, Muslims, Bhattias, Sikhs, coolies, mill-hands and school boys" who milled around until the police released the women. One man said he felt women from his own household had been arrested. The next day, December 8, 1921, the whole city was in commotion[47]. As had been the case in South Africa, Gandhi quickly recognized the value of having women join public demonstrations. Writing in *Young India*, he urged women from other parts of the country to follow the brave example of Bengali women. More than a decade earlier, Gandhi had evoked the "manliness" of English women who courted arrest and taunted his male readers with the label "effeminate." As had been the case in South Africa, the arrest of respectable Indian women brought men into the movement. Less predictable was the way these arrests affected women who were thrilled by images of women engaged in political action. Reading Gandhi's many speeches, it is clear that women's actions pushed him to expand his message to them about what they could do. Always asking for money, Gandhi reported that he was surprised when a woman, one who ground flour to make a living, took off her

[44] "Speech at Women's Meeting, Bombay", (May 8, 1919), in *Kheda Vartaman* (May 21,1919), in Pushpa Joshi (ed.), *Gandhi on Women*, cit., pp. 22-24; "Speech at Women's Meeting Surat", (May 26, 1919), CWMG, v. 18, Electronic version 1999, pp. 60-62. http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL018.PDF

[45] "Speech at Women's Meeting, Dakor" (Oct 27, 1920) in *Navajivan* (Nov. 3, 1920), in Pushpa Joshi (ed.), *Gandhi on Women*, cit., pp. 52-55.

[46] Gail O. Pearson, *Women in Public Life in Bombay City with Special Reference to the Civil Disobedience Movement*, Ph.D. Thesis, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1979, pp. 175-184.

[47] *Indian Annual Register*, II (1922), p. 320.

earrings and gave them to him. Henceforth, he asked for jewelry as that was what women had to give. And, Gandhi reported, women "showered" him with rings and bangles.

As the movement progressed, Gandhi continued to push women to take the vow of *swadeshi* and abandon their foreign-made saris. However, when women in Bengal were arrested for selling *Khadi* in the streets, Gandhi followed their lead and urged other women to come forward. "I had hoped," he wrote, ". . . women would be spared the honour of going to jail." But now these women had been arrested, he urged everyone to "welcome this innovation." Henceforth, "the women of India should have as much share in winning swaraj as men…I hope that the women all over India will take up the challenge and organize themselves"[48].

Women as Leaders

Gandhi was raised in a world where only lower-class/caste and "unfortunate" women, especially widows, worked outside the home. Their jobs were menial, the pay poor, and they were subject to sexual harassment. This was a world where the Hindi word for widow became a synonym for prostitute[49] and city surveys inform us that the majority of prostitutes were widows[50]. Respectable women worked within their homes and moved within circumscribed spaces that included their neighborhoods, religious sites, and the extended family.

When Gandhi first encouraged women to join public demonstrations and court arrest, he had to confront three issues intimately connected to women's sexuality. First, he had to overcome the widely-held belief that women were easily seduced and needed surveillance and protection. In a society where males and females generally occupied different spaces, the idea of men and women working together raised the threat of sexual encounters – forced and consensual. Finally, if arrested and sent to jail, women faced the possibility of sexual harassment and assault.

Gandhi examined these issues in a series of articles that linked women's participation in the movement to the larger issue of an India free of communalism, caste discrimination, hunger, drunkenness, and violence against women[51]. Taking on the issue of women provoking lust, Gandhi asserted it was men's problem, not women's. It was not women who needed to change but rather those men who looked upon women lustfully, forgetting their mothers and wives. He reminded his readers that English women worked in many jobs without harassment. Unfortunately, in India girls were raised to think they needed the protection of

[48] "Women's Part", *Young India* (Dec, 15, 1921), in Pushpa Joshi (ed.), *Gandhi on Women*, cit., pp. 93-95.

[49] Sarah Lamb, *Being a Widow and Other Life Stories: The Interplay Between Lives and Words*, in "Anthropology and Humanism", 26, 1, 2001, p. 19.

[50] By the middle of the 19th century there were over 12,000 prostitutes in Calcutta (out of a total population of 400,000) and it was estimated that approximately 90% of them widows. Janet Harvey Kelman, *Labour in India*, George Allen and Unwin, London 1923, pp. 222-223.

[51] "Women of Gujarat", *Navajivan* (Jan, 15, 1922), in Pushpa Joshi (ed.), *Gandhi on Women*, cit., pp. 95-97.

men. Once they overcame their fear of death, Gandhi claimed they would be able to protect themselves. Praising a girl who sold *Khadi* caps on the street, Gandhi exclaimed: "She knew that all men were her brothers. If one is good oneself, so is the world"[52]. And finally, if a woman's purity was threatened, she could exercise "the power to die," that is, commit suicide to save herself from violation[53]. Although Gandhi advocated the "nuclear option," I do not believe he was encouraging young women to commit suicide. Rather, he wanted to convince society that women who took part in political demonstrations were respectable women.

In addition to encouraging girls and women to join public demonstrations, Gandhi was concerned about nurturing women leaders. In his 1918 speech to the Bhagini Samaj, Gandhi denounced the "blemishes" in the *shastras* : child marriage, enforced widowhood, and restrictions that marked women as subordinate, and argued that society had to produce women who were as "pure, firm and self-controlled as Sita, Damayanti and Draupadi"[54], legendary heroines who "filled the wicked with awe"[55]. The women Gandhi envisioned coming forward would have authority in the society and their example would erase the impression left by erroneous *smritis*[56].

One of his chief supporters in convincing women to adopt *Khadi* was Saraladevi Ghosal Chaudhurani, the niece of Rabindranath Tagore. Well-educated and patriotic, Saraladevi was not married until she was 33 and then it was to Rambhuj Dutt Chaudhary, a nationalist and member of the Arya Samaj from the Punjab. Gandhi met her in 1901 but only became a good friend in 1919, when he came to Lahore as part of the Congress investigation of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. As he got to know her better, he discovered she embodied the characteristics of Sita, Damayanti, and Draupadi and had the potential to become the leader of Indian women. In one extraordinary letter to Rambhuj, he called Saraladevi "the greatest Shakti" and wrote about her becoming one with India in heart and soul[57].

In a series of letters to Saraladevi, written mostly in the 1920s, it is clear Gandhi was "dazzled by her personality"[58], delighted she could help make *Khadi* fashionable, and impressed by her ability to move crowds with words and music. However, she was not yet perfect. From the early days of their friendship, Gandhi encouraged her to spin every day, learn to write and speak in Hindi, and become less self-centered[59]. In these letters, one can note a deepening relationship as Gandhi moved from addressing Saraladevi as "Dear Saraladevi", to "Dear Sarala",

[52] "My hope", *Navajivan* (Jan, 1, 1922), in Pushpa Joshi (ed.), *Gandhi on Women*, cit., p. 100.

[53] "The Need for Fearlessness", *Navajivan* (Jan. 1, 1922), in Pushpa Joshi (ed.), *Gandhi on Women*, cit., p. 99.

[54] "Speech at Bhagini Samaj", p. 18.

[55] "Duty of Women", *Navajivan* (Jul. 18, 1920), in Pushpa Joshi (ed.), *Gandhi on Women*, cit., p. 48.

[56] "Speech at Bhagini Samaj", p. 18.

[57] Gandhi to Saraladevi (May 2, 1920) Dipak Chaudhury Collection.

[58] Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man, His People and the Empire*, cit., p. 216.

[59] Gandhi to Saraladevi (Mar 22, 1920) Dipak Chaudhury Collection.

to "Dear Sister," and then "Dearest Sarala." While a number of authors have characterized this as an "infatuation," suggesting a sexual longing, I propose a different reading of Gandhi's comment that he considered Saraladevi his "spiritual wife"[60]. Vinay Lal called Gandhi's experiments "sexual celibacy or celibate sexuality" – experiments that fit with his advocacy for celibacy but not sex segregation. Brahmacharya for Gandhi, according to Lal, did not entail avoiding desire but rather facing, overcoming and controlling it[61]. Personally attracted to Saraladevi, who was cultured, extroverted, intellectual, politically active, and attractive[62], Gandhi tried shaping her to become his ideal female leader. In addition to informing her about her son Dipak's progress, filling her in on political news, and discussing health issues, Gandhi's letters are full of instructions: wear Khadi, live simply, write and speak in Hindi, come to live and work in the Ashram, and dedicate yourself heart and soul to the movement. He called his letters to her "love letters" but at the same time refers to himself as her "brother" and "Law Giver". It is clear Gandhi wanted Saraladevi to give up her lavish life style and marriage to dedicate herself to the cause.

Although Gandhi wrote in *My Experiments with Truth* that he remained extremely healthy once he had mastered the art of eating, his letters to Saraladevi in 1920 tell a different story. Then 50 years old, Gandhi wrote about illnesses, aches and pains, and difficulty walking. He appeared tired and in need of her sympathy and pampering. Traveling together to promote *Khadi* and the *swadeshi* pledge, Gandhi admired Saraladevi's public persona and may have imagined that "a merger with her might bring him closer to winning all of India to satyagraha"[63]. Gandhi's description of the women leaders needed for India was based on his reading of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The legendary women he mentioned – Sita, Damayanti and Draupadi – were revered for their courage, determination, moral strengthen, and fortitude. It was only when he met Saraladevi that he found someone who embodied the characteristics needed to lead women and at the same time, could cause men to rethink their ideas about women. While this was his ideal, it was not to be. The details are lost to history but Rajmohan Gandhi claims Gandhi's son Devdas, Mahadev Desai, and others objected to the closeness of their relationship. By the end of 1920, Gandhi had begun to lecture Saraladevi, leaving her annoyed she had changed so much to try to fit his model. Rambhuj died two years later and Saraladevi returned to Bengal where she dedicated her life to writing, girls' education, feminist politics, and spiritual discipline. While Rajmohan Gandhi and other authors believe Gandhi initiated the break, there is ample evidence Saraladevi was becoming annoyed with Gandhi's efforts to shape her and his reliance on the views of his entourage.

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[60] "Letter to H. Kallenbach", (Aug. 10, 1920), in CWMG, v. 21, Electronic version 1999, pp. 130-131. http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL021.PDF

[61] Vinay Lal, *Nakedness, Nonviolence, and Brahmacharyi: Gandhi's Experiments in Celibate Sexuality*, in "Journal of the History of Sexuality", 9, 1/2, 2000, pp. 119-123.

[62] Thomas Weber, *Going Native* cit., p. 31.

[63] Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man, His People and the Empire*, cit., pp. 214-215.

Figure 5. Gandhi with Sarojini Naidu, 23 April 1930[64].

In another publication, I have described Saraladevi's 1931 speech to a meeting of women delegates from District Congress Committees in Calcutta as the most forceful feminist speech of the 1930s. After listening to the other delegates, Saraladevi explained why women needed a separate Congress for women. She acknowledged men's role in bringing women into the freedom movement, but chided them for not improving the lives of women. From birth, females were treated as inferior.

As girls, they were denied sweets while their brothers ate their fill; as adults they were exploited; and as political actors, their needs were ignored. Summing up women's experiences with politics, she said Congress "assigned to women the position of law-breakers only and not law-makers". Now was the time to join the worldwide women's movement and demand equal treatment and equal status[65]. United they would impress Congress leaders and perhaps move Jawaharlal Nehru to give "teeming womenfolk" the same attention he accorded the "teeming masses". Saraladevi concluded with a call for legal, economic, social, and educational equality[66]. After Saraladevi disappeared from the national stage, Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), the "Nightingale" of India, emerged as the most significant woman associated with the Indian National Congress and Gandhi. Sarojini met Gandhi in 1914 and from this time on, her life was dedicated to the cause of India's freedom. In 1925, she became the first Indian woman president of the Indian National Conference. Speaking from the platform, Sarojini thanked the delegates for electing her and told them they had reverted to an old tradition and

[64] Gandhi with Sarojini Naidu, 23 April 1930. By Agence de presse Meurisse - Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie, EI-13(2866), Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=30358953

[65] "Srimati Saraladevi Chaudhurani's Speech at the Bengal Women's Congress", *Stri Dharma*, 14 (Aug 1931), pp. 506-510; "Women's Congress", *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (May 3, 1931), p. 7.

[66] "Bengal Women's Conference", *The Hindu* (May 3, 1931), p. 9.

restored to Indian woman the classic position she once held in a happier epoch of our country's story: symbol and guardian alike of the hearth-fires, the alter-fires, and the beacon-fires of her land[67].

Although Sarojini did not agree with Gandhi on everything and did not live as a Gandhian, she was his loyal and devoted lieutenant. In her speeches, she imagined an India that was ancient and modern, culturally sophisticated and proud of its culture, while part of a world community. When Gandhi was arrested on May 5, 1930 for making salt, Sarojini stepped up to lead the movement until she too was arrested, and command passed to the next leader. From this time on, Sarojini was always next to Gandhi. Like him, she was imprisoned until 1931, and then went to the Round Table Conference. Back in India, she supported his causes, was there when he fasted, and used her vote on the Working Committee to support Gandhi's position. While we might contrast these two women in terms of how they performed as activist leaders and articulated women's position in new India, they both taught Gandhi that he could not decide who would be a leader and how she would lead.

Women's Debt to Gandhi

Gandhi's embrace of women's issues combined with his message that they had a role to play in securing the country's freedom opened the door for women who were keen to take part in the nationalist movement. Especially important was Gandhi's non-violent strategy that placed feminine characteristics – self-suffering, endurance, and everyday actions – above masculine violence. By making spinning and the wearing of *Khadi* key elements of the movement, he feminized the nationalist movement and opened it to women's participation. And women responded. While the number who publically demonstrated were relatively small until the 1930s, those who took the *Swadeshi* vow, spun in their homes, gave up jewelry, and supported the movement was significant. Women were part of every aspect of the movement, including the destruction of property in 1942.

As mentioned earlier, nineteenth-century reform efforts had laid the groundwork by educating women and sponsoring social reform measures to ameliorate the sufferings of women. By the first decades of the 20th century, there were women all over the country primed to serve the country. Manmohini Zutshi, a student leader who was arrested in 1930, wrote: "We were excited and enthusiastic about being taken to prison. We felt as if a great honor had been conferred on us… In fact, the three of us, my sisters and I, dearly hoped to be imprisoned three times so we would be termed "habitual offenders"[68]. Working for the country's freedom provided opportunities for these young women to prove they were just as brave and committed as young men. The real measure of what women gained emerges from oral histories, autobiographies and memoirs. Shrimati Ambujammal, one of Gandhi's loyal followers from Madras, said Gandhi "touched the hearts" of women

[67] Hasi Banerjee, *Sarojini Naidu: The Traditional Feminist*, K.P. Bagchi, Calcutta 1998, p. 38.

[68] Manmohini Zutshi Sahgal, *An Indian Freedom Fighter Recalls Her Life*, edited and introduced by Geraldine Forbes, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, New York 1994, p. 73.

when he asked them to join the movement and expressed his faith in their courage. "Do what you can" Gandhi advised women, emphasizing that every act counted[69].

Figure 6. Women released from prison, Lahore, March 7, 1931[70].

Because he did not condone rebellion against the family, few "left the house" unless their fathers and husbands agreed. However, this did not stop patriotic women from supporting the movement from within the household in defiance of their families. Suruchi Thapar Bjorkert wrote about her maternal grandmother who "overcame the restrictions and oppositions imposed by her husband, [and]. . . created a nationalist environment within the home and infused her children with patriotic feelings"[71]. Other women gained a sense of self and of self-worth when they joined the movement. Ambabai, from Karnataka, was married at age 12 and widowed at 16. Childless, she was sent back to Udipi to live with her parents and spend her days praying to Krishna. Allowed to join other women picketing foreign cloth and toddy shops, Ambabai was arrested and sentenced to four months in

[69] Gandhi, "Speech at Women's Meeting Bombay", pp. 290-292, "Speech at Women's Meeting, Surat", pp. 322-326, in CWMG, v. 15, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Delhi Government of India 1958, p. 15; "Speech at Women's Meeting Dohad", pp. 79-80, "Speech at Women's Meeting, Godhra", in CWMG, v. 16, 1958, p. 168.

[70] Women released from prison, Lahore, March 7, 1931. From Geraldine Forbes Collection (MZS4.89.023).

[71] Suruchi Thapar Bjorkert, *Nationalist Memories: Interviewing Indian Middle Class Nationalist Women,* in "Oral History", Autumn 1999, p. 36.

prison, released, and re-arrested. Between prison terms, she made speeches, taught spinning, and organized *prabhat pheries*. Recalling her political activism, Ambabai proclaimed them the happiest days of her life[72]. Gandhi's program transformed her desolate life into one of vital engagement and commitment.

Gandhi's reach also included women marginalized by middle-class society. Speaking passionately and often about child marriage and the plight of widows, he maintained there was "beauty in widowhood" and urged widows to devote their strength and souls "to the motherland"[73]. Although he emphasized sexual "purity," he held men to blame for women's transgressions and welcomed into the movement women who had been branded immoral. Visiting East Godavari District in 1921, Gandhi met with over 1,000 *devadasis*, women dedicated to the gods who practiced prostitution. Gandhi did not accept the work of *devadasis* or of prostitutes as legitimate labor but he did not condemn them. Instead, he blamed society and lustful men and suggested alternative employment.

What did women gain from their involvement? They were not included in the Congress Working Committee at the time leaders of the Indian National Congress and other political parties were negotiating with the British, but they were included in the Constituent Assembly, which first met in December 1942, to draft a constitution. The Indian Constitution, based on British and American principles, made women equal to men in matters of politics. This equality was not because a few women were part of the Constituent Assembly (six women out of a total of 299 members), but the result of years of making what Gandhi thought were the ills of Indian society – caste/class prejudice, communalism, and gender discrimination – integral to the platform of the Indian National Congress.

Conclusions

A discussion of Gandhi and women must acknowledge feminist discontent with Gandhi's "conventional views about the relative duties of men and women,…failure to recognize female sexuality, and for his apparent willingness to have women confined to the prescribed realms of marriage, wifehood, motherhood, and domesticity"[74]. At the same time, feminist scholars have recognized Gandhi's role in bringing women into the nationalist movement, making it respectable for them to remain single, focus on the equality of men and women, and for holding men to the same moral standards as women[75]. Additionally, Gandhi's insistence on non-violence combined with his focus on the regeneration of the entire society, including caste/class, communalism, poverty and gender relations, were key to women's involvement.

While there is no denying that Gandhi played a key role in bringing women into the freedom movement – through his statements that they had a role to play,

[72] Ambabai, Interview, Udipi, (May 24, 1976).

[73] "Speech at Foundation Laying of Vanita Vishram, Ahmedabad", (June 29, 1919), in Pushpa Joshi (ed.), *Gandhi on Women*, cit., p. 25.

[74] Vinay Lal, *Nakedness, Nonviolence, and Brahmacharyi*, cit., p. 109.

[75] *Ibidem.*

decision to make spinning and wearing *Khadi* key elements of the *swadeshi* movement[76], insistence on speaking to women's groups as often as possible, and choice of women leaders to work with him – one cannot overlook the way in which his agenda developed in tandem with women's own aspirations. Women's organizations date from the nineteenth century and long before Gandhi returned to India, women were becoming educated, entering the professions, writing about their issues in novels and magazines, and forming organizations to push for reform. Gandhi's faith in women and attention to their presence and potential struck a chord and they "flocked" to join him. Women pushed Gandhi to see them in a new light and when he urged women to come out of their houses, demonstrate in the streets, and court arrest, he was following, not leading, women into political action. The give and take between Gandhi and women benefitted both.

[76] See Lisa Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2007, pp. 80-89. Trivedi argues that "Khadi allowed women to radically change their participation in the nation in part by transforming their manner of dress" (Ivi, p. 88).

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"The Woman Who Swayed America": Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 1945

by

Julie Laut[*]

Abstract: This essay demonstrates the ways in which Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's gendered performance on the periphery of the United Nations Conference on International Organization (UNCIO) in San Francisco (1945) established her diplomatic celebrity and lay the foundations of India's Congress nationalist aspirations for postwar global moral leadership. Her calls to end colonial rule and discrimination were not new additions to the discourse of international diplomacy, but her self-conscious performance of a modern, ideal Indian womanhood with intimate ties to both her brother, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Gandhi was new, and it captured the imagination of contemporary observers near and far. Pandit's elite, cultured, and charismatic self-representation provided the perfect future tense for the nearly-postcolonial India.

> The skilful timing and unremitting energy of Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit and her supporters in the United States have ensured a floodlight of publicity for India's claims at a time when the peoples of the world are looking anxiously to the conference for formulation of principles and policies which are intended to shape their destinies.
>
> *Times of India*, 7 May 1945

> With such puppets representing India at San Francisco people were naturally disappointed and did not expect much from the Conference, so far as India's interest was concerned. *The only ray of hope was the presence of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit in America*.
>
> R. L. Khipple, *The Woman Who Swayed America*: *Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit*, Lion Press, Lahore 1946, p. 79.

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (1900-1990) was one of the highest ranking and most visible female diplomats of her generation. A member of perhaps the most prominent political family in India – her father was the wealthy Kashmiri politician and Ghandian nationalist Motilal Pandit, her brother was Jawharlal Nehru – Pandit had become active in the nationalist movement as a young woman. Sarojini Naidu

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 ISSN 1824 - 4483

was a mentor to Pandit through her work in the All-India Women's Congress in the 1920s. Pandit also looked to Mahatma Gandhi as a mentor and father figure, particularly after the death of her own father in 1931. Her elder brother, Jawaharlal, remained a close confident throughout his life. During the mass movements of the 1930s, Pandit served three prison sentences for political action against British imperialism, the final time alongside her twenty-year-old daughter at Naini prison in Allahabad. Pandit led the first Indian delegation to the United Nations in 1945, and during her brother's terms as Prime Minister of India (1947-1964), she continued to head India's UN delegation. She served as the first woman and first Asian president of the UN General Assembly in 1953. In addition, she was India's first ambassador to the Soviet Union (1947-48), and was ambassador to the U.S. and Mexico (1949-52) and England (1954-61).

Introduction

This essay demonstrates the ways in which Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's gendered performance on the periphery of the 1945 UN Conference on International Organization in San Francisco established her diplomatic celebrity and at the same time lay the foundations of India's aspirations for postwar global moral leadership in the post-war world. Politically experienced within a national context but a novice on the international stage, Pandit took advantage of the opportunities presented to her to gain increased media attention for her cause. Her calls to end colonial rule and discrimination were not new additions to the discourse of international diplomacy, but her self-conscious performance of a modern, ideal Indian womanhood with intimate ties to both her brother and Gandhi was new, and it captured the imagination of contemporary observers near and far. Pandit's elite, cultured, and charismatic self-representation provided the perfect future tense for the almost-postcolonial India. Her physical presence and embodied difference attracted an orientalist gaze directed toward her by western observers fascinated with this "diminutive, silvery-haired woman", dressed always in a sari, who could speak with such force as she "Twist[ed] the Tail of the British Lion"[1]. Pandit's ability to garner support from both well-heeled America supporters and the India lobby in the U.S. meant she was well positioned to represent the Indian cause at the UNCIO that spring. This essay shows how Pandit's propaganda in San Francisco bolstered the notion that the All-India National Congress was the only legitimate inheritor of the postcolonial Indian state. Despite some challenges to this predominant position, the voices of other Indian nationalist interests were effectively drowned out: figuratively by the overwhelming press coverage of Pandit that reiterated her legitimacy, and literally when a heckler at a press conference (an Indian Muslim attached to the official UNCIO delegation) was forced out of the room by other attendees. In these ways, Pandit's iteration of Indian aspirational postcoloniality abroad pushed aside the very real contests for power at home and reinforced the legitimacy of the Gandhi-Nehru dyad prominently on the global stage.

[1] William Moore, "Indian Woman Twists the Tail of British Lion", April 27, 1945, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, p. 6.

"A star-making turn"

The most important thing to emerge out of the 1945 UN Conference on International Organization (UNCIO) for the Indian nationalist cause was the geo-political and international diplomatic experience gained by Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. As a founding member of the United Nations, India had an official delegation at the conference, but the three knighted Indian men selected by the British to represent the colony were considered "stooges" by the large number of anticolonial and antiracist individuals and organizations gathered in San Francisco. The irony of a dependent state joining an organization ostensibly made up of sovereign nations only helped boost attention for Pandit's anti-imperial public speech. Pandit was no novice to politics. As the eldest daughter in India's most famous Indian National Congress (INC, or Congress) family, she had been steeped in the language and action of nationalist politics since childhood. But her debut on the international stage in 1945 provided her with a formative education in diplomacy on a larger scale and foreshadowed the contradictory nature of UN postcolonialism, which would develop in the coming years. In the making of international diplomatic celebrity, her performance on behalf of Indian independence and anticolonialism writ large in the months surrounding the conference was at the time and continues to be considered "a star-making turn."[2] She was a highly effective and affective avatar for the Indian nationalist cause and she would use the lessons learned in San Francisco to great success when she returned as India's official head of delegation to the UN in 1946 and beyond. The combination of anticipation surrounding the formation of the UN in San Francisco, a savvy political propaganda machine supported by the India lobby in the United States, and characteristics specific to Pandit as an individual, helped launch a political and cultural force.

Pandit's presence in the United States in the spring of 1945 was both personal and political. The majority of the Congress leadership remained imprisoned for their participation in the 1942 Quit India Movement, but Pandit had been released due to health concerns in early 1944 shortly before her husband succumbed to illness worsened by his own imprisonment. Because Indian law prohibited women from inheriting, Pandit was left without significant income. She worked for some months organizing famine relief in Bengal, but was personally adrift and in need of financial stability. When lawyer and politician Tej Bahadru Sapru, with the support of Mahatmas Gandhi, invited her to join the Indian delegation to the Pacific Relations Conference to be held in Virginia, USA in February 1945, she combined this opportunity with visits to see her two eldest daughters who were attending Wellesley College in Massachusetts.

When she arrived in New York City in December 1944, Pandit was the first prominent Indian National Congress figure to visit the United States since the start of the war. In response to her arrival, individuals and organizations sympathetic to the Indian cause welcomed her with open arms. Pearl S. Buck offered her practical help finding accommodation and clothing appropriate to the New York winter. The Chinese Consul General held a reception in her honor where Pandit met the British author W. Somerset Maugham among others. Power couple Henry and Clare Luce Booth gave a dinner-

[2] Manu Bhagavan, *India and the Quest for One World: The Peacemakers*, MacMillan, New York 2013, p. 31.

reception at the Waldorf-Astoria that drew "the elite of New York"[3]. Eleanor Roosevelt hosted a luncheon in Pandit's honor. New York's Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia received her at City Hall. And over 1000 people heard her speak publicly for the first time at the Indian Independence Day celebration on January 26, an event hosted by the India League of America[4]. It became apparent quickly that Pandit was naturally adept at representing the Indian cause in gatherings both large and small.

The social and political culture that undergirded postcolonial Indian politics at the United Nations in 1945 was a "glittering" world made up of international and internationally-minded elite diplomats, activists, and artists. While Pandit's political and familial lineage gave her entrée to this elite setting, her intelligence and personal charisma assured her staying power. To observers, Pandit moved through this milieu effortlessly, but throughout her first stay in the United States, Pandit was learning how to utilize her political history and distinctive personal characteristics to move her agenda forward. Over these months, Pandit self-consciously created a self-representation that would allow her the most access to and success on the international stage. Her savvy complicity in the appropriation of herself as a symbol of modern India helped produce an especially effective diplomatic celebrity.

From childhood Pandit and her sister, Krishna Hutheesing, were groomed to become exemplary models of the "educated, 'modern,' new woman" early twentieth-century Indian nationalism desired[5]. For Pandit, her Anglophile education and elite upbringing (made visible and audible through her comportment and speech), mixed with the bravery, strength, and domesticated femininity required of the ideal Gandhian *satyagrahi* was eminently transportable/translatable into the elite social and political culture she encountered in the United States. She occupied a liminal space, a gendered persona at once Eastern and Western that appealed to her influential supporters as well as a broader audience. As an Indian admirer wrote after the 1945 lecture tour:

> Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, in her self, combines all that is best in the two ways of life – the Eastern and the Western…Her exterior beams with the manners and etiquette of…her European governess – but her heart throbs with the Kashmiri Brahmin blood of her ancestor[s][6].

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[3] Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness: A Personal Memoir*, Crown Publishers, New York 1979, pp. 190-191; "Mrs. Pandit", *India Today*, 5, 11, February 1945, p. 3.

[4] "Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit", *India Today*, 5, 10, January 1945, p. 4; "Events Today", *New York Times*, 26 January 1945, p. 19; "India is Visualized Seizing Independence", *New York Times*, 27 January 1945, 4; "Display Ad 4-No Title", *Washington Post*, 29 January 1945, p. 5.

[5] See Partha Chatterjee, *The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question*, in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi 1989, pp. 233-253. For more on women and gender in the Gandhian movement, see Suresht R. Bald, *The Politics of Gandhi's 'Feminism': Constructing 'Sitas' for Swaraj*, in Sita Ranchod-Nilsson and Mary Ann Tétreault (eds.), *Women, States, and Nationalism: At Home in the Nation?* , Routledge, New York 2000, pp. 81-97; Ketu H. Katrak, *Indian Nationalism, Gandhian 'Satyagraha,' and Representations of Female Sexuality*, in Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger (eds.), *Nationalisms & Sexualities*, Routledge, New York 1992, pp. 395-406.

[6] R.L. Khipple, *The Woman Who Swayed America*, cit., p. 149.

Perceived more as an approachable "British subject" than the less comprehensible category of "Indian", her performance could be consumed comfortably by American audiences. Through her embrace of this self-representation, Pandit gave India its toehold into UN culture even before Indian independence was achieved. And her political legitimacy as the primary spokesperson for Indian interests was greatly enhanced due to her close association with her brother, Jawharlal Nehru, and her family's decades long relationship with Gandhi. But when one US newspaper declared her the "First Lady of India"[7], it signaled the arrival of much more than a familial representative; it telegraphed the arrival on the world stage of an Indian woman who was to lay the very foundations of India's ambitions for global moral leadership in the post-war geopolitical order.

Setting the Stage

Pandit arrived in the United States in late 1944 via a circuitous route. With the end of the war approaching, the Indian National Congress leadership felt it was time to send a spokesperson to the United States to garner public support on behalf of their cause. Widowed since January 1944, Pandit found herself alone and without financial support for the first time in her life. Left with no sons and no will guaranteeing her a portion of her husband's inheritance, according to Indian communal law their money and property reverted to her husband's family. Pandit was initially offered only the minimum Rs. 150 widow maintenance and Rs. 50 for her daughters until they married. Nehru offered what support he could from his prison cell at Ahmadnagar Fort: Rs. 2000 and his encouragement to keep working, try not to worry, and to remember that he considered her and their younger sister, Krishna, "joint-owners" of the family estate[8]. Pandit could have pursued a legal case against her in-laws, but Gandhi, an important paternal figure since her own father Motilal's death in 1931, urged her to let the conflict with her in-laws go as "we had more important things to do"[9]. Against her lawyer's advice but with the intent of ending the painful episode, Pandit agreed to accept a small settlement from her brother-in-law. She "signed a document giving up [her] personal claims and that of any unborn grandsons [she] might have, and the chapter was brought to a close"[10]. The question of on-going financial resources remained pressing, and a lecture tour in the United States held the potential for addressing that problem.

In spite of its financial constraints, Pandit's status as a widow did open up new possibilities for her activism and allowed her increased mobility. In a conversation with Eleanor Roosevelt for *McCall's* magazine during Pandit's tenure as Indian Ambassador to the United States in 1950, the two women mused about the

[7] S.A. Haynes, "India Stands For Equality, Leader Tells Baltimoreans", *Afro-American*, 7 April 1945, p. 1.

[8] Jawahar to Nan, 13 March 1944, in Nayantara Sahgal (ed.), *Before Freedom: Nehru's Letters to His Sister*, HarperCollins Publishers India, New Delhi 2000, p. 391 and 395. Letters in the volume date from 1909-1947, with just one letter from 1956.

[9] Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, cit., p. 181.

[10] *Ibidem.*

particular pressures placed on female diplomats. Responsibilities were two-fold for a woman who was expected to play the roles of both Ambassador and Ambassador's wife, demands that Pandit said caused physical and emotional strain. She acknowledged that despite its added pressures, widowhood had made her international diplomacy possible. While Minister of Health of the United Provinces from 1937-1939 (the first Indian woman to hold such a position), Pandit traveled to see her husband every weekend, even when they worked in different cities. But if he had been alive, she surmised, she would not have been able to be a diplomat as it would be too awkward for her husband. The timing of her husband's death contributed to the serendipitous timing of her emergence at the United Nations the following year. Married, she would have been less inclined to perform a role that required independent travel abroad; widowed, she was able to become one of the very few women active at the highest levels of international diplomacy in the 1940s and 1950s.

Given these circumstances, when Gandhi, out of prison since June 1944, and Sapru, President of the Indian Council for World Affairs, approached Pandit to speak on behalf of India in the United States, she was free to go. The only hurdle remaining was governmental permission to travel. As part of continued imperial control and surveillance of Congress leaders, the British had confiscated her passport and seemed unlikely to reissue it in the foreseeable future. Ultimately, she found a way around British restrictions on her mobility and entered the United States without a passport. In her memoirs Pandit describes Edith Pao, the American wife of the Chinese Consul General in Calcutta, inviting her to attend a consulate dinner for the American Air Force. There, Pandit was introduced to the chief of the Allied Air Command in the Eastern region. With approval from US Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles, she boarded a US army plane in December 1944, US visa in hand. The British, highly concerned about the impact of Indian propagandists in America, nevertheless were unable to prevent Pandit's entry into the United States. If the American government provided permission to enter the country, the best the British could do was track her movements and send their own counter-propagandists to lessen her impact[11].

After Christmas holidays spent with her daughters, Pandit left for the Pacific Relations Conference (PCR) in Virginia, one of five Indian delegates attending as non-voting observers. She attended lectures and meetings and had the opportunity to mingle with other delegates from all over the world. As she would do throughout her travels, Pandit wrote to her brother about her experiences. In February, Nehru responded to her letter about the conference and shared his insights about these types of international meetings. Pandit having apparently expressed frustration with the lack of definitive action at the conference, he conceded, "You are perfectly right in saying that these

[11] Pandit was also monitored throughout her trip. For example, someone who attended one of Pandit's debates forwarded a letter to the Foreign Office describing how the debate "quickly developed into a discussion on whether England should give up India" (Marika Sherwood, *India at the Founding of the United Nations*, in "International Studies", 33, 4, 1996, p. 412. And in one letter Nehru mentions Amarnath Jha being sent by the Indian Government to the United States "to put their side as unofficially and gently…as possible" in a letter to Pandit (Jawahar to Nan darling, 20 March 1945, in Nayantara Sahgal (ed.), *Before Freedom*, cit., p. 465).

conferences do not decide anything important or solve any of the world's problems"[12]. Yet the conference was by no means a waste of Pandit's energies. It was during the PCR that she began to attract the media attention that would become ubiquitous in the coming months and years. According to one biographer, her few opportunities to talk in Virginia gained "favorable news releases, which created interest in the woman from India"[13]. And a *Washington Post* columnist predicted that the "brilliant, colorful Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit" was certain to be "spotlighted"[14]. Even before the main event started in San Francisco, she had begun to make an impression on observers, one that would propel her into international diplomatic celebrity in service to the Indian nationalist cause.

Word of Pandit's successes reached Nehru in prison half a world away via news reports, friends' updates, and the much-delayed letters she wrote to him throughout her journeys. The letters Nehru wrote to her in this period provide a glimpse into how he viewed her experiences as a training ground for future endeavors. Writing from Ahmadnagar Fort (Maharashtra) and later Bareilly Jail (Uttar Pradesh), government censors constrained Nehru's ability to be explicit about political issues. International mail delivery was also highly unpredictable; letters often were months in transit. As a result, Pandit would not have received her brother's letters in time to act immediately on his advice. Nevertheless, the letters demonstrate Nehru's recognition of Pandit's growing effectiveness on the global stage. In a letter dated late January 1945, he wrote he had been following her travels in press accounts and had "no doubt" she would improve the "minds and outlooks" of the American people on the Indian issue. On a more personal note, he also hoped the experience would help Pandit grow in confidence and develop new "ideas and energy" for the work ahead[15]. In a letter from February, he mentioned that cables containing brief extracts of her statements had "rather upset the composure of people in New Delhi and Whitehall," a testament to the wide circulation of her anticolonial critiques[16]. An early April letter conveyed Nehru's pleasure at that Pandit was "making good and impressing people" and that she seemed to be "finding" herself:

> You are growing in mind, in outlook, in self-assurance, and in a friendly and favourable atmosphere your capacities are developing. One must of course have ability and capacity but almost equally important is the chance and opportunity to develop them… Keep growing and learning, flexible in mind and body, and yet always with that hard steel-like something which tempers us and keeps us straight and anchored, and gives us a sense of real values[17].

Even before Pandit made her most lasting impression at the UNCIO in San Francisco, her talent at speaking effectively on behalf of the Indian cause to audiences outside the subcontinent had become apparent.

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[12] Jawahar to Nan, 27 February 1945, in Nayantara Sahgal (ed.), *Before Freedom*, cit., p. 454.

[13] Anne Guthrie, *Madame Ambassador: The Life of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit*, Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., New York 1962, p. 120.

[14] Genevieve Reynolds, "Berge Denounces Cartels", *Washington Post*, 19 January 1945, p. 12.

[15] Jawahar to Darling Nan, 31 January 1945, in Nayantara Sahgal (ed.), *Before Freedom*, cit., p. 445.

[16] Jawahar to Darling Nan, 27 February 1945, in Nayantara Sahgal (ed.), *Before Freedom*, cit., p. 456.

[17] Jawahar to Darling Nan, 10 April 1945, in Nayantara Sahgal (ed.), *Before Freedom*, cit., pp. 469-470.

Global 1945

Physically distant yet inextricably linked to the bloody battlefields of the Second World War, San Francisco became an unlikely location of diplomatic import when delegates from fifty countries met to debate the structure of the proposed United Nations in late April 1945. Newspapers in the previous months had been filled with momentous stories drawing readers' attention to happenings in locations across the globe embroiled in the war. The Allies had won the Battle of the Bulge, firebombed Dresden and Tokyo, and freed Manila from Japanese occupation. Franklin Delano Roosevelt died just weeks after being sworn in for an unprecedented third term, leaving the untested Harry S. Truman to lead the emerging superpower. As battles continued on numerous fronts in Asia, Europe, and the Pacific that spring, concentration camps including Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen, and Flossenbürg were liberated, revealing the horror of genocide perpetrated by Germany. The war had been long and grueling, and it had affected a large portion of the world's population.

At the same time, governments and leaders were developing a forward-looking vision for the postwar world. In February 1945, the United States, the Soviet Union, and Great Britain had walked away from the Yalta Conference with a signed agreement on the reorganization of postwar Europe. The Arab League formed in Cairo in March, creating an important regional political power. Now, San Francisco had been selected as the location for the United Nations Conference on International Organization and invitations were sent to founding member states to convene at the end of April[18]. With the reality of gruesome warfare and massive civilian casualties in the sixth year of this global war as its backdrop, diplomats converged on the City by the Bay. A second world war in a generation was ending and an international organization was being built, in the words of President Truman at the opening session, to "provide the machinery which will make future peace not only possible but certain"[19].

At the center of power in San Francisco were those delegations representing the Big Four – China, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States – with the reality of a bipolar power struggle emerging between the latter two increasingly obvious. The document presented to member states for their consideration had been hashed out amongst these powers during the Dumbarton Oaks talks (August 21-October 7, 1944)[20]. Invited delegations from the other founding nations were

[18] It was a given the United States would host the conference for several reasons: Roosevelt's passion for the organization, the lack of active warfare in the country, and the fact that the US government offered to pay all costs save the delegates' personal expenses. San Francisco was chosen because of a dream US Secretary of State Edward Stettinius had during the Yalta Conference. See: Stephen C. Schlesinger, *Act of Creation. The Founding of the United Nations*, Westview Press, Boulder, 2003, pp. 111-112 and 61.

[19] "Address by President Harry S. Truman", 25 April 1945, *The United States and the Peace*, Part II: *Verbatim Record of the Plenary Sessions of the United Nations Organization on International Organization, San Francisco, April-June 1945*, The United States News, Washington, D.C, n.d., p. 29-A.

[20] "The United Nations Dumbarton Oaks Proposals for a General International Organization (For the Use of the Delegates)", Doc. I, G/1, May 17, 1945, *United Nations Conference on International Organization, San Francisco 1945*, Documents 1-2, Part 1 (1945). See also Robert C. Hilderbrand,

allowed to put forward, debate, and vote on amendments to the Dumbarton Oaks proposals. Unsurprisingly, the draft Charter reflected the contradictions of an organization guided by powerful governments seeking to protect their own sovereignty while simultaneously extending new powers to an international organization. A prime example of this tension was the belief expressed by many smaller member states that the power of the veto at the Security Council was a "defect" written into the draft Charter[21]. With deference to the greater responsibility for the war and the enormous power held by the Big Four, the other member states nonetheless resented the veto and hoped for a larger, more inclusive Security Council with regional representation[22]. Time would prove their fears well-founded: the insistence on the part of the Big Four as well as France to maintain the veto in the Charter contributed directly to frequent deadlock at the Council throughout the Cold War years[23].

Though the fight over the veto was among the most heated of the conference, the delegates faced many more disputes over the organization of the UN Charter. The smaller countries submitted thousands of revisions to the Dumbarton Oaks proposal, and the Big Four put forward more than 20 joint amendments of their own. In order to address these questions, the conference was divided into four major commissions, each with several sub-commissions tasked to discuss sections of the draft plan and any relevant amendments. The commissions met for six weeks, working longer and longer hours as the end of the conference neared. The official Indian delegation submitted no substantive amendments, but it was honored with the selection of Sir Arcot Ramaswamy Mudaliar (1887-1976), a lawyer and politician from southern India, to serve as the first chair of the Economic and Social Council committee. Debate over major issues was vigorous, including over the status of regional organizations, the establishment of permanent members on the Security Council, and the scope of the Economic and Social Council. But the deck was stacked against smaller countries in more ways than one. Primarily, the Big Four had veto power over any amendment. While they were willing to negotiate behind the scenes and make some compromises, they would not allow their power to be undermined considerably. Also, in Stephen C. Schlesinger's assessment, most of the smaller nations were "resigned to whittling down the dominance of the big

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Dumbarton Oaks: The Origins of the United Nations and the Search for Postwar Security, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1990.

[21] "Address by Alberto Lleras Camargo, Chairman, the Colombian Delegation", *The United States and the Peace*, Part II: *Verbatim Record of the Plenary Sessions of the United Nations Organization on International Organization, San Francisco, April-June 1945*, The United States News, Washington, D.C n.d., p. 42. Delegates from other South American countries, Australia, Egypt, and others also raised concerns about the veto in their plenary remarks.

[22] On the battle over the veto, see Stephen Schlesinger, *Act of Creation* cit., pp. 193-225.

[23] Since 1989, the Security Council has made on average one decision per week, a drastic improvement over roughly one decision per month in the first four decades of its existence (Peter Wallensteen and Patrik Johansson, *Security Council Decisions in Perspective*, in David M. Malone (ed.), *The UN Security Council: From the Cold War to the 21st Century*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder 2004, p. 18.

nations, but not driving them out of the organization". A compromised system outweighed the spectre of no organization at all[24].

Many observers representing a wide variety of interest groups roamed the meeting halls at the UNCIO. Their hope: to impact decisions on specific issues. These individuals and organizations without official representation in the conference halls hoped to wield some influence on the direction of the postwar world order even in the face of great power dominance. British journalist Alistair Cooke described the various groups as "unpopular crusaders for small nations and lost causes, drilling away underneath the official whirl in the hope of deepening the foundations of the peace". These included the Serbian Orthodox church in Yugoslavia, spokesmen for the Armenian question, the American League for a Free Palestine, and Friends of Republican Spain[25]. Near the end of the conference the *Christian Science Monitor* noted that those such as the Venezuelans calling for the repudiation of Spain's Franco, whether "Ill-timed or right-timed…have made it clear that multitudes are seeking a peace based on moral considerations"[26]. Emerging from within the political landscape of the United States, the NAACP also asked for a seat at the table during the San Francisco conference. The US government ultimately granted access to the NAACP along with 41 other interest groups, inevitably diminishing the influence of any one organization when so many were allowed to attend. As private citizens these representatives could observe and lobby from inside the meeting halls, but in reality they had little to no influence on negotiations[27].

These events in San Francisco echoed a similar phenomenon at the formation of the League of Nations in 1919 when activists from across the globe had gathered in Paris to speak out against racial and colonial oppression and create a "new order" as the world emerged from the First World War[28]. The question of racial equality became a highly contested issue as a result. Those "seeking to combat racial discrimination in the world needed a powerful and officially recognized voice at the peace conference itself", and so they looked to the Japanese delegation[29]. These men had received instructions from the Japanese government to make clear that cooperation with the League would be predicated on the inclusion of a racial

[24] Stephen Schlesinger, *Act of Creation* cit., p. 172.

[25] Alistair Cooke, "Big News and Little News: Contrasts at San Francisco," *Manchester Guardian*, 29 May 1945, p. 4.

[26] "Peace and Justice Sought for Minorities", *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 June 1945, 9.

[27] See Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2003, pp. 50-51.

[28] Both the US and the British attempted to restrict the mobility of activists suspected to stir the waters in Paris. See Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination*, Westview Press, Boulder 1988, p. 77; Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, New York 2007, pp. 59-60; and David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 1993, p. 567.

[29] Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice,* cit., p. 79.

equality clause in the covenant[30]. When the League of Nations Commission, designated to produce the organization's Covenant, sidestepped the first attempt to include such language, the issue went global, drawing emotional reactions from both inside and outside the meetings[31]. Japan's initially nationalist proposal was transformed into a "universal crusade"[32] as millions around the world hoped for change, including delegates to the Pan-African Congress organized by W.E.B. Du Bois to run parallel to the Paris talks[33].

For defenders of white supremacy from North America and the white British settler colonies, even vague language on the subject of equality had been cause for alarm in 1919. The Australian Prime Minister William Hughes put up the most vocal opposition to the Japanese proposal, allowing US President Woodrow Wilson and South Africa's Jan Christiaan Smuts to lay the blame for the language's omission on Hughes' shoulders[34]. Despite intense rounds of diplomatic talks and an "eloquent and moving" final appeal by Japan's Baron Makino, proposed language on racial equality was left out of the final Covenant[35]. In the end, the dominance of white, western male diplomacy in Paris won when the limited structure of the new organization successfully excluded competing interests. The real decisions were not made at the more democratic plenary meetings but "by the leaders of the great powers, who met in an increasingly smaller group as the conference stretched on"[36]. Small states could not override the intentions of the League's framers, and in regards to racial equality the great power statesmen were unwilling "to recognize that this issue might be of intense concern to millions of people throughout the world"[37]. Nevertheless, the debates did succeed in producing a "heightened emotional awareness of race" and critiques of imperial power around the globe[38].

While governments selected their delegations and gave permission to various groups to have insider access in San Francisco in 1945, and news outlets assigned

[30] Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Color Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008, p. 287; and Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race, and Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919*, Routledge, New York 1998, pp. 16-17.

[31] Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice,* cit., p. 95.

[32] Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Color Line* cit., p. 287.

[33] *Memorandum to M. Diagne and Others on a Pan-African Congress to be Held in Paris in February, 1919*, in "Crisis", 17, 3, 1919, pp. 224-225. For an extended discussion of Japan's complicated motivations for bringing the issue of racial equality to the Commission, see Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race, and* Equality, cit., pp. 89-116. On Du Bois and the Pan-African Congress, see David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, cit., pp. 561-580.

[34] Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Color Line* cit., p. 302; and Goolam Vahed, *Race, Empire, and Citizenship: Sarojini Naidu's 1924 Visit to South Africa*, in "South African Historical Journal", 64, 2, 2012, p. 330. See also Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race, and* Equality, cit., pp. 125-136, and 154-157.

[35] Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Color Line* cit., p. 301.

[36] Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment,* cit., p. 57.

[37] Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice*, cit., p. 96.

[38] *Ivi*, p. 102.

reporters to cover the creation of the UN Charter, activists with a diverse array of political interests also mobilized on the fringes of this new conference. Among these many interest groups were the India League of America and the National Committee for India's Freedom who were lobbying for Indian independence. Together, they selected Pandit to represent their cause. The context for the discussion of race and empire was quite different at the end of the Second World War than it had been in 1919. These issues no longer could be shunted aside so easily by European leaders. Though in the words of Mark Mazower "the UN was designed by, and largely operative as an instrument of, great power politics," the make-up of the new international organization and its rhetoric nevertheless was more inclusive than had been the League of Nations and its Covenant[39]. The colonial nations had made many promises to their dependencies to gain their participation in the war effort; the Allies could not have triumphed without the financial support and enormous influx of soldiers from the colonized world. Furthermore, the principles that emerged from the Atlantic Charter, which formed the basis of the 1942 "Declaration of the United Nations" and then were carried over into the Preamble of the UN Charter, stated a commitment to a postwar world in which nation-states would work together effectively not only to avoid war but also to promote human rights and justice.

The Preamble to the UN Charter was particularly idealistic, committing the new organization to work to preserve international peace and affirming the dignity of all through a commitment to human rights and the promotion of social and economic progress. Born out of the hope for postwar peace as envisioned by geopolitically dominant states, the ideals contained in the Preamble and the Charter formed a space into which millions of colonized and oppressed peoples around the world could place their hopes for a reconfiguration of power in the post war world. These millions sought relief from the imperial power and racial subjugation that the League of Nations had reinscribed. The UN Charter gestured toward these goals, but its effectiveness would have to be put to the test. Questions of racial equality and imperial power were addressed differently in 1945 than they had been in 1919, though without satisfactory outcomes for those looking to the UN as an instigator of real change. The question of colonies and trusteeships had not been on the Dumbarton Oaks agenda. As for human rights, the Big Four "concurred that the most innocuous place to insert language on the subject was in the section on the responsibilities of the Economic and Social Council. The Council would 'promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms,' but have no power to enforce them"[40]. In San Francisco, Du Bois and the NAACP were successful in getting the United States' delegation to submit proposals on human rights and colonialism, but that delegation did little to get those proposals passed. A human rights commission was established, but was years away from effective intervention. As for the question of imperial power, though the rhetoric espoused the ideal of self-governance and equality of nations, the UN Charter in the end did not include the

[39] Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empires and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2009, p. 10.

[40] Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, cit., p. 36.

goal of independence for all. The new Trusteeship Council took over from the League's mandate system as a supervisory system, leaving power once again in the hands of the imperial states. As Mazower points out, "European powers were reasserting their control over their colonial possessions in Southeast Asia even as the San Francisco conference met, and American anticolonial rhetoric dwindled as the war came to a close and the importance of good transatlantic relations with major West European powers," especially Great Britain and France, "became obvious in Washington"[41].

Anticolonial activists inside and outside the meeting halls were dissatisfied with the continued dominance of imperial powers, garnering Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and her arguments on behalf of the Indian question even broader interest and support. The stage at San Francisco could not have been better set for Pandit's introduction to world diplomacy. April 1945 was a liminal moment in both world history and in the history of South Asia. Much remained unsettled on both fronts, and yet the basic outlines of the future were becoming increasingly clear: Germany's defeat was imminent and important gains were being made on the Asian-Pacific front. In India, much of the Congress leadership remained imprisoned, but the devolution of imperial control was clearly on the horizon. Nehru was released from prison in June, and he immediately set about negotiating the terms of British withdrawal. The same combination of uncertainty and hope contained in Indian nationalist's desires also infused the UN Charter conference. By making parallels between the UN's goals and India's desire for freedom, Pandit would draw on the emotional center of this threshold moment to gain support and attention from a wide array of observers.

The "Acid Test" of the UN Charter

Underpinning Pandit's message at San Francisco was the assertion that India represented "the pivot of the whole system of imperialism and colonialism." How India's fate was addressed at this moment, she argued, was to be "an acid test" of the principles of the United Nations, "and the continued denial of India's freedom by Britain [would be] a negation of those principles and of the sacrifices that have been made" to win the war[42]. Pandit's words echoed a statement Gandhi made to the press in the days leading up to the conference: "The freedom of India will demonstrate to all the exploited races of the earth that their freedom is very near and that in no case will they henceforth be exploited"[43]. This theme linking India's freedom to the ideals of the United Nations would become a common one throughout Pandit's tenure at the UN in the coming years. But in 1945, it clashed with the goals of the official British Indian delegation, the members of which also hoped to gain Indian independence eventually, but were willing

[41] Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, cit., p. 150.

[42] William Moore, "Challenger: Indian Woman Twists the Tail of British Lion", *Chicago Tribune*, 27 April 1945, p. 6; "Leaders Speak for Colored Peoples: Colonial Hopes Soaring Upward as the Result", *Atlanta Daily World*, 3 May 1945, p.1; P.L. Prattis, "Mme. Pandit Makes Stirring Plea for Freedom of India at San Francisco", *Pittsburgh Courier*, 5 May 1945, p. 5.

[43] "Gandhi Disowns Parley Delegates", *New York Times*, 18 April 1945, p. 15.

to cooperate in San Francisco on the creation of the Charter without reference to specific colonies at that time.

Pandit's highly visible presence outside the meeting halls of at the San Francisco conference disrupted the script envisioned by the British and the official Indian delegation. As had happened at the League of Nations, India's official representatives to the UN Charter conference were not affiliated with either the All-Indian National Congress or the Muslim League, the two most prominent Indian nationalist organizations. The British instead selected delegates who were sympathetic to continued colonial involvement in the subcontinent: three knighted Indian men with long histories of cooperation with the metropolitan and colonial governments. Sir V. T. Krishnamachari (1881-1964) was almost twenty years senior to Pandit. He had been the Diwan (finance minister) of the Indian princely state of Baroda throughout the inter-war period and had served as an Indian delegate to a number of bodies including the League of Nations and several Round Table Conferences. Sir Arcot Ramaswamy Mudaliar had been a prominent leader of the nationalist Justice Party (est. 1916), which had it roots in the organized efforts to curtail the dominance of the Hindu Brahmin caste in social, religious, and political spheres beginning in the nineteenth century[44]. Mudaliar most recently had served as one of two Indians appointed to Winston Churchill's War Cabinet and would go on to represent India at the UN after independence alongside Pandit. Sir Malik Firoz Khan Noon (1893-1970), the youngest of the three representatives, was born in Lahore and educated at Oxford[45]. Noon was the High Commissioner to the United Kingdom from 1936 to 1941, and then became first Indian to hold the defense portfolio on the British Viceroy's Council (1942-45)[46].

These three men, accomplished though they were, represented a stark contrast to Pandit's youthful appearance and more radical speech. Had it been up to the British government, no Indian nationalists or Indian journalists would have been allowed to attend the Charter conference to challenge the official delegation[47]. The British and Indian governments had collaborated to prevent opponents from reaching San Francisco, a policy that was only partially successful. Pandit was already in the United States when the conference was announced, of course, and she had already proven her effectiveness as a spokesperson for the Indian cause. As a result, the conflict between the official delegation and independence activists could not be prevented, and news of the conference and Pandit's performance did circulate to India.

Congress connections in the United States made Pandit's work more effective. With the support of the India League of America and the Committee for India's

[44] Kasinath K. Kavlekar, *Non-Brahmin Movement in Southern India, 1873-1949*, Shivaji University Press, Vidyanagar, Kolhapur 1979, pp. 121-133.

[45] Wolfgang Behn, *Concise Biographical Companion to Index Islamicus: An International Who's Who in Islamic Studies from its Beginnings down to the Twentieth Century, Bio-Bibliographical Supplement to Index Islamicus, 1665-1980*, Volume Three, N-Z, Brill, Boston 2004, p. 33.

[46] *Who Was Who in America with World Notables*, Volume V, 1969-1973, With Index to All Who Was Who Volumes, Marquis Who's Who, Chicago 1973, p. 535.

[47] "India Press Gag Implied; Plans for Sending Newsmen to San Francisco Canceled", 16 April 1945, *New York Times*, p. 24.

Freedom, she was invited to help make the San Francisco conference "India conscious"[48]. Due to the inability of other Indian independence activists to leave the subcontinent and the fact that the two main Indian lobby groups in the United States had political affiliations with the Gandhian tradition, the All-India National Congress version of Indian nationalism dominated in San Francisco. Pandit's political speech and the printed propaganda released on her behalf claimed Congress was the only legitimate representation of the Indian peoples' desires, and presented Pandit herself as a recognized spokesperson for the party. This nationalist narrative denied the fact that the Congress faced stiff opposition at home from the Muslim League in areas with large Muslim populations and in ongoing negotiations with the British government. Also silenced were the many other organized political organizations (both more radical and more conservative) that did not support the Congress platform, including the right-wing Hindu Mahasabha and the Scheduled Castes Federation representing the Dalit community. Therefore, the coherence of Indian Congress nationalist dominance projected through Pandit's unofficial diplomacy at the San Francisco conference belied a much more tenuous reality on the ground in India.

Three letters to the editor from the *Times of India* in May and June of 1945 outline some of the expressed frustration at the idea of Pandit's representation of the Indian people as a whole given that she had not been elected by any Indian constituency. Ramprakash Roy's letter pointed out that Pandit did not represent the diverse spectrum of political interests organized throughout India such as the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Radical Democratic Party, or the Scheduled Castes' Federation.[49] Other letter writers focused more specifically on the Congress-League power struggle. Mahmud A. Wazifadar argued, "that unless the major question of Congress-League unity is solved once and for all India cannot be represented by any major party or individual"[50]. Another writer quoted "a distinguished Indian publicist" as saying, "If the world Press seeks truth and not mere sensation they will resist the propaganda wiles of this Indian 'nationalist' siren and examine more closely the Muslim charge that the freedom for which the Indian Hindu Congress so loudly clamours is freedom to oppress"[51]. This critique turned the American press's fascination with Pandit as a womanly warrior on its head, depicting her instead as a *femme fatale* who was luring men to a dangerous conclusion with her beauty and charm.

A heckler at Pandit's biggest press conference at the end of April highlights Pandit's inability to remain insulated from the realpolitik of competing Indian nationalisms. Just after she delivered a short statement to an estimated 200 journalists and prepared to answer their questions, "a persistent Muslim" began asking questions, insinuating that Congress had been responsible for "violence and sabotage" during the Quit India movement in 1942. Rather than address the accusation, Pandit asked if the questioner was a journalist. Admitting he was not,

[48] Marika Sherwood, *India at the Founding of the United Nations*, cit. p. 423.

[49] Ramprakash Roy, "Reader's Views: Mrs. Pandit", *Times of India*, 5 June 1945, p. 4.

[50] "Letter to the Editor 1", *Times of India*, 22 May 1945, p. 4.

[51] J.D.J., "Freedom From Fear: To the Editor", *Times of India*, 29 May 1945, p. 4.

he was forced to leave the room[52]. Speculation abounded about how he gained access to the press conference in the first place. Malik Firoz Khan Noon remembers in his autobiography that this press conference held very high stakes for the Muslim man who asked Pandit the "awkward question". He was in fact a "brave stenographer" for the Indian delegation, and when "he walked out all cameras clicked. No one ever got such publicity as he did". Noon claims that this man's actions were so well-known and so widely criticized by the Congress Party that the stenographer could not find a job in government after independence and instead attempted to change his identity, opening a store in Connaught Place in Delhi. "When Partition came", Noon writes, he became a victim of communal violence, and "was left for dead from sword wounds. He still carries the mark of a sword would on his face"[53]. R. L. Khipple later wrote that the stenographer's efforts "boomeranged, and Mrs. Pandit received much wider publicity than she would have otherwise received"[54].

Noon was the only of the three Indian representatives reported to directly address Pandit and others' criticism of the delegation's independence, though he chose to engage more directly with Gandhi's leadership in India than with Pandit's representation in San Francisco. When asked about her by reporters, Noon was dismissive, referring to her as a "charming lady" without any direct comment on her political positions[55]. He later refused to comment on the memo she submitted to the UN steering committee saying "he did not want to criticise a lady"[56]. In early May, at a press conference described "as one of the most animated at San Francisco", Noon presented his views on Indian independence. The journalists present, a majority of whom seem to have been more sympathetic to the Congress position, challenged his statements, and it was reported that the event sometimes felt like "a political debate rather than a press conference"[57]. First, Noon accused Gandhi of being too influenced by "reactionary and orthodox Hindus", who made him "bigoted and narrow-minded" with a political stance "half a century out of date"[58]. Noon blamed Gandhi for rejecting the Cripps proposal, undermining the Allied war effort, and inciting communal violence through the Quit India movement in 1942[59].

[52] "British Policy in India; Mrs. V. Pandit's Criticism", *Times of India*, 28 April 1945, p. 9; William Moore, "Challenger: Indian Woman Twists the Tail of British Lion", *Chicago Tribune*, 27 April 1945, p. 6.

[53] Firoz Khan Noon, *From Memory*, Ferozsons Ltd., Lahore 1966, p. 179.

[54] R. L. Khipple, *The Woman Who Swayed America*, cit., p. 81.

[55] "British Policy in India; Mrs. V. Pandit's Criticism", *Times of India*, 28 April 1945, p. 9.

[56] "Sir F.K. Noon", *Times of India*, 11 May 1945, p. 9.

[57] "Pandit Nehru Should Supersede Mr. Gandhi: Sir F. Khan Noon's Views", *Times of India*, 4 May 1945, p. 5.

[58] *Ibidem*. See also: William Moore, "Report India Settlement is Growing Near", *Chicago Tribune*, 3 May 1945, p. 10.

[59] This accusation should be considered at minimum disingenuous given that as a member of the Executive Council Noon expressed his own criticisms of the Cripps plan in 1942 (Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*: *Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, Cambridge South Asian Studies, Cambridge 1994, pp. 78-79). The Muslim League was as skeptical of the Cripps Plan as Congress, though for different reasons, and both major parties officially rejected the plan (Ivi, pp. 72-81).

He further suggested the elder statesman should step aside and allow Nehru to take control of the Congress since Nehru was "the one man in the Congress who is likely to have the breadth of vision to see the Moslem point of view and come to an understanding with the Moslems"[60]. When asked why Nehru was still in prison if his leadership would be so effective, Noon replied that Congress's civil disobedience had been "a misnomer for rebellion", and that he "sincerely" hoped Nehru would be released soon. "[T]he final question shot challengingly at Sir Firoz as the conference broke up was, 'Is not the Government of India controlled by the British'? Reply (in an equally challenging tone): 'That is absolutely wrong'"[61].

Noon's comments circulated back to India and reportedly caused "great concern among Indian nationalist circles"[62]. In response to the press conference, Gandhi said he would fulfill Noon's wish to step aside if the Congress prisoners were released[63]. Further, he said there was no need for Nehru "to come to the front. He is in the front. The Government of India would not let him work as he would. He and I are friends. But we are no rivals. We are both servants of the people and the platform of service is as big as the world"[64]. One "former member of the Congress Working Committee said in an interview: 'It is very amusing to see Sir Firoz Khan Noon deposing Mahatma Gandhi. The people's leaders are not appointed by some high authority, as [he] has been appointed to represent India at San Francisco against the declared wishes of the country"[65]. Shortly after the San Francisco conference, Noon joined the Muslim League, and after independence he became special envoy to the first prime minister of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah[66]. Noon himself served briefly as Pakistan's Prime Minister from December 1957 to October 1958, before being ousted by the first declaration of martial law in Pakistan's history[67]. Though he gained some publicity in San Francisco in 1945, Noon remained less visible than Pandit, who garnered much more positive coverage from the mainstream media in the United States and India, her Congress-leaning calls for independence overriding the statements of a vocal critic from outside the Congress's circle of power.

"The Woman Who Swayed America"

[60] P.L. Prattis, "Charge and Counter…Delegate Labels Gandhi A Traitor to Allied Cause", *Pittsburgh Courier*, 12 May 1945, p. 12.

[61] "Pandit Nehru Should Supersede Mr. Gandhi': Sir F. Khan Noon's Views" *Times of India*, 4 May 1945, p. 5.

[62] "India Honoured At San Francisco", *Times of India*, 3 May 1945, p. 5.

[63] "'Fulfil Your Wish By Releasing Leaders': Mr. Gandhi's Offer to Sir F. Noon", *Times of India*, p. 5 May 1945, p. 5; "Gandhi Agrees on Retirement with Proviso", *Chicago Tribune*, 5 May 1945, p. 6.

[64] "'Fulfil Your Wish By Releasing Leaders': Mr. Gandhi's Offer to Sir F. Noon", *Times of India*, 7 May 1945, p. 8. The title used for this article was identical to one used two days earlier.

[65] *Ivi*, p. 8.

[66] *Chronology of International Events and Documents* 1:5 (August 27-September 9, 1947), p. 112. For extended explanation of the ramifications of Noon's action, see: Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman,* cit., pp. 144-145.

[67] "Pakistan Horizon", 19, 4, 1966, p. 339.

From prison, Nehru tracked Pandit's actions through North American newspaper clippings as best he could. Simultaneously with US audiences, Nehru was a consumer of what James W. Carey describes as an invented cultural form – American print culture – which conveys "dramatic action in which the reader joins a world of contending forces as an observer at a play"[68]. Pandit's savvy complicity in the appropriation of herself as a symbol combined with the gaze of American print culture to produce an especially effective diplomatic celebrity. Upon his release in June, he began forming an interim government, and he wrote to her a personal assessment of her successes: "You know that your work in the States has been very greatly appreciated here by all kinds of people. You have done a splendid job, as perhaps no one else could have done in the circumstances. The immediate consequences of what you have done may not be obvious but I am sure that the remoter consequences will be considerable"[69]. With this, he made a decidedly accurate prediction. Pandit's success at drawing both elite supporters and large crowds to the Indian cause in the United States led her, Nehru, and others to recognize the potential of her effectiveness on the world stage. San Francisco served as a rehearsal for Pandit's future diplomatic career, and she worked to negotiate a persona fit for the task at hand.

One challenge Pandit faced was how to tread a course between representing the whole of India through her speech and highlighting her own position in Indian cultural and religious hierarchies. Nehru for one encouraged her to use Hindi when speaking to Indian audiences in the United States, presumably to signal a level of authenticity to the diasporic South Asian community there[70]. One US paper printed a picture of her in a moment of "Calm Before the Storm" before one press conference, an image that served to ground Pandit's actions within a Hindu-inflected spirituality strongly identified with the political symbolism of the Congress. In the photo, Pandit and an unnamed man face one another across a narrow table. On the right side of the image, the "sister of India's great nationalist leader" smiles serenely over clasped hands held close to her chin. With hands clasped at his chest, the man bows to Pandit from the left of the image, eyes cast down[71]. He wears one of the most ubiquitous symbols of individual Congress affiliation: the Gandhi *topi*. This close-fitting cap made of white *khadi* (homespun cloth) and pointed in the front and back, first became popular during the 1920-1922 Non-Cooperation movement as one aspect of what Lisa Trivedi calls Gandhi's contribution to the "visual vocabulary of national community"[72]. By 1945, the *topi* was "an established visual symbol of dissent" used widely by Indian nationalists[73].

Pandit also negotiated her physical representation of modern Indian womanhood and, by extension, the modern Indian nation. The relationship between

[68] James W. Carey, *A Cultural Approach to Communication*, in James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, revised edition, Routledge, New York 2009, p. 17.

[69] Jawahar to Darling Nan, July 24, 1945, in Nayantara Sahgal (ed.), *Before Freedom*, cit., p. 490.

[70] Jawahar to Darling Nan, 31 May 1945, in Nayantara Sahgal (ed.), *Before Freedom*, cit., p. 481.

[71] "Calm Before the Storm", Chicago Defender, 26 May 1945, p. 4.

[72] Lisa Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2007, p. 40.

[73] *Ivi*, p. 147. See extended description of the history of the topi, pp. 123-133.

Pandit and her clothing offers one clear example of the co-production of a persona designed for public consumption. While arranging her lecture tour with the New York-based Clark Getts Lecture Bureau, Mr. Getts wanted to discuss her attire since the "American public…would expect someone from India to look exotic and to wear bright clothes and fine jewels"[74]. Though she refused to alter her rather subdued style, her usual selection of gray or pastel saris, her wedding ring, and a watch, were "exotic" enough in the US context to merit significant press attention.

Early in her lecture tour, Pandit articulated a level of frustration with the constant comments on her attire and its links to gender differences between the United States and India. Discussing the many women who hold high posts in India, she argued, "'They got the jobs…not because they were women but because they were better than the men. And these…are not women whose clothes are described every time they enter the legislative assembly'"[75]. By refusing to alter her simple style to please her lecture sponsor, Pandit established some distance between herself and the orientalist gaze. However, in a 1949 interview Pandit was more reflexive about the sari as a cultural symbol. "Everybody admits that the sari is the most graceful dress for women", she said. "But I find that in traveling, climbing in and out of airplanes, the sari is a confounded nuisance, and I'd like to wear skirts or slacks. But society demands that I wear a sari". The male reporter refused to allow her the last word on the issue. Despite her "silver hair" and nationalist politics, he assured his readers, the "attractive younger sister of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru" remained beautiful. "She looks as good in the sari as the sari looks on her"[76]. American, Indian, or otherwise—it is apparent that the sari played an integral part in the performance of an acceptable Indian womanhood in all of these contexts.

The more prominent Pandit became on the world stage, the more pronounced the attention to her attire, culminating in a frenzy of attempts to describe her clothing during her early days at the United Nations. William Moore's coverage during the Charter conference was the first by a US reporter to rely heavily on visual description in order to emphasize Pandit's visceral impact on contemporary observers. His first article, combining political reporting with not so subtle sexually-charged language was headlined, "Indian Woman Twists the Tail of British Lion":

> Folding her dazzling white robe [no buttons, no zippers] (sic) around some alluring curves, Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit of India moved into Anthony Eden's hotel today and began twisting the British lion's tail…Thus was the Indian question which many say will be the test of the basic principles of international organization brought out into the open as the conference was beginning its work[77].

Another article by Moore two days later featured an interview with Pandit who warned that America should help India in the fight for independence in order to avoid a war against imperialism. Invoking another prominent Eastern woman, Moore described his interviewee as:

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[74] Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, cit., p.192.

[75] Leonard Lyons, "Broadway Bulletins", March 10, 1945, *Washington Post*, p. 5.

[76] Robert Trumball, "Mrs. Pandit Urges U.S.-Indian Links", April 24, 1949, *New York Times*.

[77] William Moore, "Indian Woman Twists the Tail of British Lion", April 27, 1945, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, p. 6.

> a diminutive, silvery haired woman who speaks with force that recalls the chill fury with which Madame Chiang Kai-shek once brought the American congress to tears, was wearing a sheer black robe, so folded that its silver edging fell about her wrists and spiraled downward[78].

For Moore, Pandit's political message was inextricably linked with her appearance, made more exotic, and thus more intriguing, because of her "native" costume. Wrapped in yards of silk or cotton cloth, Pandit embodied a certain type of "Eastern" womanhood that made compelling "dramatic action" for consumers of her as news[79]. The same would remain true throughout Pandit's diplomatic career, with her sari and her gender dominating initial coverage of her election as President of the General Assembly in 1953.

Pandit's voice was as significant as her appearance in translating Indian womanhood to a Western audience. Nehru initially expressed some concern about her speaking voice. He wondered in one letter, "how does your accent, intonation etc go down there? You tell me that your voice has been liked. That I can understand easily enough for you have a good speaking voice. But what of the special dislikes of Americans regarding the English way of speaking"[80]. Her speaking voice did merit attention, though not negatively. In one 1945 article she was described as having an "Oxonian accent". insinuating a connection to the upper-class education her father, her brother, and other nationalist leaders obtained in England though Pandit herself was not educated in England. A reporter at her first press conference as Ambassador to the United States in 1949 expressed surprise that Pandit "spoke flawless English…in a low, well-modulated voice 'without a trace of accent"[81]. Anyone familiar with Pandit's personal history would have been wholly *un*surprised by her command of English. She spoke "with the cultured English" the "wealthy, aristocratic Brahmin", common to the Nehru family[82]. Pandit became literate in English before learning to read and write Hindi, and her father, Motilal, insisted his children speak with "a pure English accent"[83]. One of the most successful Oxford-educated lawyers in India before converting to Gandhian nationalism after the First World War, the family patriarch "was of the view that unless we all turned ourselves into English people, there was no chance for us in the world"[84]. During her childhood the entire family lived according to British standards Monday through Friday: they ate European food with utensils while sitting at a dining room table, dressed only in European clothing, and spoke

[78] Ibid., "Two Spokesmen of Freedom Denounce Reds and British", April 29, 1945, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, p. 10.

[79] James W. Carey, *A Cultural Approach to Communication*, cit., p. 17.

[80] Jawahar to Darling Nan, 10 April 1945, in Nayantara Sahgal (ed.), *Before Freedom*, cit., p. 465.

[81] William Moore, "Indian Woman Twists the Tail of British Lion", April 27, 1945, *Chicago Daily Tribune*; Anne Guthrie, *Madame Ambassador*, cit., p. 140.

[82] Poppy Cannon, in Chandralekha Mehta, Nayantara Sahgal, and Rita Dar (eds.), *Sunlight Surround You, A Birthday Bouquet*, Orient Longmans, New Delhi 1970, p. 154. The three editors of this volume were Pandit's daughters.

[83] Pearl S. Buck, *Woman of the World*, in "United Nations World", 1, 2,1947, p. 25.

[84] Sri Prakasa, in Chandralekha Mehta, Nayantara Sahgal, and Rita Dar (eds.), *Sunlight Surround You* cit., p. 24.

English exclusively. Only on the weekend could the children experience the Kashmiri Brahmin food, language, and culture that their mother continued to maintain in a separate portion of the family estate.

In addition to establishing an effective persona for herself, Pandit also worked to cement her legitimacy as the main spokesman for Indian interests beyond her close association with Nehru and Gandhi. One paper even declared her the "First Lady of India", as if Nehru were already prime minister[85]. In San Francisco, Pandit consistently claimed to speak on behalf of all of India, taking for granted that her political party already spoke as the representatives of the Indian people as a whole. In one statement she declared she was "chosen by her compatriots in [the United States] and Canada as the sole spokesman for their cause". She also spoke, she said, for the Indian National Congress, "'which represents an overwhelming majority of all the peoples of India'"[86]. As the most visible of those aligned against the official Indian delegation at San Francisco, she was described in the American press as a more legitimate spokesman for India than Krishnamachari, Mudaliar, and Noon. She contrasted her own status against that of the official Indian delegates who were not representative of Indian interests at all, but were simply nominated by the British. W.E.B. Du Bois agreed with this assessment of the three "Indian Stooges". In an article in the *Chicago Defender*, Du Bois described himself and the NAACP's Walter White running away from a photo-op with the official Indian delegates. Since they "in no way" represented the Indian people, Du Bois wrote, "[i]t would have been a calamity for us to be photographed with them". Instead, the two activists lunched with Pandit, who he described as "a charming woman in every way; physically beautiful, simple and cordial, [who] represents as few people could, nearly 400 million people, and represents them by right of their desire and her personality, and not by the will of Great Britain"[87]. Walter White heaped on even greater praise in his assessment of Pandit at the end of the San Francisco conference, an extraordinary passage worth quoting at length:

> Imagine, if you will, an exquisitely featured face of lovely reddish brown surmounted by a semi-circle of silver hair brushed backward and upward to that it looks like a halo when the sun shines through it. Imagine laughter as spontaneous and gay as that of a healthy child filled only with the joy of living and darkened by none of life's heartaches and tragedies. Imagine beautifully kept hands which dart and flash with the color and skill of a bird in flight, lending just the need emphasis to words spoken with a throaty richness in flawless English. Imagine the transition with unbelievable speed from gayety to somber, moody fury against the suave exploiters of her people—a change of mood so startling that Helen Hayes, the great actress, was moved to describe its possessor as 'a bright shining flame'.

The relationships Pandit forged with Black American leaders such as Du Bois and White in San Francisco because of her ability to present herself as the only legitimate representative of the Indian cause translated into powerful solidarities

[85] S.A. Haynes, "India Stands For Equality, Leader Tells Baltimoreans", *Afro-American*, 7 April 1945, p. 1.

[86] P.L. Prattis, "Mme. Pandit Makes Stirring Plea for Freedom of India at San Francisco", *Pittsburgh Courier*, 5 May 1945, 5.

[87] W.E.B. DuBois, "DuBois, White Run From Photo with India Stooges", *Chicago Defender*, 12 May 1945, 5.

around questions of racial equality and anticolonialism when Pandit returned to the UN in 1946 as head of India's delegation.

The Future

Pandit capitalized on her family history, natural charisma, and gripping oratory in order to present a compelling personification of modern India at the birth of the United Nations. To Western audiences this fair-skinned, sari-wearing Indian woman with perfectly coiffed hair, the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, and a non-violent protestor who had been thrice imprisoned for civil disobedience embodied both the intriguing otherness of India and the possibility of India's future. Her future press attaché referred to "her mass appeal in the Western world" as a "phenomenon"[88]. These observers, perhaps most familiar with Katherine Mayo's negative depiction of Indian women in *Mother India* (1927) were struck by the particular combination of Pandit's charismatic femininity and powerful political speech[89]. For the Congress's nationalist project she embodied the ideal "modern Indian womanhood, lovely, graceful, intelligent, poised and thoroughly feminine," and thus reflected the position the Congress leaders believed postcolonial India should assume in world politics[90]. According to British diplomat Philip Noel-Baker, "if India could produce such women, India could herself most assuredly control her national affairs"[91]. Pandit embodied this space in a moment in which the contingencies of history combined with the power of print culture allowed her to appropriate her own representation and project herself, and India, as legitimate actors on the world stage. The San Francisco conference was a major diplomatic event garnering attention from around the world. But it was the drama taking place outside the meeting halls via Pandit that predicted the nature of UN postcolonialism that would take root in the power of the General Assembly in 1946 through the Indian delegation's fight against racism in South Africa. In other words, the Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit of 1945 was the perfect future tense for both the aspiring Indian postcolonial state and the ideals of the United Nations itself.

[88] Shiv Shastri, in Chandralekha Mehta, Nayantara Sahgal, and Rita Dar (eds.), *Sunlight Surround You,* cit., p. 84.

[89] This was an argument made by Lyra Robero, a South African Indian observer at the UN in 1946 during Pandit's debates with Smuts over racist policies in South Africa (Robero, "When All American Went to Hear Mrs. Pandit", *The Passive Resister*, 31 July 1947). On the transnational circulation of Mayo's book see Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*, Duke University Press, Durham 2006.

[90] J. R. D. Tata, in Chandralekha Mehta, Nayantara Sahgal, and Rita Dar (eds.), *Sunlight Surround You*, cit., p. 71.

[91] Philip Noel-Baker, in Chandralekha Mehta, Nayantara Sahgal, and Rita Dar (eds.), *Sunlight Surround You,* cit., pp. 54-55.

DEP Deportate, esuli, profughe
Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile

Dreams of a Poetess.

A Subaltern Study of Sarojini Naidu's Poetry and Political Thought

by

Chiara Corazza[*]

Abstract: Sarojini Naidu was the spokesperson of the Indian National Congress during India's struggle for freedom. Her impromptu speeches, charming and dense with poetry, always impressed the masses. Jailed four times during the disobedience movements, she took part in several *satyagraha* actions and non-cooperation protests. She was one of the founder members of the All-India Women's Conference. She never considered herself a feminist and distanced herself from Western feminism. Nevertheless, she dedicated her entire life to the enhancement of the status of Indian women. Sarojini's controversial figure will be discussed in this paper, in order to analyse her role in Indian women's empowerment in a postcolonial and subaltern studies perspective.

"The dream of freedom is a spiritual condition that gives a value of courage or despair to whatever kind of bondage we must accept". To Leonardo [da Vinci] with his besetting dreams of wings beating the blue air the notion of freedom was a necessity. But it was personal freedom he meant, the joy of an uncaged mind! With his rich and prevailing qualities, he could create his freedom around him everywhere. What a wonderful power to evoke, what a perfect sanctuary within oneself from the turmoil and the anguish of the world…
(Letter to Padmaja Naidu, from Yeravda Jail, 22 July 1932).

Introduction

Sarojini Naidu was the spokesperson of the Indian National Congress during India's struggle for freedom. She was a special friend of Gandhi, as their intense correspondence reveals. Known as "Bulbul-e-Hind", the "Nightingale of India", her impromptu speeches, charming and dense with poetry, deeply impressed the masses. Jailed four times during the disobedience movements, she took part in several *satyagraha* actions and non-cooperation protests. She was one of the

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 ISSN 1824 - 4483

founder members of the All-India Women's Conference. She travelled to many countries, spreading Gandhi's message and giving lectures on the status of Indian women.

Sarojini dedicated her entire life to the empowerment of Indian women. She advocated women's education, ending of child marriage, and remarriage of widows. Nevertheless, she never considered herself as feminist and distanced herself from Western feminism.

Her poetry has often been criticised for giving a traditionalist image of women's role, and for romanticizing women's status in ancient India, as she apparently does not question patriarchal power in her writing. In this paper Sarojini's poetry and prose will be compared to explore this apparent mismatch between her poems and her thought. Moreover, this paper traces an analysis of Sarojini's writings and actions in a "subaltern studies" perspective. More specifically, I will demonstrate how Sarojini's limits in her lyrics about women are the same limits we find in her political thought, which underlie her status of subaltern and her failure in her attempt to find an effective alternative path from western feminism. As Choudhury (2015) considers, the assessment of feminism in the "Global South" should not transcend the awareness of a cultural difference. On the contrary, difference and subjectivity can be used as important interpretative categories of feminism (see Choudhury 2015 and Chakravarty 2016). For this reason, I decided to adopt an approach that takes into account Sarojini's cultural background and individual experience, and then analyse her political thought on the role of women in India.

In the first section I will provide a brief overview of Sarojini's life and political experience. In the following biographical sketch, I refer to some of the many biographies written of her life: *Sarojini Naidu. A Biography*, by Padmini Sengupta (1966), *Sarojini Naidu*, by Makarand R. Paranjape (2012), *Sarojini Naidu. Her Life, Work and Poetry* by Vishvanath S. Naravane (2012), and Anu Kumar's more recent *Sarojini Naidu. The Nightingale and The Freedom Fighter* (2014). Other interesting sources are Eleanor Morton's *Women Behind Mahatma* (1954), though not solely dedicated to Sarojini, Sarojini's selected letters to Gandhi, in *The Mahatma and The Poetess*, edited by Mrinalini Sarabhai (1998), and *Selected Letters 1890s to 1940s*, edited by M. Paranjape (1996).

In the second section I will analyse Sarojini's political writings and speeches, to discuss Sarojini's role in the achievement of Indian women's empowerment. Her controversial poetry will be discussed in the third paragraph. Sarojini's collected poetry examined in this paper was taken from *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Birth of Time* (1912), *The Broken Wing* (1917), and *The Feather of a Dawn* (1961). Other compositions we find in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, edited by Paranjape, and *Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu* (1925).

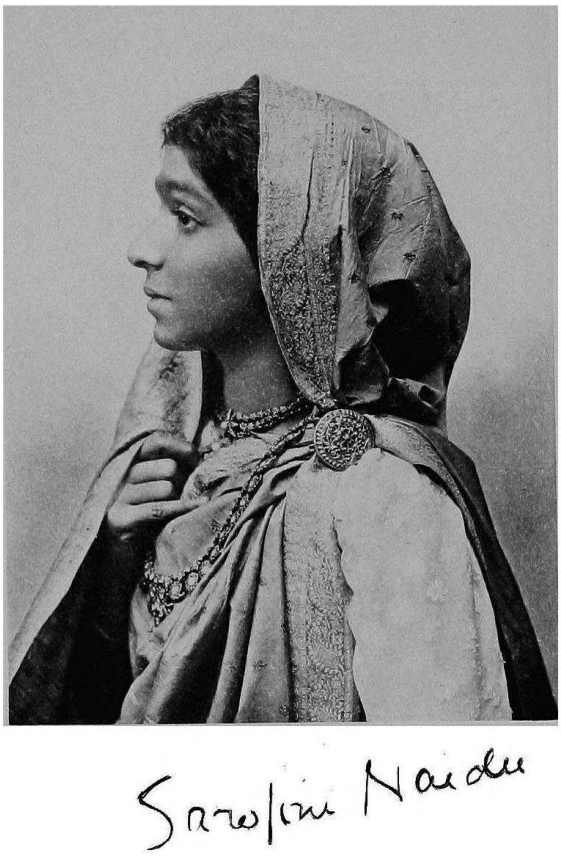
More specifically, I will focus on those writings which were dedicated to women's empowerment, such as "Women's education and the Unity of India", "Indian women and the franchise", "Hindu widows", "Indian Women's Renaissance", "Women in National life", "Hindu's Ladies", collected in *Speeches and Writings* (Naidu, 1925).

Life

"Why should a song-bird like you have a broken wing?"
G. K. Gokhale

Behold! I rise to meet the destined spring
And scale the stars upon my broken wing!
(Sarojini Naidu, "The Broken Wing", *The Broken Wing*)

In your gracious garden there is joy and fostering freedom,
nesting place and singing space for every feathered thing,
o Master of the Birds, grant sanctuary and shelter
also to a homing bird that brings a broken wing.
(Sarojini Naidu, "The bird sanctuary", *The Feather of a Dawn*)



Sarojini Naidu: Public Domain, **https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=57553411**

Sarojini Naidu was born on 13 February 1879 in Hyderabad. Her family was wealthy, with a property house and a maid. Her father, Aghorenath Chattopadyay was awarded a PhD in Chemistry at the Edinburgh University of Scotland. In 1881, he abandoned chemistry, as he set up the Anglo Hindu Vernacular School in Hyderabad for girls. He placed great value on education, especially women's education. He supported social reforms such as women's access to education, widow's remarriage and the end of infant marriage. He lived with his family in Hyderabad, on Nampally Road, in the house, better known as "The Golden Threshold", where Sarojini Naidu was born. There he hosted intellectuals, poets, scholars, artists, aristocrats, singers, Oxford-educated professors, village priests, scientists, Muslim, Hindu and Orthodox intellectuals. On Nampally Road there was also the Nampally Girls School, set up with the aid of his wife.

Sarojini's mother, Varada Sundari Devi, was a Bengali poet. She studied at Bharat Ashram, an educational institution founded by the Indian social reformer Keshub Chunder Sen. Sweet-tempered, calm, gentle, quiet, apparently reserved, Varada Sundari composed lyrics in Bengali.

Sarojini was the first of eight children. She was educated at home by her father. From childhood, she read and wrote a lot of poetry. Sarojini left in 1895 for London and studied at King's College and at Girton Girls College at Cambridge. Sarojini often avoided the boring, too structured lessons, to enjoy the English countryside, and to write poems about nature, inspired by the landscape. She was introduced to Arthur Symons, and she met the poet Edmund Gosse and showed them some of her compositions. Edmund Gosse suggested she be a genuine Deccan poet, instead of an Anglicized one. Subsequently, in her poetry, there was a transition between European skylarks to *bulbuls*, Indian birds. Many of her poems were dedicated to her beloved Govindarajulu Naidu – a young doctor she met in India before she left for England. When she returned to India, in 1898, her parents had no more objections to the marriage between her and Mr Naidu. She had four children: two girls, Padmaja and Lilamani, and two boys, Jayasurya and Ranadhira.

In 1903, she began her affiliation with the nationalist movement during the 18th Indian National Congress Session, Bombay. On this occasion, she recited "Ode to India", and she met Gopal Krishna Gokhale, her future mentor, and Ramabai Ranade, one of the pioneers of the Indian women's emancipation movements. Soon, the nationalist cause and the need to enhance women's empowerment in India became Sarojini's main scope.

Sarojini had been encouraged by Gokhale to devote her poetry and her talent to the motherland. They shared the same ideas about the Hindu-Muslim unity issue. Gokhale introduced Sarojini to Gandhi, contributing in giving her life a special turn after that important meeting. From her first meeting, in 1914, she took the role of presenting and systematically explaining Gandhi's precepts to the public. In the same year Gokhale, Sarojini's mentor, passed away. This was a turning point for Sarojini, whose interest in social and political issues became predominant in her life, from now. She threw herself into the freedom movement after her return to India. Sarojini met Jawaharlal Nerhu. He was 10 years younger, and soon he began a younger brother to her. Her letters to Nerhu are a blend of kindness, humour, admiration. She became acquainted with all the Nerhu family, she defined "an

integral part of the story of India's struggle for independence" (Naravane 2012, Location 1179).

The years 1917 and 1918 were intense for Sarojini. She took part in several meetings and delivered various speeches: in 1917 she addressed the Madras Students' Convention, with Annie Beasant as President. After the Jallianwala Bagh massacre (Amritsar massacre) perpetrated by the British army on 13 April, 1919, against an unarmed crowd – hundreds died and were injured, among them many women and children – Sarojini's political involvement changed into a staunch nationalism. She used her pen and her skilful speaking ability in speeches against the iniquity of the British rule. She writes about the "ill-treatment of women during the martial law in the Punjab" (Letter to Gandhi, 2 September 1920: 152). After this date, Sarojini's awareness of Indian women's status began to grow. In July 1919 Sarojini went to England as a Home Rule League deputation member. She spent a year here, keeping in touch with the Indian community. Sarojini gave public lectures to the English public, showing the true situation in India, and speaking against the hypocrisy of British rule. On her return, in 1920, Gandhi started the non-cooperation movement. Students, lawyers, and common people took part in the boycott movement. People abstained from buying foreign products, such as cloth. Sarojini helped Gandhi to form self-discipline among passive resisters. She explained the non-violent methods to the people by manifestos and through her speeches. By the end of the year, several people were jailed. Gandhi launched a *hartal* (strike) all over India. Sarojini took part directly in the non-violent protests, and several women, encouraged by her example, joined her.

In the 1920s Sarojini also travelled around the world. She went to Africa and took part in the Kenyan Indian Congress in 1924. She went to Mombasa, Durban, where she spoke against segregation. On her return to India, Gandhi had been released because of his illness. She presided at the Kanpur session of the Congress in 1925. On this occasion, *The New York Times* named her as the "Joan Arc of India". During her presidency, she suggested the creation of a women's section of the Congress and advocated the special need to talk about women's issues in India. In this period, she travelled in the North of India. She often met student delegations at Allahabad University, usually accompanied by Nehru's sister. In this period Muslim and Indian relations deteriorated.

The late 1920s were important for her political career, as she was appointed President of the Congress in 1925 and was Gandhi's unofficial ambassador in America. She arrived in New York in 1928. She gave lectures, poetry readings, she participated in festivals, encountered literary figures, poets, intellectuals. She admired the landscape, and people's sense of duty, love of freedom, and optimism. She met Jane Addams and admired those "splendid women who use their wealth, rank and talent in the service of fine national causes for the progress of humanity. Jane Addams" – Sarojini continues – "is of course the chief among them" (Letter to Gandhi, 19 November 1928: 214). The Grand Canyon inspired in her a sense of the sublime; she compared it to a magnificent temple built by God. She visited Elizabeth Beecher Stowe's house in Cincinnati. She met many black professors at the Howard University. She gave her solidarity to black people and visited Indian reservations.

After her return to India, she joined Congress. When Nehru was naminated as the Congress President, in 1929, complete independence had been adopted by the political party. In March of the same year, Gandhi launched the famous Dandi march against the Salt Tax. Sarojini joined Gandhi and broke the Salt Law, reminding the *satyagrahis* to remain non-violent. When Gandhi was arrested on 5 May, she was given the leadership of the movement. She attempted to enter the Dharasana Salt Works and was arrested.

She assisted Gandhi during his fast in September 1932 and in February 1942. Sarojini had been arrested several times, the longer in Aga Khan Palace, with Gandhi and Gandhi's wife, Kasturba.

In 1931, Gandhi moved to England together with Sarojini. Here Sarojini participated in lectures and readings and met friends. She travelled to Italy and Switzerland, then visited South Africa. Sarojini had been arrested shortly after her return in India, but was soon released because of illness. In 1932 Gandhi started a fast in protest of the announcement of separated electorates of untouchables by their leader, Dr. Ambedkar. Then he founded the journal *Harjian* and travelled on foot during 1933-34. Sarojini often accompanied him in these struggles.

In 1942 the Congress adopted the Quit India resolution, asking the British to leave India. Thousands were arrested. Sarojini was imprisoned, too. In gaol she had an encouraging influence on other prisoners. When Mahadev Desai and Kasturba Gandhi passed away in prison, she felt great sadness.

In 1944 Gandhi was released. He helpfully tried to resolve unity by meeting Jinnah several times. But, finally, on 15 August 1947, the British transferred power to two independent states: India and Pakistan. The partition was a dramatic event, with riots, mass-migrations of refugees, rapes and violence between the two communities. On 30 January 1948, Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu-nationalist, at a prayer meeting in Delhi. Sarojini continued to remain the same, important column of the Congress in those dramatic days. Though the assassination of Gandhi left a deep sorrow in Sarojini, she demonstrated self-control. In her speech at Gandhi's funeral, she talked about him as "a lineal descendant of all the great teachers who taught the gospels of truth, love, and peace" (Naravane 2012: Location 1169).

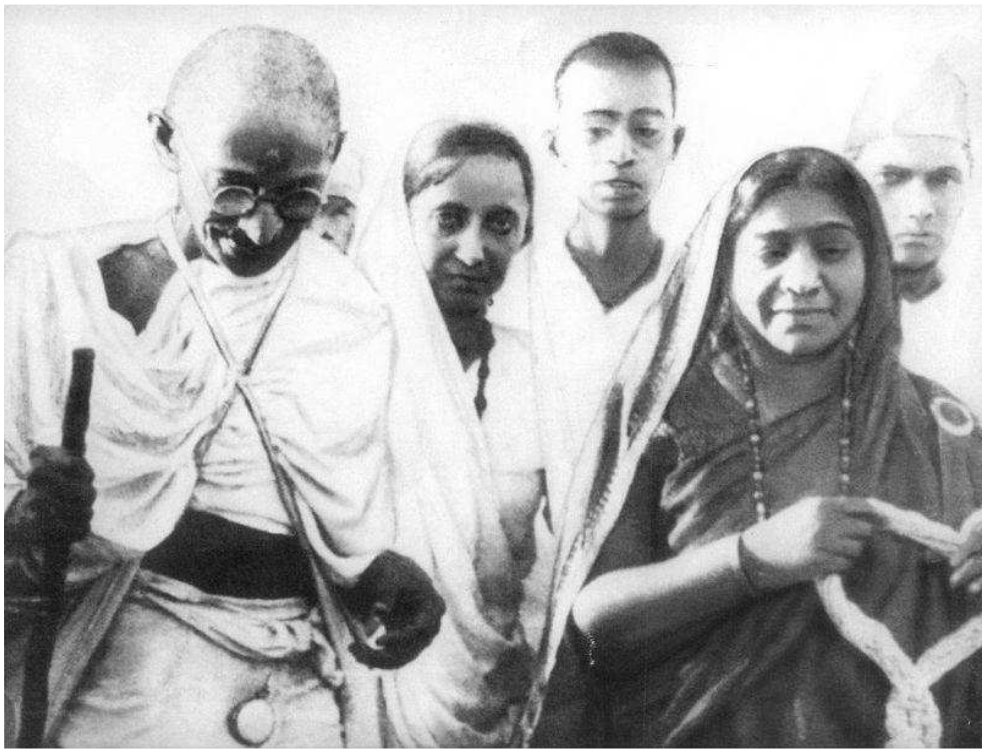
Sarojini was nominated governor of Uttar Pradesh by Nehru. In these final years she showed herself to be a brilliant legislator; she met students in conferences and celebrations in many universities, and never stopped being a woman of spirit, infusing positive energy to the people around her.

In the late winter of 1949 she felt ill. She passed away on 2 March, 1949. Sixty thousand people watched the ultimate departure of Sarojini Naidu in silent grief, at her funeral on the Gomti river banks.

Political Writings on Women

Sarojini Naidu was influenced by her father's thought about women's upliftment: like Aghorenath Chattopadyay, she was in favour of women's education, the ending of child marriage, and widows' remarriage. However, she became a spokesperson for women issues after her meeting with remarkable women who worked for women's empowerment, like Annie Beasant, who headed

the Theosophical Society and supported the Indian National Congress, and Ramabai Ranade, who founded Seva Sadan, an association for the service of women. Besides, Sarojini was introduced to other important political women and men by Gokhale.



Mahatma Gandhi and Sarojini Naidu during the Salt Satyagraha, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/61/Mahatma_%26_Sarojini_Naidu_1930.JPG

In 1917 she set up the Women's Indian Association, with Annie Besant, Dorothy Graham Jinarajadassa, whose main aim was to obtain women's right to vote. With the Government of India Act (1919) women's right to vote was denied. This led to widespread protests, and Sarojini inquired why the British did not extend the franchise to women. Paradoxically, the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms stated that this resolution wanted to protect the rights of a minority of women secluded in *purdanashin* – i.e. secluded women – not to provoke religious men. As Geraldine Forbes writes, "excluding females from the India Act seemed to be de facto recognition of male authority over women" (Forbes 2004: 100).

Sarojini set her battle against indentured labour – known as *Girmitya* in Hindi – for an intense period. Sarojini was aware of women's exploitation through this practice, since they were uprooted from their homes, transported from India to Fiji to work on the sugarcane plantations. Many women escaped from dowry, poverty, and oppressive situations, to encounter miserable conditions. Sarojini travelled to Kenya, South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, where she spread her message against indentured labour. She

condemned it and especially condemned the ill-practice of exploitation of poor women. British Guiana abolished indentured labour firstly, and Fiji only in 1920. She had been affiliated with the International Women's Congress.

In 1925 Sarojini became the first Indian woman to serve as the President of the Indian National Congress. This was a great and symbolic achievement. The next year the women's movement gained its first success: women could be appointed members of legislatures by nomination. In the same year she became associated with the All India Women's Conference (AIWC). This organisation was originally conceived for an educational scope; subsequently, along with Sarojini presidency, also political issues were considered by AIWC. Margaret Cousins headed the AIWC initiatives and contributed to the foundation of women's movement in India. Margaret, together with her husband James, joined the Beasant's Theosophical Society in 1915, from their arrival in India. Margaret Cousin and Annie Beasant wanted to give an organisation to women's activities. Sarojini bridged between the activity of AIWC and the National Congress. She also worked for the solidarity among women all over the world.

Sarojini took part in the Pan Pacific women's conference at Honolulu in 1927. She worked for the National Council for Women in India and the International Council for Women. In 1932 she was at the Round Table Conference in London as representative of Indian women. The Women's Manifesto published in 1936 by the Women's Indian Association was inspired by Sarojini. She was in touch with several Western women affiliated to the suffragist movements and the feminist debate, as Christal MacMillan, "a very handsome old lady famous in the women's movement (Letter to Padmaja and Leilamani, 1 December 1931: 266).

Sarojini addressed the Patna Session of the Women's conference, where the campaign against *purdah* was debated. Gandhi inaugurated the campaign and invited women to abandon the veil. Even though Sarojini's poetry was criticised for exalting the segregated life of the royal family's women, Sarojini crusaded against this custom. She also campaigned for the right to divorce.

During her trip to the United States, she held several talks about women's status in India: in her lectures, entitled *The Veiled Pageant*, *Guardians of the Flame*, *A Garden Enclosed*, *The Sceptre of Service*, she gave another image of India, very different from the discrediting one the journalist Catherine Mayo gave with her recently published *Mother India*. Sarojini wrote to Gandhi: "I shall be a good ambassador. I go not to refute the falsehoods of an ignorant woman but to interpret the Soul of India" (7 August 1928: 204). Sarojini was aware that the colonial rule used the excuse of "Indian cultural social customs" to legitimate British "civilizing mission". In a letter to her daughter Leilamani she writes: "[The Western world] believes that Indian women are – and always were – downtrodden, ignorant, and weak" (3 October 1925: 179). In order to deny this belief, she gave a counter-narrative of Indian women's status: she showed the important role played by women in India's history, art and culture, up until the freedom movement. Her speech during the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress, in 1917, compares women to torchbearers of the freedom fighter. In her words: "the success of the whole movement lies centred in what is now known as the woman question. It is not you but we who are the true nation builders" (Kumar 2014: Location 228).

Sarojini's words and deeds contributed the special role of women in the national struggle to emerge. In her letter to Padmaja and Leilamani she describes, in vibrant prose, these masses if satyagrahi women involved in the struggle, then imprisoned.

> There are 120 of the Satyagrahi and pseudo-Satyagrahi Legion of "Bens"[1] from Gujarat. They fill 2 long barracks near my cottage and overflow into six crowded tents on the open space that was dedicated to my walk, morning and evening. They are a loud army of protestants and protest against everything at the top of their voice, interspersed with shrill internecine altercations and punctuated at dawn and dusk with a serried medley of prayer and praise […] It is rather heroic and impressive to see these Gujarati ladies… most of them form homes of comfort and culture, most of them delicately nurtured, sheltered and cherished, enduring more or less long tenures of rigorous imprisonment…[…] Some of them, too, are in acutely feminine phases and stages of life… Going to have, on the verge of having, or having just had little Gujarati babies. (2 May 1932: 270).

Sarojini's oratory was vibrant and brilliant, she fascinated the audience, and spoke extempore, her "words drop from her lips like full-blown flowers" (Paranjape 2012: 65). On several occasions, she engendered her discourse and spoke about and for women's empowerment. During her presidential address to the 1925 Congress session, she spoke about a "restoration" of women's role in the society as in the classical Indian period. In her view, freedom would be reached only with equality for women. She considered her appointment as Congress President as a "generous tribute to Indian womanhood and […] loyal recognition of its legitimate place in the secular and spiritual counsels of the nation" (Paranjape 2012: 266. Setting her speech in the restoration of women's role vulgate, she asserts: "You have only reverted to an old tradition and restored to Indian woman the classic position she once held in her happier epoch of our country's story […]. I might bring some glowing ember of the immortal faith that illumined the vigil of Sita in her forest exile" (Paranjape 2012: 266-8). Sita is a *Ramayana* female character, married to Rama, Vishnu's incarnation. Avatar of Lakshimi, the goddess of prosperity, Sita is revered among Hindus, as she embodies the ideal woman's virtues: loyalty and self-sacrifice. By using these words, Sarojini seems to accept the traditional role given to women in society. Giving a traditional, and thus conservative, image of women's role in Indian society, Sarojini was strongly criticised of romanticism and idealization, and of not considering the dark side of women's status in ancient India. However, Sarojini tries to interpret the *Ramayana* heroine in a feminist perspective. Often considered a victim because of her choice to renounce life to escape an unjust world and re-join her mother the Earth (see Sally J. Sutherland 1989: 63-79), Sita demonstrates also strength and courage, wisdom and willpower. Following Sarojini's path, interpretations of Sita in a feminist perspective recently come to light (see Namita Gokhale 2009 and Premalatha 2017).

In her speech, Sarojini continues talking about her "domestic programme", which consists in the restoration of India's "true position as the supreme mistress in her own house, the sole guardian of her own vast resources, and the sole dispenser of her own hospitality" (Naravane 2012: Location 1595). This passage is

[1] Sisters.

meaningful, as it shows her attempt to be revolutionary and feminine at the same time, that is fighting for women's freedom and respect for women, without renouncing the traditional division of roles of man and woman in human life. According to Naravane (2012), she was influenced by Gandhi's and Tagore's vision of women. In fact, as Nair (2008) observes, the Gandhian movement gave a partial victory to women's emancipation, for how nationalism was reconfigured, through the representations of the Indian nation as feminine, and the large-scale and unprecedented participation of women in the national movement. Sarojini tries to find another path – different from Western feminism, for Indian women, in order to construct an enlightened society for a free India, where men and women work together for a better future. She avoided following Western feminism because she saw the risk of a division of society – a risk that would damage the Indian nation's struggle for independence, since it would divide men and women. This is why Sarojini often looked at Western feminism with a critical eye and tried to build an ideology that would guarantee the union of Indian society against the common enemy: the Western world. At the same time, this ideology had to be respectful of tradition, in order to find the favour of the different strata of India. A balance that was difficult to achieve.

In one of her letters, her awareness of Western feminism's narrowness is evident, when she perspicuously affirms

> The women of Europe for all their intelligence and education remain merely mental and limited – imitating men in a fierce, resentful, revengeful kind of way… poor , foolish things, instead of recognizing the strength and sanctity of their womanhood as the inspiring and purifying influence in the world… (Letter to Jaisoorya Naidu, 16 June 1920: 146).

The limits of the so-called "enlightened" Western behaviour towards women is stressed in another letter:

> Today the great debate on the India question takes place in the House of Commons, but I could not go for a very amusing reason. All the R.T. delegates were to get seats in the special gallery but so hidebound and stupid are old English customs that women are not allowed to sit in that special gallery. So, I had to return my ticket. I was both annoyed and diverted by such an exhibition of British conservatism (Letter to Padmaja Naidu, 3 December 1931: 267).

In a letter to Leilamani she considers the different framework in which Indian women's awareness moves, unlike that of Western women:

> Only remember – she writes – that you are an Indian girl and that puts upon you a heavier burden than if you were an English girl born to a heritage of freedom. Remember that you have to help India to be free and the children of tomorrow to be free-born citizens of a free land and therefore – if you are true to your country's need you must recognize the responsibility of your Indian womanhood. Nothing in your speech or action should cause the progress of Indian women to suffer, nothing in yourself should give room for wretched reactionary slave-minds to say "This comes of giving too much education and freedom to our women". Think over it my darling. You are not free" (Letter to Leilamani Naidu, 4 March 1921: 156-157).

Thus, Indian women are twice (or more) subaltern, at least once more subaltern than western women, because Indian women, differently from Western ones, are colonized. For this reason, Sarojini conceived women's empowerment together with the battle for freedom, which must be conducted by both women and men.

She linked political and economic issues to the women's condition and extended the battle for women's upliftment from social to political and economic issues. She says: "The question is whether in the reconstruction of the national life it will be possible for you to have a rich national life unless and until it is shared and supported by women who are the soul of citizenship and the life of the nation?" (Paranjape 2012: 238).

Sarojini sets her discourse in the "golden age" narrative, when women were valued and had positions of high status, considering the present situation as a regression. This representation of an idealized past, and a dark present, was common to many activists for women's rights in 20th-century India; even though it problematized the historical woman's question in India, it helped to legitimate social reform.

Interestingly, in her reply to the Secretary of State for India Edwin Montagu on Punjabi women mistreating by British rule, she seems to defend the custom of *pardah*, as she writes "pardah is as sacred to the Indian women as is her veil to the Catholic Nun and forcibly unveil an Indian woman constitutes in itself a gross outrage" (Manmohan Kaur 1968: 258-9). In her discourse on women's franchise, she writes on the same issue "without discussing the merits or demerits of this old social custom, I am convinced that, like other all time-honoured but already obsolete social observances and usages, the *purdah* system can no longer remain immutable, but must read just itself to the needs and demands of a widespread national re-awakening" (Paranjape 2012: 245).

In "Women's Education and the Unity of India" she states:

> The subject of women's education in India cannot be fully considered except in its relation to the vexed and delicate problem of the purdah. To be or not to be, that is the question! There are many ardent but not far-seeing social reformers who loudly advocate the immediate and wholesale abolition of the purdah as an initial step towards education. I suppose it is not easy for those whose lives are cast in progressive places where the purdah system is so elastic, to realise that to countless men and women in other parts of India it is dearer than life itself and synonymous with their honour. All my life I have lived in a Mohamedan country which Is regarded as the stronghold of the purdah, and I realise what a calamity of incalculably tragic results would follow a premature and total abolition of the system […]. Indeed I hold that the crowning triumph of education will be the complete emancipation of Indian womanhood. In the fulness of time, like a splendid and full-blown flower, she will emerge from the protecting sheath of her purdah (Paranjape 2012: 209).

Sarojini sees the real revolution as a gradual, step by step achievement of women's freedom from their direct actions toward a grass-root level change. A radical, up-to-down change is not durable, nor is a real women's liberation, as it is an oppressive solution wanted by illuminated and westernized social reformers, who Sarojini successfully defines "not far-seeing". For a long-lasting result, she advocates women's education. An educated woman will be able to defeat all obsolete customs which seclude her, as *purdah*.

Continuity with traditions, instead of rupture, is one of Sarojini's standpoints in her discourse for women's franchise. She does not question women's and men's roles. With her words: "It has been said that to give women franchise would be to rid them of feminine grace […]. We realise that men and women have separate goals and separate destinies and that just as a man can never fulfil the responsibility of a woman, a woman cannot fulfil the responsibility of man" (Paranjape 2012:

240-241). Seeming not to discuss patriarchal power, Sarojini's assertions need to be considered under a post-colonial perspective. In her effort, Sarojini Naidu tried to defend her cultural and gendered identity from the double colonization Indian women had to face, as colonial subjects, and as oppressed women. To Catherine Mayo's Mother India, and the general British "civilizing mission" narrative, Sarojini opposed her counter narrative of the traditional enlightened role of Indian women, postulating the necessary recognition of women franchise. To find a different path from Western feminism, Sarojini enforced her arguments by quoting women's role in political battles, and ultimately in the struggle for India's independence among Gandhi's movement.

> She [The Indian woman] has been pre-eminently associated with the political life of the country, uplifting the voice of her indignation against all measures of unjust and oppressive legislation […], she has accorded her cordial support to all beneficent, social and economic measure, like Gokhale's Bill for free and compulsory education, the Civil Marriage Bill of Mr Basu, the Inter-Caste Marriage Bill of Mr Patel and the Swadeshi movement inaugurated by my friend and leader, Mahatma Gandhi, and all efforts to ameliorate the condition of the depressed and afflicted members of our society (Paranjape 2012: 244).

We have to remember also that she did not consider herself a feminist in a westernized meaning. Nevertheless, Sarojini's contribution to the Indian Women's movement was meaningful and very important, as she gave a different perspective in considering women's upliftment from various aspects: economic security, political rights, the right to divorce, *purdah*, the role of women in India's cultural progress, and women's struggle for the national cause. She helped the Indian women's movement to grow, avoiding the imitation of the western women's movement without any critical approach. She was aware that Indian women must look back to their heritage to find a solution and the inspiration for their social, and political struggles. She was convinced that only by looking back at the ancient role of women in society the modern India's society could give to women their right status. Sarojini had never been a traditional woman: undoubtedly, in her private and public life she was a living example of an emancipated woman.

Dreams of a Poetess

Sarojini Naidu experienced poetry from a very young age: she published her main poetry volumes in the early phase of her life: *The Golden Threshold*, in 1905, and *The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death and the Spring*, in 1912. Both were printed in London with the support of Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symons, two English poets affiliated to the romantic revival in England. In 1917 she published her last book of poetry in life, *The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death and the Spring*. The other collections, *The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India* (1943), *The Feather of the Dawn* (1961), and *The Indian Wavers* (1971), were posthumously published. Even if the love for poetry never faded during her political activity, it is clear that the editing of new books of poetry had been subordinated to the nationalist cause.

Since her baptism as a poet was blessed by the members of the Rhymers' Club in London ("William Watson, […] Davidson,[…] Thompson[…], Yeats with his exquisite dreams and music, Norman Gale, […] Arthur Symons, the marvellous

boy, with his passionate nature and fiery eyes, all gathered together in the friendly house of that dearest and lovingest of friends and rarest and most gifted of geniuses, Edmund Gosse", *Letter to M. Govindarajulu Naidu*, London, 13 January 1896), Sarojini was deeply influenced by the so-called "new poets", with mixed "melancholic sensuality, […] and attention to the intricacies of rhyme and rhythm" of the "new poets" (Anna Snaith 2014: 74).

According to Paranjape this was a "colonial relationship" (p. xxv), in which Sarojini, a young Indian woman, had been subjugated by the fascinating prestige of the "godfather of [her] dreaming girlhood" (p. 62) and the adoring envy mixed to the admiration for her friend Symons ("I envy you very much, very much – but that envy is swallowed up completely by a greater and a truer feeling of admiration, and it is with very great pride I count myself among the friends of so gifted a poet", Letter to Arthur Symons, 10 July 1896: 23). This complex relationship, not wholly equal, is – according to Paranjape – reflected in her poetry, since it has been deeply influenced by Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symons. Nevertheless, Sarojini could not be blamed for this "weakness", since she was very young (16 years old), and plainly aware of the improbable opportunities her loved city, Hyderabad, could offer to a young poetess to emerge. In her words: "I wonder if you can realize how difficult it is for any one to keep 'merely' to the 'primrose path' of Art – in India […] living in Hyderabad the most self-centred of all Indian principalities, absolutely isolated from all living literary influences and public, my personal ambition for success, for fame has been growing less and less" (*Letter to E. Gosse*, 12th January 1905). Her first London experience in the 1890s was to prove her value as a poet – and her dream to become a poet had been fulfilled: "Poetry is the one thing I love so passionately, so intensely, so absolutely, that is my very life of life – and now you have told me that I am a poet – I am a poet! I keep repeating it to myself to try to realize it" (Letter to E. Gosse, 1896: 27). The success of Sarojini's talent depended on E. Gosse's decision to publish or not: and this liaison is accepted by Sarojini, who never takes a step without Gosse's permission – as her need for his approval we can find in her letters: "Of course, I should not dream of saying yes without consulting you" (To E. Gosse, Hyderabad 5 May 1904); "I sent [to Gosse] the poems last week and this week I am writing to him to communicate directly with you and give his formal sanction to publishing this book [*The Bird of Time*]. Mr Gosse is my literary godfather, so I must, in common loyalty ask his sanction before giving a book to the world even under your sheltering wing" (Letter to W. Heinemann, Hyderabad 20 July 1911). And Gosse's introduction to *The Bird of Time* is necessary to understand how his influence had determined the aesthetics of Sarojini's poetry. He writes:

> The verses which Sarojini had entrusted to me were skilful in form, correct in grammar and blameless in sentiment, but they had the disadvantage of being totally without individuality. They were Western in feeling and in imagery; […] I advised the consignment of all that she had written, in this falsely English vein, to the waste-paper basket. I implored her to consider that from a young Indian of extreme sensibility, who had mastered not merely the language but the prosody of the West, what we wished to receive was […] some revelation of the heart of India, some sincere penetrating analysis of native passion, of the principles of antique religion and of such mysterious intimations as stirred the soul of the East long before the West had begun to dream that it had a soul. Moreover, I entreated Sarojini to write no more about

> robins and skylarks, in a landscape of our Midland counties, with the village bells somewhere in the distance calling the parishioners to church, but to describe the flowers, the fruits, the trees, to set her poems firmly among the mountains, the gardens, the temples, to introduce to us the vivid populations of her own voluptuous and unfamiliar province. (E. Gosse, Introduction to *The Bird of Time*).

As a result, – according to Paranjape (2012) – Sarojini's poetry is imprisoned in the mimics of her Western literary patron (Edmund Gosse), and the "new poets" models (Arthur Symons, Yeats): her transition from a "machine-made imitator of the English classics" to "a genuine Indian poet of the Deccan" under Gosse's advice, makes her poems artificial, inauthentic, performing an image of India which best suits the artistic taste of the English public, but betrays her coherence with her struggle for Indian women's enhancement.

Conflicts within Sarojini's poetry can be analysed in a post-colonial perspective. Since she was a spectator of the cultural colonization of the Indian world by Western modernity and rationality, Sarojini is a subaltern, in the extent of what G. C. Spivak has conceptualized in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?". In Spivak's words, "in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female, is even more deeply in shadow" (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 1988: 271). Unlike many women who could really not speak, Sarojini conceived subaltern in a colonial perspective, was able to enhance her voice against women's seclusion. However, she was not wholly free from that linguistic phenomenon Franz Fanon defines in his book, *Black Skins, White Masks*,

> It is implicit that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other. […] To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization. […] Mastery of language affords remarkable power. […] Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle […] (Fanon 1970: 48).

In this perspective, Sarojini is subaltern, since she writes poetry in the colonizer's language, and, first of all, for the colonizer's public. Her debut was blessed by English poets, like Edmund Gosse, who constricted Sarojini to fulfil the wishes of the post-Industrial West for the "postcolonial exotic" (Graham Huggan 2001), a mysterious soul of India, which was merely a projection the West expected to see. With the result that "her India is more artificial, exotic, and picturesque than any account by an Anglo-Indian poet" (Paranjape 2012: 45), though less "dishonest" than Anglo-Indian poets' representations, since her knowledge of India was better than any foreign Orientalist could have. In Paranjape's words,

> Sarojini subtly but certainly complicated the apparently simple relationship of the colonised and the coloniser that was contained in Gosse's advice to her. Though ostensibly colluding with dominant metropolitan aesthetic and producing and answerable portrayal of India to suit Western tastes, she also resisted such a project by both nativizing and politicising it. She thus reclaimed her right to represent herself as an India and also brought into poetic discourse the marginalised and oppressed 'folk' [giving] them dignity, even grandeur, even if this meant masking their wretchedness and exploitation (Paranjape 2012: 45-46).

Sarojini was a sensitive spectator of the cultural colonization of her world by Western modernity and rationality. Indian culture and traditions were menaced by this new dominant world. In this context, the counter reaction was the revival of Indian religion and spirituality, called "Indian renaissance", and whose main interpreter was Gandhi. He offered an alternative to colonialism and modernity. Thus, Sarojini's poetry tried to reproduce an authentic world diverse form colonial modernity. Her concern about its disappearance is expressed in a letter to her editor:

> These beautiful and symbolic and uplifting things [she refers to the Hindu feasts of serpents] are dying out of our daily life, alas: but in my own home […] they are observed and faithfully fulfilled – Your Western civilization has not been an unmixed blessing to us at all, to us of this generation; but me, the dreamer, the child of a thousand mysteries […] it has not been able to rob of my spiritual and poetic heritage" (*Letter to W. Heinemann*, Hyderabad 27 July 1911: 58).

> The new [Nizam] is a dear boy, but he belongs to the Modern Age… and where we had elephant processions we shall have motors, where we had torches to light the streets, we shall have Kitson lights, where we had the glamour and splendour and glory of the Arabian Nights we shall have "improvements", better sanitation, more ordered system of administration […] Those marvellous days are gone" (*Letter to W. Heinemann*, Hyderabad 7 September 1911: 65).

In this poetic world, suspended in a pre-modern age, colourful and vivid, spoiled by the squalor and suffering of poverty, not only are the women segregated, but the whole of India is set apart, in a sort of extended *purdah*, from the contradictory reality of immense poverty and Western modernity Sarojini experienced as a woman of her time. We can say that Sarojini put her pre-modern Indian world in the *zenana*. It is a "poetic ethnography", as successfully defined by Paranjape, "a way of preserving through writing wat was passing away before her eyes. All these factors contributed to her attempt at offering not just to Westerners, but also to Indians, a picture of themselves which they might be proud of, something that might salvage some of their crippled self-respect as a colonized and humiliated people" (Paranjape 2012: 50).

Many of her poems collected in the volumes between 1905 to 1917 depict women in a romantic and exotic way. Her poetry shows women suffering for their beloved death, fragile and imprisoned, with no chance for a better life, nor a desire to escape from the patriarchal status quo which apparently Sarojini glorifies and does not discuss.

In the poem "Suttee" (*sati*), in *The Golden Threshold*, Sarojini admires the Rajiput women who did *jauhar* in ancient time. *Jauhar* was a medieval practice of collective suicide of women in case the city was invaded by the enemy, in defence of chastity and devotion to their husbands. In "Suttee" the wife's sorrow for her husband's death ends with the words "Shall the flesh survive when the soul is gone?", which implicitly but clearly – as Paranjape (2012) observes – recalls women's self-sacrifice on the husband's pyre in *sati* practice. However, according to Naravane (2012) the annihilation of the widow is only metaphorical. Other poems were dedicated to widowhood, such as "Dirge. In sorrow for her bereavement" and "Vasant Panchami", both collected in *The Bird of Time*. In these poems women appear imprisoned in their status of eternal sorrow and grief. The widow could not take part in the spring festival of Vasant Panchami, because her mourning is eternal. There is no chance for a better life, no exit from the traditional

remarriage ban. For Paranjape, Sarojini "appears to romanticise sati […], implying that like several other retrogressive practices from her immediate past, she found it aesthetically appealing though as a champion of women's rights, she opposed it politically. This tension between her poetry and her politics is evident throughout her work" (Paranjape 2012: 21). "Certainly – he continues – the champion of women's rights can be seen politically at her worst here. Poems such as these suggest that she never quite broke with tradition in her way of thinking" (Paranjape 2012: 26).

In her early creative process, there is apparently no room for any political debate: moreover, in her early career as a poet, she deliberately refuses any utility of her poetry, and does not want to write poems to be of any utility of her country, neither for women – in a way condemning what her father had done in his political struggles for women's upliftment:

> France they say is the land of movements, but Modern India I think their 'cradle and home and their bier'. There is a tacit understanding that all talents and enthusiasms should concentrate themselves on some practical end for the immediate and obvious good of the nation. There are innumerable strong foes who would lure you or force you into their own special task. The leader of a "religious reform", the prophet of "social progress", the editor of a political journal, the worker in the cause of "female education", the president of a "Home for Hindu Widows", the advocate for the revival of home industries, a whole paradox of admirable and incongruous movements to be pressed on me – to me of all people, with scarcely enough bodily strength to exist at times – and a part so unfitted to do more than sing with the birds in the forest of lilies and nut palms!" (*Letter to E. Gosse*, Hyderabad 4th September 1905, p .46).

However, using this assumption to understand her whole production – in poetry and prose – risks giving a partial imagine of Sarojini's thought: in fact this assumption was written early before her active involvement into the nationalistic struggle, and behind her words we can, to some extent, read the burden of what was expected from her, who was to become "a national poet" (*Letter to E. Gosse*, Hyderabad 12 January 1905: 45).

However, as a first conclusion of the present debate, Sarojini's poetry apparently remains outside her political activity: "Her lyric poetry becomes an indulgence, or an embarrassment, in the context of her career as a politician and orator. Her poetry, seen as sentimental, derivative and backward-looking, sits awkwardly alongside her feminist anti-colonialism" (Snaith 2014: 69).

On the contrary, according to Anna Snaith, Sarojini Naidu's poetry was not a mere expression of private pain, but a first experiment of translating the private into the public sphere, therefore linked to her subsequent political experience. In other words, Anna Snaith does not see any discontinuity between Sarojini's poetry and prose, but a continuum. The four periods she spent in London (the first from 1895 to 1899, the second from 1912 to 1914, the third from 1919 to 1921, and the last in 1931), were marked with a growing nationalist – and feminist – awareness, which was shaped early during her frequentations with the Irish nationalist poets, such as Yeats and Symons, and definitely gained its final contours after the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre. This interpretation revolutionizes the reading of Sarojini's poetry and politics and complicates the question about her position as a poetess and a politician, apparently contradictory. Anna Snaith affirms that the members of the Rhymers' Club had "influenced her later feminist nationalism"

(Snaith 2014: 70), with a "cross-cultural nationalism" especially inspired by Yeats' Irish revivalism. In fact, Yeats' interest in Irish folk tales and folk songs is reflected by Sarojini's poems about Indian folks: they both romanticize a pre-modern life, seen as a remedy to the British colonizer's modernity.

Giving a glance to other poems on women's status, as "Pardah Nashin" and "Nightfall in the City of Hyderabad", which describe the segregated life of women in a splendid jail, we can discover a deep meaning behind the first superficial interpretation that has often been given. In this couplet, excerpted from the poem "Nightfall in the City of Hyderabad", she describes the women looking out from the *zenana*'s balcony:

> From trellised balconies, languid and luminous
> Faces gleam, veiled in a splendour voluminous.

The words Sarojini uses to depict the richness and the splendour that contour the woman may led to consider Sarojini in favour *purdah*. However, in the end of the poem, Sarojini goes deep inside the feelings of the woman segregated: feelings of sorrow and sadness. We can interpret the subject of the poem as a "double prison": the *purdah*, in which the woman is constricted, and the silent sorrow imprisoned in the heart of the segregated woman. Thus, instead of being a poem in favour of *purdah*, it shows its futility. In "Purdah Nashin", from *The Golden Threshold* we read:

> But thought no hand
> Unsanctioned dares
> Unveil the mysteries of her grace,
> Time lifts the curtain unawares,
> And sorrow looks into her face…

The same introspection is given by another poem taken from *The Golden Threshold*, "The Princess Zeb-un-Nissa", whose protagonist is isolated from the world. Queen Gulnar has everything in her room, but is unsatisfied, she is bored. In these poems the women are depicted as being bored, in solitude and sorrow, although their cages appear splendid and opulent.

Even though Sarojini does not openly discuss the seclusion of women in her poetry, she writes about women, from a woman's perspective, opening the private space of the *zenana* to the public. Her subjectivity through her poems emerges as a factor of agency. Interestingly, they are the result of a hybrid culture. As Snaith observes: "Naidu campaigned actively against both purdah […] and sati […], and while these poems are certainly not radically feminist, they recognize the voice and motivation of women in these contexts. Poems such these are not derivative, neither purely European nor Indian, but the product of [an] hybrid situation" (2014: 79).

With her poetry, as in her political speeches and writings, she symbolizes the feminization of the public sphere: her gendered politics, which can be easily interpreted in her prose, implicitly lies in the values she celebrates in her poetry: devotion, altruism, fortitude, embodied by the heroines of the *Ramayana* and

Mahabharata, the Indian epics: Sita, Savitri, Damayanti, we can find also in her political speeches, or common women.

Thus, Sarojini does not unconsciously adhere to Gosse's advice, but she is aware of her role of interpreter of a "cross-cultural poetics". In Sarojini's poems about *sati* and *purdah* we should read "her desire to interpret India to Britain and vice versa", and this is poignantly clear in her letters to her editor. In her words:

> To you in your wholly different mental and spiritual atmosphere how remote and how remote and unreal such things must seem, especially in one who as a girl talked and walked with English poets and watched the English daisies in blossom and heard the skylark sing from English greens – but, perhaps it is the skylark after all who makes the link between the East and the West, Shelley's Skylark in all its inscrutable yearning, passionate ecstasy to reach and be merged in the Infinite beauty and music and splendour, which we Hindus are always striving towards from birth. So, after all – knowing the rapture and the yearning of your English Skylark, an eastern woman's soul may not perhaps seem to you so remote, so unusual (*Letter to William Heinemann*, Hyderabad, 27 July 1911: 59).

> Beauty is my supreme God! I have in me something of the Greek hunger for material loveliness combined – no, infused – with the immemorial Hindu thirst for the immaterial mystic and spiritual glamour of the invisible "Om", a fusion that does not always make for peace in one's life – but certainly the conflict between the two gives ecstasy (Letter to William Heinemann, Hyderabad, 28 March 1912: 74).

According to Anna Snaith, Sarojini poetry must not be read only in a British context, as a comeback to a Western public, but a "key feature of her emergent feminist nationalism (or a response to the contemporary political situation), which would be articulated in numerous speeches from the early twentieth century onwards. Her poetry, then, is constitutive of her later politics, rather than a distraction from or even a catalyst for it" (Snaith 2012: 72).

This theory is confirmed by Sarojini's same words, which demonstrate her dream of being someone important for her country is read in her early letters to Symons, while she was returning to India:

> I know, I am sure, that if there be any real gift in me, any genius, it must catch strange, bright fires from the inspiration of so much beauty and the mystery of the dead, great sorrowful Past… and if, as you say, there is a possibility of my achieving any real greatness in Art or life, it can become certainty only in India: but I have a terrible fear that I have not the strength of soul to accomplish anything alone, and against such odds – I have a terrible fear lest I be overcome by the circumstances, of tradition, of everything, and yet crushed into a mediocrity – I could not tolerate that" (*Letter to Arthur Symons*, Pembridge Crescent, 17 August 1898: 36-37)

Her acclamation as a national symbol to her country is referred in her letter to Gosse: "It was a great awakening for me […] My public was waiting for me – no, not for me, so much as for a poet, a national poet […]. I shall indeed produce something worthy to be offered to my nation as a gift" (Letter to E. Gosse, Hyderabad 12 January 1905).

Her devotion to the nationalist cause and women's issues – as indentured labour, women's franchise, women's education – in the next years till the end of her life, is the result of a whole-existence development, which emerged in her early experience and grew into a mature political awareness.

Conclusion

> How can it be, that the subject, taken to be the condition for, and instrument of agency, is at the same time the effect of subordination, understood as deprivation of agency?
>
> (Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*: 10)

In the Indian women's movement, Sarojini Naidu was not a beginner, as was Margaret Cousins nor a radical activist like Pandita Ramabai, nor a staunch feminist, as she often declared in her various conferences. She was a controversial figure in feminist studies also for her poetry, ambiguously exalting social injustices, like *sati* and *purdah*, and the patriarchal status quo of a feudal society in which women are subjugated by men. However, it is interesting to compare her controversial poetry to her life experience, which are dissonant. She was an emancipated woman: Sarojini, member of a Brahmin family, had an inter-caste marriage with a doctor; she was educated abroad, in England. She travelled a lot, giving lectures and public speeches about poetry and politics. She led civil disobedience while Gandhi was in prison, she actively took part in marches, parades, public speeches and the *satyagraha* movement. She was appointed President of the Indian National Congress and President of the All-India Women Conference. She was Governor of Uttar Pradesh. She fought for women's education, women's franchise, and women's advancement in society. She wanted to find a different path from Western-style feminism for Indian women. She did not want conflict between the sexes, but mutual cooperation for a common cause.

Sarojini's poetry has "inner tensions and conflicts", and "reproduces the contradictions and debates of her age" (Paranjape 2012: 38). Many of her poems, like "Suttee" or "Dirge", seem to be the celebration of women's oppression, while other poems, like "Purdah Nashin", give a multifaceted and more complex insight to women's status. However, Sarojini's poetry is remarkable for giving voice to women's feelings, and insights from a different point of view: and this poetic aim is capably succeeded by the fact that the author who imagines and writes is a woman. Often criticized for being feminine, and not feminist, in her poetry, Sarojini has the merit to give voice to subalterns. Certainly, we should not reduce Sarojini's political thought to her poetry, nor limit the poetic analysis to her verses, without considering her speeches and political writings (Paranjape 2012).

The aim of Sarojini's poems is not to analyse or confront the real world, but to give a pleasant escape from reality. Surprisingly, her best poems are those which represent a feudal world, while the more prosaic poems are those which are imbibed with nationalistic subjects. Different assessment may be made of her prose. Gandhi gave her the title of "Bharat Kokila", the "Nightingale of India", probably because of her speeches, and not for her verses. As Paranjape writes, "Her prose is […] more poetic than some of her nationalistic poetry, which is prosaic" (2012: 66). However, as Snaith observes, there is not a sharp discontinuity between her poetry and her political writings. The apparent division between the woman and her poetry, is the result of a westernized point of view and interpretation. On the contrary, we can interpret her poetry as a forge where she moulded her political-nationalistic and feminist thought – using "feminist" in the same extent Geraldine Forbes uses it, in an "inclusive definition" (see Forbes 2004: 8).

According to Hasi Banjeriee (1998) Sarojini Naidu conceived the role of women within a traditional vision, so there was no need to consider the women's rights movement in India apart from India's liberation movement. As Banjeriee observes, for Sarojini – but also for Gandhi – women's struggle for women's rights would have weakened and divided India in its fight for Indian independence. Therefore, if for Naidu Indian independence had to contemplate equal rights and struggle for the emancipation of both sexes, on the practical side the female question remained subordinate to the urgency of a free nation. The idea of Banjeriee is confirmed in Ghadai's thesis (2014) which sees in the political oratory of Sarojini a feminist scheme and, at the same time, the search for a different path from Western feminism.

According to Paranjape, Sarojini's poetry must be evaluated separately from the political discourse, as often the best poems come into disagreement with the author's political battle for female emancipation. For Snaith, on the contrary, both the poetry and the prose of Sarojini are the result of a political struggle in the nationalist sense, while for Betsy George (2016), Naidu has used poetry, like his oratory, to convey her message of denunciation against practices such as *purdah* or *sati*: therefore, poetic production cannot be considered a "weakness".

In this essay, however, I have set out to show that the work of Sarojini, as Snaith and George claim, has no discontinuity: poetry and prose, in a postcolonial perspective, are both the result of an attempt by a subordinate subject, Sarojini, to find a balance between female emancipation, liberation of the Indian nation and preservation of Indian identity. This attempt, however, succeeds only partially in its original objectives, unfortunately sacrificing on the side of female emancipation. The independence of India and the emancipation of women certainly have a link, but they are not interconnected: although one accompanies the other, the real battle that Sarojini seems to want to lead is the emancipation of India from the influence of the Western model. The need to find a different way from Western feminism undermines the result of the battle of Indian women, which therefore remains tethered by the bonds of tradition: while involved in the struggle for independence, they play a specific role, namely of sacrifice for the country – as Sarojini asserts in one of her speech: "Remember that in all national crises, it is the man who goes out, but it is the woman's hope and woman's prayer that nerves him – nerves his arm to become a successful soldier" (Sengupta 1966: 153).

And yet, not even Sarojini is free from the bond of tradition, given her poems that respond to the taste of the exotic for the Western public. As we have seen, there is no discontinuity between her poetic work and her political prose, as it is the result of a writing that unfailingly, and unknowingly, is influenced by Sarojini's status of subaltern – whose charm is often observed in her letters to her "godfather" Gosse. If in the second part of her life she criticizes Western world, Sarojini's wings are clipped by Indian tradition. The nationalist spirit that links Sarojini to the Gandhian struggle for independence, and which actually makes her a national poet, will influence her political approach to the issue of women's rights. Probably she would be more revolutionary in recognizing herself as a women's poet, not as a national poet. Her poetry is about women, from a woman's perspective, opening

the private space of the *zenana* to the public – and this is more revolutionary than any of her speeches.

Asserting this, I do not want to diminish the fundamental role that Sarojini played in participating in the front line of the political struggle in those years: nevertheless, her experience remains valid more as a symbol and as a model on the practical side, than as a thinker. Through her example Sarojini embodies the advancement of the woman in Indian public life – even if with the limits of her exceptionality, because, even in her subalternity, Sarojini does not belong to the ranks of the lower strata. High caste, educated woman according to the Western model, frequenting the most illustrious families of India, first of all the Nerhu family, Sarojini is a privileged woman. For the lower caste – out of caste women of rural villages, Sarojini's example is still difficult to reach.

In conclusion, we should not limit our interpretation of Sarojini's poetry with a Westernized feminist paradigm, because in this case we have to admit that her poetry and oratory do not discuss patriarchal power. On the contrary, it is interesting to analyse her verses and prose in a post-colonial and subaltern perspective, as they reproduce the contradictions of her age and the challenges of a subaltern's voice.

> I know I am nothing but a dreamer of dreams […] but this too I know: great dreams are the essential seed of great deeds (Letter to Gopal Krishna Gokhale, 9 January 1909).

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DEP Deportate, esuli, profughe
Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile

Gandhi e le donne occidentali

Di

Thomas Weber[*]

Abstract: This paper is the Italian translation of an edited chapter of Thomas Weber's Going Native. Gandhi's Relationship With Western Women (Roli Books, New Delhi 2011) in which Gandhi's attitudes to and relationships with women are analysed. Many Western women inspired him, worked with him, supported him in his political activities in South Africa and India, or contributed to shaping his international image. Of particular note are those women who "became native" to live with Gandhi as close friends and disciples. Through these fascinating women, we get a different insight into Gandhi's life.

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Il rapporto di Gandhi con le donne si è rivelato di irresistibile fascino per molti. Molto spesso le persone che non conoscono praticamente nulla del Mahatma commentano il fatto che "dormì" con giovani donne durante la vecchiaia. Gran parte di questo deriva dall'interesse pruriginoso promosso da biografie sensazionalistiche o libri volti a smascherare il "mito del Mahatma" (Ved Metha 1976). Gandhi parlava spesso delle donne come del sesso più forte (e questo è stato visto come una forma di paternalismo dai critici, soprattutto di orientamento femminista) e di come desiderasse essere una madre per i suoi seguaci. Non sorprende pertanto che le collezioni delle sue lettere e dei suoi discorsi "sulle donne" siano molte. Ciò che meraviglia è quanto poco lavoro accademico sia stato intrapreso sul suo atteggiamento nei confronti e sulle sue relazioni con le donne. Nel 1953, Eleanor Morton pubblicò un libro intitolato *The Women in Gandhi's Life* (*Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi* nell'edizione britannica dell'anno successivo). Il libro fornisce una cronaca della vita di Gandhi usando come veicolo le sue relazioni significative con le donne. Le donne sono, naturalmente, in primo luogo sua madre Putlibai e la moglie Kasturba; seguite da alcune amiche e figure influenti occidentali tra cui Annie Besant, Olive Schreiner, Millie Graham Polak e Sonja Schlesin; poi donne di spicco indiane come Anasuya Sarabhai, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur e Sushila Nayar; e altre

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 ISSN 1824 - 4483

illustri occidentali tra cui Muriel Lester, Mirabehn e Lady Mountbatten. Il problema principale con il libro è che non è affatto referenziato e molti degli episodi citati sembrano basati sul sentito dire. Da allora, oltre a molti capitoli di libri in genere superficiali su Gandhi e le donne, solo il libro di Martin Green, *Gandhi: Voice of a New Age Revolution*, ha preso un interesse serio e accademico sull'argomento; e, più recentemente, il corposo volume di Girja Kumar, *Brahmacharya, Gandhi & His Women Associates*, ha fornito la prima riflessione dedicata, anche se più giornalistica e disorganizzata, sull'argomento. Il libro di Sudhir Kakar su Gandhi e Mirabehn (*Mira and the Mahatma*), benché sia un romanzo, si basa su fonti ragionevolmente ben documentate. Considerato tutto ciò che Gandhi ebbe da dire sulle donne e considerati i suoi stretti rapporti con molte di loro, alcune delle quali veramente note, come mai, fino a poco tempo fa, c'è stata una tale carenza di ricerca e pubblicazioni sull'argomento? La ragione, almeno in parte, sembra essere dovuta al fatto che la storia di Gandhi è in genere strettamente intrecciata con la storia della lotta per l'indipendenza dell'India. E qui gli attori principali erano uomini. Come ho discusso altrove, questo ci dà un'immagine molto limitata di Gandhi (Thomas Weber 2007). Narayan Desai, uno dei pochi gandhiani rimasti che conoscevano intimamente il Mahatma (suo padre era Mahadev Desai, il capo segretario personale di Gandhi, ed egli è cresciuto negli *ashram* di Gandhi), è stato una figura di primo piano nel movimento post-Gandhi ed è un suo recente biografo. Osserva che Gandhi ha dato tre grandi doni all'umanità e che il *satyagraha*, l'attivismo nonviolento di Gandhi, che rappresenta il Gandhi politico, è solo uno di questi (Narayan Desai 1999: 50-1). Questo aspetto è comunque quello su cui i libri di lingua inglese dedicati a Gandhi tendono a concentrarsi. Con questo focus, i collaboratori di Gandhi, quelli che assumono ruoli da protagonista nelle biografie, sono potenti politici maschili come Jawaharlal Nehru e Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel e sostenitori maschili leader dell'Occidente come il reverendo Charles Freer Andrews e simpatizzanti socialisti britannici. Il Gandhi politico, tuttavia, offre un'immagine alquanto parziale di sé e un'analisi più completa del Mahatma includerebbe un accenno esaustivo ad altri importanti collaboratori.

Gandhi non era semplicemente interessato a liberare l'India dal giogo britannico. Desiderava anche un certo tipo di India libera, e l'indipendenza politica per il paese non ne era la garanzia. Per questo motivo, lavorò instancabilmente a quello che definì il "programma costruttivo" per la promozione dei villaggi e l'armonia comunitaria. Gandhi sostenne in più di una circostanza che il programma costruttivo era più importante delle campagne politiche di disobbedienza civile che stava conducendo. Senza di esso, non sarebbero stati apportati i fondamentali cambiamenti necessari e la disobbedienza civile, se fosse riuscita a rovesciare un gruppo di oppressori, si sarebbe limitata a sostituire un gruppo di leader con un altro gruppo simile. Le biografie politiche sembrano essere più eccitanti e spettacolari di quelle incentrate sugli aspetti sociali e morali della vita di Gandhi. Le sue discepole, comprese quelle occidentali, tendevano ad essere delle donne costruttive, ma poiché le attività costruttive della vita di Gandhi ispirate al *sarvodaya* (benessere per tutti) sono minimizzate, queste donne sono in gran parte sconosciute, nonostante il fatto che molte di loro abbiano scritto dei libri.

Sono semplicemente scomparse dalla memoria anche se per lui furono altrettanto importanti dei suoi collaboratori politici. I programmi costruttivi, nello schema di Desai, sono il secondo dei grandi doni di Gandhi. Ma c'è ancora di più di questo nel Mahatma, qualcosa di ovvio per Desai, che la maggior parte delle biografie trascura. Desai sottolinea che c'era un terzo dono di Gandhi: i suoi undici voti, una serie di regole che stabilivano il codice di condotta per i membri dell'*ashram* e che sono la chiave per comprendere la ricerca religiosa di Gandhi. Gandhi credeva fermamente che la vita non potesse essere compartimentata, che le azioni e le ragioni su cui si basano, siano esse politiche, economiche, sociali o spirituali, fossero correlate e che queste azioni avessero un rapporto diretto con il raggiungimento della liberazione personale, lo scopo ultimo della vita. Ancora una volta il Gandhi spirituale non si inserisce troppo facilmente nelle biografie prevalentemente politiche, tranne che per creare il Mahatma come coscienza dell'umanità o come un vecchio eccentrico che aveva grandi problemi con la sua sessualità. Tuttavia, senza comprendere la ricerca spirituale di Gandhi, non siamo in grado di comprendere Gandhi. Poiché è stato secolarizzato in un attore comprensibile e meno controverso sul palcoscenico politico, non è facile per noi venire a patti con un Gandhi più completo. Il problema è che il processo è quasi inevitabile in ogni biografia di una lunghezza ed un grado di coerenza ragionevoli. Laddove un aspetto diverso della vita di Gandhi diventa l'oggetto di uno studio, esso sembra diventare la principale forza alla base delle azioni del Mahatma. Ad esempio, se si legge il libro di Kumar che esamina la vita di Gandhi attraverso i suoi esperimenti di *bramacharya*, quasi non si realizza che Gandhi era un attore politico. Nehru e Patel sono a mala pena menzionati. E questo libro potrebbe far sembrare che tutti i più stretti collaboratori e devoti di Gandhi fossero donne occidentali.

Come ottenere il giusto equilibrio è il dilemma per i biografi di personaggi complessi come Gandhi. Con alcune autorevoli eccezioni, la maggior parte delle discepole di Gandhi (al contrario dei collaboratori politici o costruttivi) erano *ashramiti*, che cercavano di seguire la disciplina spirituale del loro maestro. Quindi, anche in questo caso, benché molte di loro abbiano lasciato scritti autobiografici, sono tendenzialmente scomparse dalla memoria, e questo è particolarmente vero per le sue discepole occidentali. Ovviamente ci sono delle eccezioni. Mirabehn non poté essere tralasciata dato che fisicamente era spesso al fianco di Gandhi e, a causa del suo precedente status, figlia di un ammiraglio britannico, fece sensazione. Ma lei non fu la sola e in effetti non fu la prima discepola occidentale ad "assimilarsi ai nativi". Anche le altre meritano di essere ricordate. La più vicina delle seguaci occidentali di Gandhi ebbe con lui più una relazione personale che una relazione di sostegno (meramente) politico o filosofico.

Per descrivere adeguatamente queste relazioni personali, ho cercato di affidarmi alla corrispondenza invece che ai resoconti biografici o addirittura autobiografici successivi. Le lettere hanno evidentemente un'immediatezza assai maggiore e non sono scritte per i posteri, modo in cui lo sarebbero stati molto più tardi gli scritti autobiografici. Spesso, tuttavia, è stata preservata solo la corrispondenza dalla parte di Gandhi. Non appena Mohandas Gandhi divenne il venerato Mahatma "dalla

grande anima", il suo staff di segretari conservò le copie delle sue lettere, e quelli a cui erano indirizzate furono inclini a conservarle e in molti casi acconsentirono alla loro riproduzione in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, collezione in cento volumi.

Le lettere a Gandhi sono un po' più problematiche. Quelle importanti, o quelle scritte da determinate persone o che coprono determinate date, sono state conservate negli archivi del Sabarmati Ashram di Ahmedabad o nella Nehru Memorial Museum Library di Nuova Delhi. Tuttavia, molte sono state anche distrutte. È assai probabile che Gandhi abbia ricevuto più lettere durante la sua vita di chiunque altro. Presumibilmente la maggior parte non erano degne di essere conservate, e anche molte di quelle che potevano essere preservate furono replicate e poi riciclate come carta per appunti. Fortunatamente, molte delle lettere ponevano domande a Gandhi e anche quando non lo facevano, nelle sue risposte molto spesso egli alludeva al contenuto delle lettere a cui stava rispondendo, quindi la conversazione non è necessariamente unilaterale anche quando sono disponibili solo le sue lettere agli amici e ai seguaci. Quello che ho cercato di fare attraverso queste lettere ed altri scritti è esaminare i rapporti di Gandhi con le donne occidentali. Chi erano? Perché erano attratte da lui? E cosa ci dice questo di lui? Tuttavia, prima di esplorare le singole donne e il suo rapporto con loro, è necessario inquadrare il contesto.

[…]

Gandhi e le donne

I pensieri di Gandhi sulle donne e la femminilità e il suo messaggio alle donne sono stati raccolti in molti volumi. In questi libri si intravede il desiderio di Gandhi di coltivare il proprio lato femminile e ci sono alcuni libri scritti da altri, come quelli di Millie Polak, Mirabehn, Nilla Cram Cook, Mary Barr e Manu Gandhi, che toccano il suo rapporto materno con le autrici in particolare e, a volte, con le donne in generale. C'è stato anche un considerevole numero di libri sulla moglie di Gandhi Kasturba e sul suo rapporto con lei (l'ultimo dei quali è *The Forgotten Woman* di Arun Sunanda Gandhi).

Detto questo, è sorprendente che non siano stati intrapresi maggiori studi sul rapporto di Gandhi con le donne, piuttosto che sulle sue riflessioni su di loro. *The Women in Gandhi's Life* di Eleanor Morton, a parte alcune osservazioni analitiche, è davvero poco più di una biografia di Gandhi che menziona molte più donne del solito, e il libro di Girja Kumar sulla relazione di Gandhi con le donne alla luce dei suoi esperimenti di *brahmacharya* trae ben poche conclusioni.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur fu una fra le discepole indiane di Gandhi più occidentalizzata. Era nata in una famiglia principesca che si era convertita al cristianesimo, era stata educata a Oxford ed era membro dell'*ashram* di Gandhi dalla metà degli anni '30. Osserva che "nessun uomo ha suscitato una tale devozione da parte delle donne". Questo lo attribuisce alla sua capacità di "mettersi nei panni di un'altra persona [...] in particolare [...] del perdente". Prosegue dicendo che "Un amante appassionato dell'umanità, un implacabile nemico

dell'ingiustizia [...] non c'è da stupirsi che Gandhi abbia abbracciato presto la causa delle donne" (Amrit Kaur 1942, p. iii).

Vivendo a stretto contatto con Gandhi, è stata in grado di osservare che nelle sue istituzioni e programmi di lavoro in India "ha prestato uguale attenzione e dato lo stesso posto alle donne e alle ragazze", mentre nei suoi *ashram* "c'è un'aria di libertà e fiducia in se stesse nelle ragazze e nelle donne che hanno vissuto con lui o che sono state sotto la sua cura". Aggiunge che "è una gioia da vedere e raramente ritrovabile nella società indiana. Nulla lo delizia di più del successo delle donne in ogni sfera della vita" (A. Kaur 1942, pp. iv-v).

Rameshwar Nehru aggiunge che Gandhi considerava le donne più idonee a realizzare il suo mondo ideale rispetto agli uomini in quanto rappresentavano dei soldati migliori nel suo esercito nonviolento, e questo, a sua volta, significa che "ha fiducia in loro, ed è per questo che sono così inevitabilmente attratte verso di lui" (Rameshwari Nehru 1949, p 212).

[…]

Gandhi e le donne occidentali

Inizialmente Gandhi nutriva un profondo rispetto per l'Impero britannico, ritenendo che fosse un'influenza giusta e civilizzatrice. In seguito perse questa fede e professò un'avversione per almeno alcuni elementi della civiltà occidentale. Gandhi, diciannovenne, andò in Inghilterra per studiare giurisprudenza nel 1888, non solo a causa dell'ambizione professionale, ma anche perché se "Vado in Inghilterra non solo diventerò un avvocato (di cui pensavo grandi cose) ma potrò vedere l'Inghilterra, la terra dei filosofi e dei poeti, il vero centro della civiltà" (Intervista, "The Vegetarian", 13 giugno 1891).

Dopo essere arrivato, inizialmente si dedicò a trasformarsi in un vero gentiluomo inglese attraverso i costosi alloggi in cui viveva, gli abiti alla moda che indossava e le lezioni di danza, di francese, di elocuzione e di violino. Ben presto, tuttavia, la sua posizione finanziaria lo costrinse a modificare la sua stravaganza e la scoperta di ristoranti vegetariani contribuì non solo a placare la sua fame, ma anche a metterlo in contatto con una cerchia notevole di *New Ager*, Socialisti e Cristiani esoterici. Ebbero un profondo impatto sul giovane Mohandas alla stregua missionari cristiani, che divennero i suoi primi amici intimi in Sud Africa (Per le prime influenze su Gandhi, specialmente occidentali, si veda T. Weber, 2007, pp. 26-33, 36-45).

Inoltre, è sintomatico vedere, per esempio, quanto spesso i temi e le frasi dei testi occidentali che Gandhi lesse affiorino nei suoi discorsi e scritti persino decenni più tardi. Questo fu evidente durante i suoi primi studi filosofici a Londra e in Sudafrica (quando aveva ancora tempo per costruire il suo capitale intellettuale). Le letture de *Il regno di Dio è dentro di te* di Tolstoj, *Unto this Last* di John Ruskin, *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* di Henry David Thoreau sulla disobbedienza civile, o i dialoghi di Platone di Socrate (specialmente l'Apologia e il Cristo) sono a questo riguardo veramente rivelatori; molti dei detti o degli esempi preferiti di Gandhi, e persino intere aree della sua filosofia, sono state riprese quasi letteralmente da queste fonti. Lo stesso Gandhi affermò che il lavoro di Ruskin

trasformò la sua vita e fornì le basi per le sue idee economiche (si veda il capitolo intitolato *The Magic Spell of a Book* in M. K. Gandhi 1949, pp. 219-221).

Il suo segretario personale e primo biografo, Pyarelal, è andato ben oltre sostenendo che Tolstoy era il "fondatore del Gandhismo" (Nayar Pyarelal 1965, p.707). Mentre le influenze formative rimasero, il suo rispetto per la civiltà occidentale subì una brusca flessione. Già nel 1909, nel suo manifesto politico seminale *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi scriveva sui mali della civiltà moderna. Vedeva una società che forniva un'abbondanza di beni materiali, ma dove la gente era diventata schiava della fabbrica o schiava del materialismo, abbandonando la moralità e la religione; dove il rapido trasporto ferroviario diffondeva piaghe e impediva alle persone di avere la possibilità di incontrarsi e stabilire sentimenti affini con i loro vicini nei lunghi viaggi; dove gli avvocati istruiti dividevano ulteriormente le controparti piuttosto che riconciliarle; e dove i dottori trattavano i sintomi in modo che le cause non dovessero essere affrontate (si veda M. K. Gandhi 1939, capitolo VI "Civilization", capitolo IX "The Condition of India: Railways", capitolo XI "The Condition of India: Lawyers", e capitolo XII "The Condition of India: Doctors").

L'India chiedeva la libertà non solo dal giogo del colonialismo britannico, ma anche dalla perniciosa influenza della civiltà moderna ovvero occidentale. Questo doveva essere fatto attraverso il suo lavoro alla riforma sociale per il tramite del suo programma costruttivo. E qui è dove sperava che le sue seguaci occidentali avrebbero avuto un ruolo. E coloro che sembravano sostenere le sue opinioni.

Le donne occidentali furono menzionate per la prima volta nella sua vita come parte del voto a sua madre, prima che gli fosse dato il permesso di andare in Inghilterra a studiar legge, come qualcosa (insieme all'alcool e alla carne) che non dovesse essere toccato (Gandhi 1940, p. 28). Anche se Gandhi ebbe poche amiche a Londra quando era lì come studente, con conseguenze a volte buffe, le sue prime e più strette amiche occidentali furono delle parenti di compagni sudafricani con i quali in seguito avrebbe stretto dei rapporti. Durante il suo soggiorno sudafricano, le donne occidentali erano diventate importanti sostenitrici e, nel caso di Millie Graham Polak, un'amica personale estremamente intima. Alla fine di ottobre e nel novembre del 1906, Gandhi era a Londra come membro di una delegazione indiana per discutere questioni di discriminazione in Sud Africa. Al quel tempo, entrò in stretto contatto con le sorelle del marito di Millie, Henry Polak. I genitori e le sorelle di Polak lo accolsero con tanta cordialità che Gandhi scrisse scherzosamente a Polak che le sue due sorelle, Maud e Sally, erano così amabili che, se non fosse "stato sposato, o fosse stato giovane o avesse creduto nel matrimonio misto, sai cosa avrei fatto!" (Gandhi a S. L. Polak, 26 ottobre 1906, in M.K. Gandhi 1999) E, benché fosse ancora un lobbista occidentale politico e ammodo, piuttosto che un indù seminudo, vestito con il khadi, ed un santo, Maud era chiaramente infatuata di lui. Lei gli fece visita in Sud Africa e in seguito lavorò come assistente del Segretario onorario del Comitato indiano britannico del Sud Africa a Londra. Quando Gandhi era a Londra per la conferenza della tavola rotonda, lei (ora Mrs Cheesman) lo raggiunse per unirsi alla sua segreteria nell'ufficio di Knightsbridge.

Le ben note sostenitrici sudafricane di Gandhi erano femministe, pacifiste e socialiste. Sembra abbastanza logico che avrebbero sostenuto una campagna nonviolenta da parte di una minoranza trattata ingiustamente e che Gandhi, a sua volta, sarebbe stato attratto da loro. All'epoca in cui le conobbe, era molto interessato al movimento delle suffragette e stava sperimentando concetti di uguaglianza tra i sessi. Stava anche lavorando con passione al suo impegno per la nonviolenza, e dai suoi giorni a Londra, quando si mescolava in ambienti socialisti, si considerava almeno un socialista. Anche le compagne sudafricane, Emily Hobhouse, Betty Molteno e Olive Shreiner, ammiravano Gandhi, i principi che professava e il movimento che guidava. C'era un rispetto reciproco, e in questa fase della sua vita, Gandhi era ancora il partner minore in queste relazioni.

Se questi contatti femminili britannici e sudafricani erano amici e sostenitori, Gandhi apprese molto anche dalle sue osservazioni sulla lotta femminista allora in corso in Inghilterra. La campagna politica condotta dalle suffragette che ebbe modo di vedere durante le sue visite alla capitale dell'impero fu di grande importanza nella formazione della sua metodologia politica.

Poche settimane dopo il lancio della lotta politica degli indiani del Sudafrica verso la fine del 1906 – anche se in questa fase sembra che non abbia mai incontrato nessuna di loro – Gandhi fece osservazioni ravvicinate delle suffragette a Londra e scrisse a lungo di loro e delle loro tattiche. James Hunt, il principale studioso di questa epoca della vita di Gandhi, nota che Gandhi provava ammirazione per le inglesi e per la loro liberata femminilità; e nota che Gandhi ricevette "un sostegno significativo da un movimento femminile contemporaneo in un momento in cui stava formulando la propria filosofia di azione non violenta" e che questo "produsse risultati preziosi che aiutarono in modo considerevole a maturare e sviluppare la sua opera" (James Hunt 1981, p. 65).

In un ultimo atto di lobby costituzionale, prima di iniziare la campagna di resistenza attiva in Sud Africa, Gandhi trascorse sei settimane a Londra per presentare il proprio caso alle autorità britanniche. Durante questa visita, il movimento per il suffragio delle donne raggiunse nuove vette di militanza "impiegando tattiche e perseguendo obiettivi sorprendentemente simili ai suoi" (J. Hunt 1981, p. 75). Tre giorni dopo il suo arrivo, l'Unione sociale e politica delle donne (WSPU) tenne una dimostrazione alla Camera dei Comuni, provocando l'arresto di undici di loro. Dopo aver rifiutato di pagare le multe, le donne furono condannate a tre mesi di reclusione. Fu il numero in assoluto più elevato di arresti nel corso della campagna che durò un anno divenendo sempre più militante. Questo fatto non venne dimenticato da Gandhi che scrisse un articolo per il suo giornale "Indian Opinion" pochi anni dopo. Uno dei suoi principali manifesti annunciava: "Non rispetterò mai nessuna legge nello stabilire la quale non abbia avuto voce; non accetterò l'autorità del tribunale che attua quelle leggi; se mi manderai in galera, andrò lì, ma per nessun motivo pagherò una multa. Né ricorrerò ad alcuna difesa" (James Hunt 1981, p. 102). Legò poi questa determinazione all'inevitabile successo, successo che gli indiani del Sud Africa avrebbero potuto ottenere anche adottando tattiche simili:

> Oggi l'intero paese sta ridendo di loro, e hanno solo poche persone dalla loro parte. L'Unione Nazionale delle Insegnanti (NUT) è imperterrita, quelle donne lavorano risolutamente alla

> loro causa. Sono certe che avranno successo ed otterranno il diritto al voto, per la semplice ragione che le azioni sono migliori delle parole. Anche quelli che ridevano di loro sarebbero rimasti meravigliati. Se persino le donne mostrano un tale coraggio, gli indiani del Transvaal falliranno nel loro dovere e avranno paura del carcere? O preferiranno piuttosto considerare la prigione un palazzo e prontamente andare lì? Quando giungerà il momento, i vincoli dell'India si scioglieranno da soli (M.K. Gandhi 1906).

Dopo il suo ritorno in Sud Africa a dicembre, Gandhi si tenne aggiornato sulle campagne di suffragette a Londra e continuò a scrivere su di loro. In seguito agli arresti su larga scala durante le marce in Parlamento nel marzo 1907, Gandhi scrisse che "Dobbiamo seguire l'esempio delle donne di cui sopra. Vanno in galera, sebbene siano poche, e attirano così l'attenzione del mondo sulla loro causa" (M.K. Gandhi, "Indian Opinion", 24 Novembre 1906). Usò l'esempio del sacrificio delle suffragette in azioni coraggiose per far sì che i suoi seguaci provassero vergogna: "Mentre le donne inglesi fanno gesti virili, dovremmo pensare che gli uomini si comportino come donne? ... Tra pochi giorni il nostro coraggio verrà messo alla prova" (M.K. Gandhi, "Indian Opinion", 30 marzo 1907).

Nel 1909, Gandhi, ormai da lungo tempo disobbediente, era di nuovo a Londra a promuovere la causa degli indiani sudafricani. Durante le diciotto settimane trascorse lì, incontrò finalmente i membri del movimento femminile e partecipò ai loro raduni in un momento in cui il movimento stava prendendo una piega più violenta con la resistenza all'arresto, il lancio di pietre, la rottura di finestre, gli scioperi della fame in carcere e persino l'incendio doloso. Gandhi lodò l'impegno e le azioni delle suffragette inglesi come esempi di *satyagraha*; tuttavia, la loro violenza le rendeva ora problematiche come modello. Per aggirare questo, nei suoi primi scritti non informò il suo pubblico di tutto ciò che potevano aver fatto, omettendo riferimenti alla loro distruzione di proprietà: "Il modo sistematico con cui si dedicano al lavoro e le loro abilità meritano il più alto elogio", e "Quando consideriamo la sofferenza e il coraggio di queste donne, come possono i *satyagrahi* indiani stare a confronto con loro?" (M.K. Gandhi, "Indian Opinion", 23 ottobre 1909).

Più tardi espresse la sua preoccupazione per ciò che vedeva come l'impazienza di alcune donne, cosa che avrebbe dimostrato una sconfitta sul lungo periodo:

> Alcune di queste donne sono diventate impazienti. Certament è una cosa ammirevole che per la loro causa vadano in prigione. Nessuno può avere nulla da dire contro la loro sofferenza. [Tuttavia], se le donne inglesi intendono combattere nello spirito del *satyagraha*, non possono adottare tattiche [come rompere le finestre]. Non c'è spazio per l'impazienza nel *satyagraha*. Chi vuole il diritto al voto è in minoranza, mentre la maggioranza delle donne si oppone alla richiesta; quindi la minoranza non ha altra scelta che soffrire a lungo. Se demoralizzate dalla sofferenza, adottano misure estreme e ricorrono alla violenza, perderanno qualsiasi simpatia esse abbiano e si inimicheranno la gente (M.K. Gandhi, "Indian Opinoin", 9 ottobre 1909).

Alla fine, si rese conto che la violenza non era solo l'azione di alcune che avevano perso la pazienza, ma quella violenza – per alcune delle principali suffragette – era diventata parte della strategia della campagna. Osservò che, poiché gli inglesi rispettavano la violenza, queste tattiche avrebbero potuto avere successo in un modo limitato, ma non avrebbero potuto mai portare a una trasformazione significativa e avrebbero potuto persino mettere in pericolo l'intero tessuto sociale.

Sebbene sulla questione della violenza si separasse da loro, come sottolinea Hunt, le suffragette fornirono a Gandhi un precedente importante da citare e un modello politico da esaminare. "Fu un esempio concreto dell'organizzazione di una campagna per i diritti" (J. Hunt 1981, p. 73). Studiò le loro tattiche e metodi con interesse, in primo luogo, nel 1906, quando aveva bisogno di esempi di ispirazione, enfatizzando il loro coraggio e la loro fede come modello morale. Successivamente, nel 1909, mentre si trovava nel mezzo della sua campagna di disobbedienza civile, si preoccupò maggiormente degli aspetti operativi della lotta delle suffragette – raccolta di fondi, organizzazione e pubblicazioni. Hunt nota che il debito di Gandhi con le suffragette non è mai stato pienamente apprezzato. Egli sottolinea che benché né le donne attiviste che Gandhi aveva conosciuto e osservato a Londra, né alcun altro modello occidentale, potesse affermare di essere l'autore diretto di ciò che divenne noto come *satyagraha*, Gandhi parlò spesso dell'esempio delle suffragette per incoraggiare i suoi seguaci indiani sudafricani. Ciò avvenne molto prima di scoprire il saggio di Thoreau "Disobbedienza civile", che viene spesso descritto come il modello per l'attivismo politico nonviolento di Gandhi. In seguito, le donne occidentali seguaci di Gandhi non riuscirono ad stargli così vicine come le sue indiane, molte delle quali erano direttamente legate a lui o ai suoi più stretti collaboratori. E nessuna discepola occidentale fu coinvolta nei suoi controversi esperimenti per assicurarsi negli ultimi anni della sua vita di aver conquistato le sue lussuriose passioni. In quella fase non c'erano donne occidentali abbastanza vicine da coinvolgerle in tal modo, e certamente nessuno che avrebbe potuto metterlo alla prova come avrebbero potuto farlo le giovani e sode nipoti. In un momento diverso, Esther Færing avrebbe potuto svolgere questo ruolo? O in un senso più sottile, era questo il fulcro della sua attrazione per la donna "caduta" Nilla Cram Cook? Non era solo un po' infatuato di Mirabehn, almeno nei loro primi anni insieme?

Col passare del tempo, Gandhi divenne meno occidentalizzato e le sue discepole indiane giunsero a dominare la sua vita personale. Ciò nondimeno, le sue seguaci occidentali furono di fondamentale importanza. Erano fuggite dalle maglie sociali della tradizionale Europa e spesso le portava come modelli per le sue seguaci indiane. Dopo la pubblicazione della prima biografia di Romain Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Man Who became One With the Universal Being* (che ispirò l'interesse di molte donne occidentali in lui), e prima che apparissero – dopo la morte del Mahatma – quelle scritte da autori maschili, la sua immagine in Occidente fu creata in gran parte dalla scrittrice Katherine Mayo e dalla fotografa Margaret Bourke-White. E nessuna sfidò le sue idee sulla sessualità umana come Margaret Sanger. Attraverso il suo rapporto con loro e le donne che si assimilarono ai "nativi" e si associarono integralmente a Gandhi, comprendiamo meglio la sua ricerca e comunque indipendentemente da ciò che possiamo imparare su di lui attraverso queste relazioni, la maggior parte di queste donne occidentali sono in sé così notevoli che non dovrebbero essere trascurate dalla storia.

[…]

Le discepole occidentali

Come abbiamo visto, molte donne occidentali avevano una forte fede religiosa o principi socialisti che le spingevano a lavorare per la pace e con i poveri e gli oppressi. Alcune come Annie Besant erano in India prima che la fama di Gandhi si diffondesse, ma a molte di loro, di solito in Inghilterra, giunse come una rivelazione il fatto che Gandhi nella lontana India stesse facendo un lavoro simile a loro, e che l'Impero di cui erano cittadine non fosse necessariamente una forza per il bene se visto dal punto di vista degli assoggettati. Si interessarono alla filosofia e alle campagne di Gandhi, gli fecero visita in India e aggiunsero la sua causa dell'indipendenza indiana alla loro, o continuarono con il loro caritatevole lavoro politico con Gandhi come lontane colleghe o consigliere. Spesso il profondo rispetto era reciproco e le amicizie, sebbene raramente faccia a faccia, durarono per tutta la vita. Tuttavia, ci fu un altro gruppo di donne occidentali che si recò in India per svolgere il proprio lavoro sociale o per incontrare questo santo Gandhi di cui stava iniziando a sentire parlare, che rimase per lunghi periodi, anche per tutta la vita, e che durante la propria permanenza "si assimilò ai nativi". "Assimilarsi ai nativi" era un termine peggiorativo per indicare quelli della razza colonizzatrice, o europei in generale, che avevano preso a vivere un po' troppo a stretto contatto con o a vivere come la popolazione colonizzata "incivile", "primitiva", "inferiore", se non addirittura degenere. Esprime la paura di essere contaminati o, peggio, di essere assorbiti dalla vita e dalle usanze locali. Dal punto di vista colonialista, coloro che "erano diventati nativi" erano decaduti da un comportamento europeo superiore ed erano stati trascinati in una situazione di degenerazione morale. Gli indicatori chiave secondo cui qualcuno era "diventato nativo" erano più che semplicemente identificarsi o mostrare compassione per la popolazione oppressa. Essi comportavano manifestazioni esteriori visibili come vestirsi in abiti nativi, mangiare cibi nativi e impegnarsi in cerimonie native. Margaret MacMillan, nel suo libro *Women of the Raj*, osserva che mentre ad taluni *memsahib* anziani erano "permesse alcune eccentricità", la maggior parte erano limitati ai ruoli convenzionali assegnati loro dalla razza, e che la libertà che alcuni avevano forgiato per sé divenne sempre più difficile da godere nella misura in cui il Raj "aveva raggiunto la sua pienezza e dignità" nel tardo diciannovesimo e ventesimo secolo. Ci furono, tuttavia, donne che andarono contro le convenzioni sociali. Affrontarono la piena disapprovazione dei loro coetanei che non esitavano ad esprimere chiaramente il proprio parere: "diventare selvaggi", dicevano, o peggio, "assimilarsi ai nativi", o peggio ancora "lasciar decadere la razza e il Raj e l'impero britannico"(Margaret MacMillan 1988, p. 200). La più importante discepola occidentale di Gandhi, Madeleine Slade, conosciuta come Mirabehn, ha forse espresso la versione estrema di tutto ciò quando scrisse a Gandhi che

> Ogni giorno della mia vita mi innamoro sempre più profondamente della natura indù. Sento come se rappresentasse il più alto sviluppo dell'umanità che abbiamo in questo mondo, con la sua innata gentilezza, perdono e tolleranza – la sua semplicità e il sentimento naturale per Dio. ... ho la sensazione che passare alla natura indù sia la via naturale, forse la via della salvezza. Comunque, fintanto che si rimane in qualsiasi misura al di fuori di esso, ci si sente a questo riguardo un barbaro. So che la barbarie che sento in me stessa e che continuo portarmi dall'Europa, è la causa della maggior parte delle mie difficoltà. ... prima o poi lo supererò. Se non riuscirò a superarla del tutto in questa vita, allora non chiedo niente di meglio che nascere indù la prossima volta (Lettera di Mirabehn a Gandhi, 29 Gennaio 1929)

Naturalmente dal suo punto di vista (come indica chiaramente la sua lettera), e da quello di altre che "si assimilarono ai nativi", stavano assumendo un ruolo moralmente e persino culturalmente superiore, non inferiore. La maggior parte non si identificava fino a questo punto, ma era ancora disposta, in una certa misura, a piegare o ignorare le regole non scritte, indipendentemente dalle conseguenze. E questo era più facile da fare per le donne che venivano in India per lavorare invece di unirsi ai mariti che facevano parte dell'istituzione dominante. Il più grande gruppo di donne che era venuto in India per lavorare era composto da missionarie, operatrici sanitarie e insegnanti. Sebbene dovessero essere caute per non mettere in imbarazzo le loro missioni o le istituzioni presso cui erano impiegate mentre erano membri attivi, esse erano spesso di stanza in luoghi più piccoli e fuori mano e in contatto ben più stretto con la popolazione locale nelle scuole e negli ospedali presso cui lavoravano di quanto lo fossero coloro il cui unico contatto era con i domestici. Le motivazioni all'origine della decisione di venire nel subcontinente erano probabilmente un senso di avventura o una "chiamata" a fare del bene, e quest'ultimo motivo poteva essere utilizzato per diffondere la parola di Dio o impegnarsi in una sorta di attività sociale o politica femminista che avrebbe migliorato la posizione delle donne indiane. E per alcune anche il desiderio di lavorare per la fine di quello che vedevano come un opprimente Raj. MacMillan sottolinea che alcune missionarie erano arrivate al punto di "vivere in uno stile indiano e persino di indossare abiti indiani" (Mac Millan 1988, p. 210).

Assimilarsi ai nativi

Millie Graham Polak non si preoccupava di quello che i suoi colleghi europei pensavano e viveva con Gandhi nella sua comune a Phoenix in Sud Africa (come Ada West). Viveva con gli indiani, ma non in stile indiano, perché a quel tempo non lo faceva neppure Gandhi. Era nativa tanto quanto lo era Gandhi. Fu la prima donna occidentale ad associare il proprio destino a quello di Gandhi, ma lo fece più come una sfida che come una discepola come quelle che la seguivano avrebbero finito per fare.

Alcune delle donne non convenzionali che entrarono nell'orbita di Gandhi in India erano "anime irrequiete" che "cercavano in India qualcosa che non trovavano nella loro stessa civiltà. A loro non importava di essere rifiutate dalla società britannica perché non avevano alcuna intenzione di essere accettate; anzi stavano respingendo tutto ciò che rappresentava" (MacMillan 1988, p. 217). Il primo esempio di MacMillan è Madeleine Slade. Mary Barr, Catherine Mary Heilemann e Marjorie Sykes sono altri esempi. E dal lato non inglese, Esther Færing, Anne Marie Petersen, Margarete Spiegel e molte altre, sono altrettanto valide rappresentanti.

Sudhir Kakar, noto psicoanalista indiano e interprete di Gandhi e della sua relazione con le donne, ha scritto in modo percettibile che

> nei suoi anni centrali e successivi, un certo numero di giovani donne, attratte dall'immagine pubblica di Gandhi come il Mahatma, la sua causa, o la sua fama, cercarono la sua vicinanza e alla fine condivisero la sua vita di *ashram*. Queste donne, che in molti casi lasciavano le loro case della media e alta borghesia ben arredate per accettare il rigore di uno stile di vita

> ascetico, erano tutt'altro che convenzionali. Alcune di loro […] possono essere descritte come affette da crisi emotive di notevole entità. Come le loro controparti che oggi cercano guru famosi, anche queste donne stavano cercando il terapeuta in Gandhi tanto quanto il Mahatma o il leader che incarnava le aspirazioni nazionali indiane (Sudhir Kakar 2001, p. 243).

E questo si applicava ugualmente alle sue seguaci, donne occidentali e indiane. Di nuovo, dal lato occidentale, Slade è l'esempio principale. Forse questa descrizione potrebbe applicarsi anche a Færing e probabilmente a Francisca Standenath, e certamente si applica a Nilla Cram Cook, Margarete Spiegel, Helene Haussding e Antoinette Mirbel. Ovviamente non tutte quelle che si accostarono a Gandhi soffrivano di crisi emotive. Alcune di loro "si assimilarono ai nativi" per lavorare nel modo in cui secondo la loro fede avrebbero dovuto farlo, con Gandhi a fornire aiuto e guida per la loro missione piuttosto che svolgere il ruolo tanto necessario di terapeuta. Petersen, Barr e le sue collaboratrici Khedi, Sykes e Heilemann sono i migliori esempi. In breve, le ragioni per cui queste donne occidentali – discepole non sembra una parola troppo forte – si assimilarono ai "nativi" erano diverse. Quello che avevano in comune era Mahatma Gandhi, che aveva la capacità di attrarre seguaci di ogni tipo.

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Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile

Sarala Behn: The Silent Crusader

by

Bidisha Mallik[*]

Abstract: Mohandas K. Gandhi and his revolutionary ideas of nonviolent and equitable social and political reconstruction attracted many, particularly women, from around the world. While some preferred living and working in Gandhi's ashrams, there were others who worked more independently in remote regions of India and carried out the constructive work of Gandhi. One such dedicated constructive worker was Catherine Mary Heilemann, or Sarala Behn, as she is better known in India. In this paper, I argue that the socio-political ideas and value orientations of Sarala Behn in her fight against colonialism, imperialism, race and gender injustices did not begin or end with Gandhi, but had their formative roots in the various choices and encounters she made in the early phase of her life in England that led her to travel abroad to join the cause of Gandhi in India. Accordingly, this paper presents a brief biographical sketch of Sarala Behn outlining the key moments and turning points that helped shape her philosophy and practice and gave specificity to her individual contributions as an educationist and an activist, and her role as a European going to India. Additionally, this paper presents selected details of her nonviolent social work in colonial India amongst the natives and against British imperialist policies.

For woman is not undevelopt man,
But diverse
Alfred Lord Tennyson, *The Princess*

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.
William Ernst Henley, *Invictus*

Hers was a struggle from the beginning[1]. A peaceful struggle against all injustice and exploitation of defenseless people. An educator and an iconoclastic thinker, she fought patriarchy in her own terms challenging dogma, orthodoxy, and

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[1] This article is a variation of a chapter from my doctoral dissertation. Bidisha Mallik, *The Contribution of Mira Behn and Sarala Behn to Social and Environmental Transformation in the Indian State of Uttarakhand*, PhD diss., University of North Texas, 2014. All pictures in this article are edited by David M. Grimes for clarity and presentation.

 ISSN 1824 - 4483

repression at every turn. She was a woman of indomitable will and forceful action, an indefatigable rebel against colonialism and imperialism, and a passionate critic of modern theories of economics and politics. The story of her life's struggles and her iron will to overcome them mirrors what she perceived and believed in Henley's famous lines above.

To thousands of hill women and men of the Indian Himalayas, this feisty English woman Catherine Mary Heilemann, was known as "Sarala Behn" or Sister Sarala[2]. Interestingly, her name did not originate with Gandhi, unlike what many of her close friends and followers believed. Her autobiography makes it amply clear that some Indian colleagues used to address her as such when she came to India. But what is more, the philosophy and values which she adopted in her life and which gave her prominence in India as a Gandhian social worker did not begin with Gandhi either. Where did her values come from? And what prompted her to leave England for India? Her response to the question of a curious Indian villager, who wanted to know why she left her own country, may serve as self-explanatory:

> Which path can solve the world's problems? Compassion can establish peace, co-operation, and dignity of labor on earth. But I felt that Western civilization cannot do this work. It is the search for an answer to this question; it is *this* [my emphasis] inspiration that brought me to India[3].

These values and ideas populated her mind during her adolescent days in England.

Sarala Behn came to India in 1932 to join Gandhi's struggle against British rule, worked in India for fifty eventful years, and died there in 1982. A staunch follower of Gandhi's twin ideals of truth and nonviolence, her dedication and contribution to the cause of India's independence struggle and to Gandhi's constructive program through holistic education, her activism for environmental conservation, and her contribution to the uplift of women in the Uttarakhand Himalaya is legendary. To those who knew her saw her as a "person of rare integrity" and one who "practices exactly what she preaches"[4]. Yet little is known about her life to the outside world. Unlike Mira Behn, Gandhi's better known English associate, she did not have long periods of close affiliation with Gandhi, and as such, no significant correspondence with him exists. Having come from an economically and socially marginalized class in England also puts her in sharp contrast to that of Mira Behn, who hailed from the upper-class English gentry. This often led some to compare Mira Behn to "the Brahmin" and Sarala Behn to "the Baniya", referring wryly to the caste hierarchy prevalent in India[5]. In colonial India and thereafter, Sarala Behn worked

[2] Sarala Behn signed her name as Sarala Devi in official letters and as an author. However, it is also the custom of Kumaoni culture where women addressed themselves as such instead of using last names of their father or husbands. Sarala Behn's use of this appellation thus recognizes her identification with and adoption of Kumaoni culture.

[3] Dr. Hari Singh, *Diary*, in Shantilal Trivedi - Radha Bhatt (eds.), *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha*, Lakshmi Ashram, Kausani 1984, p. 93.

[4] Bill Aitken, *Sri Satya Sai Baba: A Life,* Penguin Books, New Delhi 2006, p. 14.

[5] David Hopkins, Interview with author, Lakshmi Ashram, Kausani, 2011. This point was also raised by Rebecca Klenk as we happened to interview the same person.

in remote areas of the Himalaya and lived like any other village woman. She was also known to have nurtured a strong dislike for publicity especially from outside media or people and instead preferred steady constructive work. "If we light a light it will spread itself", she had often said to her students and co-workers[6]. Being a key organizer of Gandhian constructive *sarvodaya* (uplift of all) movements in Uttarakhand, when co-workers hailed her as their *neta* (leader), in her usual self-abnegatory style she would forcefully retort: *main neta nahin hoon bhai, main karyakarta hoon!* (I am not a leader, I am a worker!)[7].

Sarala Behn's autobiography[8] and commemorative volumes dedicated to her by her students and followers and published posthumously[9] are among the few surviving sources that offer some valuable details of her early life and struggles, her decision to come to India, and her constructive work and activism thereafter. The autobiography is helpful to the extent of understanding her work and her understanding of Gandhi's philosophy but not her person, and thus she remains largely elusive to the reader because her writing, as she confesses, "rather than being introspective, is outward looking" with little information about the subtler "aspects of the inner soul, the spirit"[10]. Philology being her main interest, she was quick in learning a foreign language. But what is remarkable is that she wrote her autobiography in Hindi which carries proof of her greater degree of involvement with the native culture than any other western associate of Gandhi. However, at times her autobiography reads more like an ethnography given the great lengths she speaks about the people and cultures of the mountains where she worked. Amongst scholarly works, Rebecca Klenk, in a fascinating ethnographical study has explored Sarala Behn's constructive work at the educational institute she founded in Uttarakhand, and its impact on the life and development of women in rural India[11]. Klenk's narrative is however, limited on the formative period of her childhood and youth and how she actively pursued and acted on the various spiritual and ethical ideals she made her own[12].

Available festschrift accounts are also of little avail as they are largely noncritical, reads Sarala Behn primarily in the light of Gandhi (i.e. as his 'favorite disciple' or 'daughter', without Gandhi ever acclaiming or adumbrating her as such), and treats her life, thought, and activism in a rather non-systemic and

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[6] Sushri Shobha Behn, *Mamatamayee Maa*, in Shantilal Trivedi - Radha Bhatt (eds.), *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 118.

[7] Yogesh Bahuguna, Interview with author, May 7, 2017.

[8] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds: Autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi's English Disciple,* Lakshmi Ashram, Kausani 2010.

[9] Shantilal Trivedi and Radha Bhatt (ed.), *Sarala Behn: Smriti Grantha,* Lakshmi Ashram, Kausani 1984; Sharada Vidushi, *Mahatma Gandhi ki Angrez Shishya Sarala Behn*. Nainital, Gyanodyaya Prakashan 2010; Prabha Pant, *Karmayogi Sarala Behn*, National Book Trust, New Delhi 2016.

[10] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p. XV.

[11] Rebecca Klenk, *Educating Activists: Development and Gender in the Making of Modern Gandhians*, Lexington Books, Plymouth, UK 2010.

[12] In a recent article, Klenk addresses this gap to some extent. Rebecca Klenk, *Gandhi's Other Daughter- Sarala Devi and Lakshmi Ashram*, in "Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies", 34, 1, 2014, pp. 94-104.

sketchy manner. This approach has helped propagate myths and confusion about the real person and her contributions casting her as often as a "blind follower" of Gandhi's philosophy, but not as leader and initiator of novel social experiments and a path breaker in her own right[13]. Interestingly, the nature of this much popular *guru-disciple* discourse was quite alien to Gandhi's own. Gandhi on no account accepted anyone as a disciple and flatly refused to be looked upon as a guru. He urged constructive workers not to blindly agree to all his ideas or to adhere to any ideology without putting them to their rigorous scrutiny of reason. As such, notions of discipleship immediately become suspect when we notice how often the views of so-called 'disciples' differed from Gandhi's own.

This paper extends the thesis that Sarala Behn was not a typical follower of Gandhi but a visionary thinker in her own right. I focus on the moral-spiritual, existential, social, and cultural insights emerging from her early life in England that helped find her calling in life, the reasons that prompted this young European woman to leave her homeland to join Gandhi, and her contributions thereafter to India's struggle for independence. This is important because the study of the history and political economy of a colonial and postcolonial world often tend to focus on abstract processes of macro-level philosophical analysis or textual exegesis ignoring micro-histories of subjectivity or biographical elements, subsuming thus the agency of individuals if any, particularly that of women. Second, a philosophical approach to biography is crucial because life as an "impressionable philosophical narrative", "has its own specificities" in which thought processes and individual worldviews are not without ambiguities and inconsistencies. As a "dramatic process of (self)-formation, [and] (self)-knowledge," life thus cannot be viewed "in a single linear perspective" or represented in a schematic manner[14]. Indeed, as Pierre Hadot pointed out, a philosophical biography would not merely be a narrative or a report on one's life and beliefs, but a defense of the "mode of life" as a working union of thought and action and aimed at transforming one's entire way of being[15].

Thus, my approach to this biographical narrative is selective, non-linear, and non-thematic, and although I follow the rough chronology of her life, I do so to unveil both the internal and external drama and struggle Sarala Behn experienced as an activist, educator, and a philosopher in course of the various circumstances of her life. It is hoped that this narrative will help us reflect on the larger questions vital to contemporary interest, such as the role of biography that unite thought and

[13] Sharon McDonald, who so kindly shared her work with me, has also cogently argued this point. In her biographical research on a group of western women who came to Gandhi during the colonial period, McDonald aptly emphasizes that in putting the stamp of an eastern notion of discipleship on these various western women, we fail to approach them from a western perspective. The latter, she observes, has maintained a certain distinction between discipleship and mentorship. Sharon McDonald, *Neither Memsahibs nor Missionaries: Western Women Who Supported the Indian Independence Movement*, PhD diss., University of New Brunswick, 2010.

[14] Irina Polyakova, *Philosophical Biography Some Problems of Conceptualization*, in "Conserveries Memorielles",15, 2014, 1, p. 6, accessed March 30, 2018, http://journals.openedition.org/cm/1753

[15] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford,1999, p. 21; 30-31.

the art of living in global encounters of cultures and social praxis, the role of the cosmopolitan 'alien' navigating in a foreign land, and that of individual spiritualty in fostering communication and interdependence across and beyond static cultural worldviews.

Life in Britain

Catherine Mary Heilemann was born on 5 April 1901, in Fulham, southwest of London. Her mother, Emily Sinnock[16] was English and her father, Otto Gottleib Heilemann, a goldsmith of Lutheran faith and Swiss-German descent. She was named after her paternal grandmother, Katharina Heilemann[17] who was from the village Ochsenwang in the Black Forest of Baden-Württemberg.

Heilemann's father, born in Bern, had also stayed in France for some time with his parents before coming to England. Heilemann mentions in her memoir that she nurtured an open mind with regard to nation or language, her parents having come from diverse nationalities. Heilemann had a younger brother, Alfred[18], and the two lost their mother when Heilemann was seven. Her grandmother Katharina took over the charge of the household and the care of the children. Of the two, Heilemann was the more rebellious type and her brother was quieter and loved his books and studies and somewhat disliked the intensity of her sister's thoughts.

Heilemann adored her grandmother. Her boundless love gave all the support Heilemann needed during the darkest moments of her childhood and adolescence. She did not harbor such faith in her father. She also spoke of her father as very conventional in his outlook, concerned about niceties of social comportment etc., and as not being very successful in his trade, unable thus, to sufficiently provide for the family[19]. Given her father's financial instability, the elderly Heilemann came to the aid of the family, managing not only the entire household but also contributing from her own life-savings. Inspired by her grandmother's virtues, including her independent nature, honesty, strength to face life's problems with courage and dignity, and her self-supporting life, Heilemann took them to her heart. Particularly her grandmother's practical emphasis on the need for self-sufficiency had a seminal impact on Heilemann's mind.

[16] FamilySearch Family Tree. Under license to MyHeritage.com [online database]. Lehi, UT, USA: MyHeritage (USA) Inc. https://www.myheritage.com/research/collection-40001/familysearch-family-tree

[17] Switzerland Baptisms, 1491-1940, MyHeritage.com [online database]. Lehi, IT, USA: MyHeritage (USA) Inc. https://www.myheritage.com/research/collection-30090/switzerland-baptisms-1491-1940

[18] 1911 England & Wales Census, MyHeritage.com [online database]. Lehi, UT, USA: MyHeritage (USA) Inc. https://www.myheritage.com/research/collection-10446/1911-england-wales-census

[19] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds*, cit., p. 2.

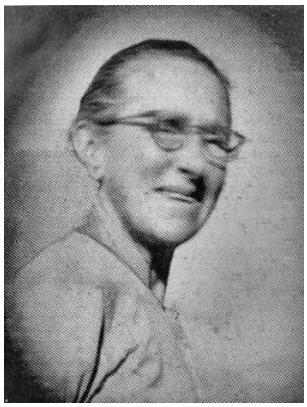

Figure 1: Catherine Mary Heilemann in her earlier times[20]

Though a farmer's daughter, having come from the forested uplands of South Germany, her grandmother spent her entire life in the cities. "Yet," Heilemann recalled with pride, "she tended such a productive fruit-flower-cum- vegetable garden in the suburbs of London that it was hard for the people to believe that she was not a woman straight from the countryside"[21]. One day, while cooking, her grandmother accidentally burnt a piece of sandwich bread. It upset her for several days and she expressed her unhappiness to her granddaughter: "I feel as if I have burnt a child!" This incident had a profound impact on Heilemann's youthful mind and shaped her future thoughts. She wrote, "I believe from this birthed in me a love for nature and the idea that nature's production should be conserved, a concept that took a deep root into my very being"[22]. The twin ideals of *simplicity* and *economy* that Heilemann thus derived from her grandmother's teachings gave her a vision that later in her life culminated in her philosophy on nature[23].

The injustices that Heilemann and her family underwent during her childhood and adult days through the machinery of the state and society awoke her to its inherent contradictions in which political rivalry and imperial ambitions created enemies out of common people who were friendly neighbors. This happened during the First World War, when her father, originally born in Switzerland but who lived in England since his childhood was wrongly interned by the British as an enemy national due to a mix-up in his birth certificate. This particular incident completely outraged her. The experience made it plain to her that the "Law is an Ass" and she grew increasingly skeptical about political institutions and the

[20] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p.VI.

[21] Sarala Devi, *Sanrakshan Ya Vinash?* Gyanodyaya Prakashan, Nainital 1981, p 14.

[22] Ibidem.

[23] Shri Devi Puraskar, *Adbhut Vyaktitva: Behnji*, in Shantilal Trivedi - Radha Bhatt (eds.), *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha*, cit., p. 100.

government. It did not take her much to fathom that a minority family has become cornered by a majority society and in her mind she became restless to respond to this injustice. It is this feeling of restlessness that nurtured a profound sense of empathy and concern for the lives of those sections of society and communities who were minorities and oppressed[24]. Apart from the unlawful detention of her father based on false claims of being an enemy ally, she could not reconcile to how common people of nations who were peaceful neighbors and friends could suddenly rise to the mindlessness of bloodshed and war at the armchair prompt of their respective governments. She began questioning war as an institution to settle disputes and conflicts. She expressed her distress in these words:

> The new inhuman conception of total war, the spirit of reprisals, all struck home as sheer stupidity to one who could not accept current theories of economics and politics as gospel, but weighing them in the balance of common sense and finding them wanting was therefore categorized as an enemy of the nation. People were prepared to accept that if on a certain day, the rulers of two countries sign documents declaring themselves at war, it is the bounden duty of citizens of both countries to set about killing one another, even if until yesterday they had regarded themselves as friends. … Is it good sound common sense? It didn't seem to me[25].

The bombing of east London during the war and the unreason of it weighed heavily on her young mind, "it was in violation of all the accepted rules of war" which she read in her history books that wars should be fought beyond populated areas to inflict no injury on ordinary citizens. When instead of denouncing the act there were counter attacks on Berlin and on German women and children living in Britain, she was astonished: "Why was it that respectable people of society were not able to recognize the simple truth that when two wrongs are joined together, the outcome cannot be right?"[26]. She felt concerned for the children of those committing mass murders: "When those who are killing on a mass scale and thereby making other children orphans would return to their homes, what would be the impact of these people on the moral growth of their own children?"[27]. While her grandmother's prudent advice to practice reticence in troubled times made sense to her, Heilemann's speculative and formative mind was already in search for a constructive, organized, and effective means to fight injustice[28].

As a budding social activist, pacifist, and revolutionary, her perceptive teenage mind began to question not only politics but also religion. Her grandmother, having a Lutheran background, exposed her to a non-conformist denomination and Heilemann began attending a Congregational Church as a child. However, she could not comprehend many aspects of organized religion. She was not interested in church liturgies and doctrinal creed, but was attracted to the stories of the life of Jesus, his fundamental teachings of love, nonviolence, truth, and compassion. The work of Christian missionaries had an impact on her, and she harbored a secret

[24] Ivi, p. 99.

[25] Sarala Devi, *Revive Our Dying Planet: An Ecological, Socio-economical and Cultural Appeal*, Gyanodyaya Prakashan, Nainital 1982, p. 4.

[26] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., pp. 3-4.

[27] Sarala Devi, *Sanrakshan Yan Vinash?* cit., p. 11.

[28] Shri Devi Puraskar, *Adbhut Vyaktitva: Behnji*, cit., p. 99.

desire to become a missionary one day. The onslaught of the war however, made her question her faith, disenchanting her about organized faith and institutional religion and made her see its connection to nationalism. The Bible taught her that Christianity was about turning the other cheek. But she was appalled that despite the inhumanity of the war, the religious priests of both sides prayed for the victory over the enemy nation. "I just could not understand which side would have its prayers answered by the poor Almighty", she exclaimed. This made her aware of what she called the "double standards of morality" preached by pastors, who upheld killing as many men as possible in a war to vanquish the enemy, while in the same breath condemn murder as a terrible crime[29]. The futility of armed conflict and church bigotry disillusioned her, and Heilemann refused to go to church. Her grandmother, who supported her in her questioning of the inanity of war, did not support this decision of her grandchild. As Heilemann began to get increasingly suspicious of religious rituals and liturgies she argued with her pious grandmother over such matters. She refused to accept the teaching that bread and wine when consecrated becomes the body and blood of Christ[30]. Her conscience and insistence on common sense led her to repudiate such teachings, refrain from partaking in the either Holy Communion or preparing for Confirmation, leading her finally to stop attending church. Acceptance of any creed without verifying it in one's own life and conscience became a dogma to her, apt to discountenance. However, though her spirit rebelled against institutional religion, Heilemann did not lose faith in Christ's universal precepts of love, truth, and non-violence.

Soon afterwards, Heilemann was to face another traumatic experience that would significantly impact her vocational future. As a brilliant student, Heilemann had received scholarships for high school. She made good progress in languages, history, and mathematics and was about to win another to go on to university, when events took a different turn. The headmistress of her school, who did not endorse Heilemann's lack of nationalistic fervor, told her:

> Listen Catherine, it has been decided that as your family are on the enemy side, you cannot receive a scholarship. This decision is also the right one for, as you are not helping in the war effort, you can give more time to study and therefore have a much better chance of winning than those girls who are active in the war effort.

This statement stunned her, not because of the denial of scholarship but because of the reasons. Distrustful of higher education she wondered, "what was the point of such people as the headmistress gaining a higher education, when they did not concern themselves with Truth and Untruth, and when they felt no pain whatsoever in causing suffering to their own children's minds"[31]. This incident compelled her to abandon her studies at a young age of sixteen and search for employment. With her being classed as an "enemy", this search proved a challenging venture, but she

[29] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds*, cit., pp. 4-5.

[30] Ibidem. Though Congregationists do not believe in transubstantiation, given that Heilemann also had a strong Lutheran influence owing to her grandmother, the emphasis here appears to be on consubstantiation (as some Lutherans define) that the Body and Blood of Christ are substantially present 'in, with, and under the forms' of consecrated bread and wine.

[31] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds*, cit., p. 5.

eventually landed on the job of an office clerk. "The picture of the future", she wrote in her autobiography, "that I had kept before me had been crushed, and my personal despair slowly began to assume the form of revolt against society"[32].

The injustice, discrimination, hypocrisy, social ostracism, and the widening gap between belief and practice that she witnessed during her days in London drove her to seek inner peace and consolation amidst nature. Heilemann had earlier developed a strong distaste for science subjects taught at her school like botany and geography. However, as she turned to nature for peace, she discovered, "These long rambles in the spring and autumn woods, the wondrous clouds at sunset and dawn, fleeting sunshine and shadow over the green countryside, opened a new vision which school-taught botany and geography had failed to give"[33]. She considered that visions of a peaceful way of life with nature, which specialists teaching and theorizing evidently lack, "can be communicated by living contact, by experience, not by word of mouth or written word"[34]. This realization of the value of experiential learning over the mere intellectual or factual and her striving to put these ideals into action later played a significant role in attracting Heilemann to the progressive education program of Gandhi, *Nai Talim*[35].

London in the early twentieth century was witnessing an intense and unprecedented phase of industrial and suburban growth. Heilemann did not find anything appealing or worth emulating in this rushed lifestyle. Instead, it made her seriously reflect on the goal of humanity's ambition and means to achieve progress. She penned her earliest thoughts on this:

> Coming into close contact with factories I only became even more disturbed. Seeing the unnatural environment of the factory, the deafening noise, the people made slaves by the sheer speed of machines, I suffered a lot. The thought came to me that when I make use of items produced in these factories, in a way, I too am part of this inhuman process[36].

Appalled by the noise, competition, rush, and deteriorating human relationships of modern industrial life, she wondered, "Was it for all of this that humanity exists?" The embracing of material goods and subsequent giving up of human values deeply disturbed her and she developed an aversion toward western materialistic civilization. Anticipating Gandhi, Heilemann became an unrelenting critic of modern economic theories and when she discussed these matters with others they called her anti-national or believed her to be insane. Under these circumstances the only option was to choose to remain a social outcaste, which she did. She sought relief in the countryside and as her fondness for the beauty of nature and a peaceful way of life increased it led her "think about leading a life among the fields and forests"[37].

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[32] Sarala Devi, *Revive Our Dying Planet*, cit., p. 5.

[33] Ivi, p. 4.

[34] Ivi, p. 3.

[35] Literally translated, Nai Talim is New Education. It was the Basic Education Program proposed by Gandhi in 1937, an alternative to the colonial system of education as well as a critique of the larger colonial and modernist political-economic structures.

[36] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds*, cit., p. 8.

[37] Sarala Devi, *Preface*, in *Sanrakshan Yan Vinash*, cit., p. 12.

After the First World War, when her father returned home following his release from detention, Heilemann lost her beloved grandmother. This personal loss, threw her life into utter loneliness and despair. She gave up interest both at home and at her workstation, and following a petty argument with her religious-minded father over whether washing could be hung outdoors to dry during Sabbath, she left home, discontented and unhappy.

This marked a turning point in her life. While living in London on her own working as an office clerk, Heilemann came in touch with people from other parts of Europe, who shared many of her interests and views. At the same time she became conscious of the "color prejudice" that existed amongst her English peers, which deeply troubled her. However, at the international society where she had her quarters in 1926-27, Heilemann came to know a few Indian students, among who was one, Mohan Singh Mehta. Very soon, Heilemann and Mehta became close friends. Mehta often had discussions with Heilemann about the constructive role that women should play in society to address poverty, injustice, and inequality rather than 'waste' one's life doing a white-collar job in an office environment. This infuriated Heilemann and she engaged in heated arguments with Mehta[38]. However, Mehta's words began making some sense to her when she became dissatisfied with her clerical position. About this time from Mehta and other students Heilemann also learnt about Indian politics and the nonviolent movement of Gandhi. She became once more aware of the faulty education she received in her school days, reflecting on which she wrote:

> Imperialism and colonialism were presented to me in a new light. In our history books Indians were always referred to within the context of 'The White Man's Burden.' Now, though, I began to understand that we were in India, not for the benefit of the people there, but for their exploitation, and that having destroyed their culture we now sought to impose our own[39].

Heilemann began to take active interest in the nationalist movement in India and read about the work of prominent leaders of the Indian renaissance movement. When she learnt about Gandhi's constructive program for self-sufficiency, she could not be more convinced. This was a nonviolent and transformative social praxis aimed at fostering alternative conditions of living within socially sustainable, economically self-reliant, and self-governing local communities which he called *gram swaraj* (village republics). Gandhi's character and philosophy gave Heilemann's "rebellious thoughts" a creative focus[40]. She found Gandhi's methods "not simply a practical means of revolt against some foreign government, colonialism, or imperialism, but rather a step taken in opposition to the direction of the machine age that devalued human existence". "For the first time in my life, I was exposed to ideas that resonated within me", she affirmed[41]. Heilemann also found Gandhi's principle of *satyagraha* or nonviolent noncooperation movement against injustice spiritually appealing, and saw in it an alternative to the violence

[38] Mohan Singh Mehta, *Kumari Heilemann*, in *Uttar Ke Shikharon Me Chetana Ki Ankoor,* cit., p. 107.

[39] Sarala Behn, *A Lifein Two Worlds*, cit., p. 12.

[40] Sarala Devi, *Sanrakshan Yan Vinash?* cit., p. 15.

[41] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., pp. 12-13.

and bloodshed that she experienced during the war. It awakened in her, a passion to peacefully fight for justice that lay dormant within for several years. Thus, she considered Gandhi's emphasis on truth and nonviolence as a pertinent solution to the problems of modern economic theories and "a long stride in advance of Marx"[42]. By 1929, these ideas concretized in her mind and she began thinking of going to India[43]. Meanwhile, in India, Gandhi began his famous Salt March in 1930 to protest against the unjust tax on salt imposed by the British. It had a profound impression on her. The news of the exemplary and unflinching bravery of men and women suffering hardship of every kind like *lathi* charges, gruesome police brutality, and courting arrest, made her feel "as if the spirit of Christ had been reawakened in a non-Christian land. It now seemed that the desire I had had in my childhood to become a missionary had found a new direction. I now considered going to India to be part of the movement for national education through constructive activities in spinning, removal of untouchability, and promoting health and hygiene"[44].

Heilemann's friends and relatives in England became alarmed. They tried to persuade her to drop her idea of going to India, a country with climate, people, and culture different from her own. But Heilemann remained firm. Her spirit was not to be dampened even when she received a reply to her letter from Gandhi who advised her against coming stating that most westerners were not able to conform to the way of life in India. Undeterred, she decided to undertake some practical training so that she could go to India with the idea of practicing that skill. She took training in midwifery, undertook a correspondence course in commerce etc. in course of which she came in close contact with spiritual-pacifist groups like the Quakers and the British socialist organization, Fabian Society. She was greatly consoled to learn that they were equally in favor of creating a new society through revolution, an idea, which resonated with her own political and social thoughts.

During this time, probably between 1930 and 1931, Mehta, who had been in correspondence with Heilemann ever since he left London after his studies, reached out to her from India. He asked her services in accounting and to teach students in a new progressive school he had established in Udaipur of Rajasthan in western India. Heilemann understood from their initial correspondence that the school would be run based on Gandhi's ideals. She agreed to the proposal, left her course in midwifery and took a course in child education instead, to prepare herself.

When Gandhi arrived in London for the Round Table Conference in 1931, Heilemann attempted to meet him twice but in vain. Understanding that time has not come for her to meet Gandhi, she concentrated on her preparations to leave for India. On January 4, 1932, soon after Gandhi's departure from England, Heilemann set sail from Liverpool for India, never to return.

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[42] Sarala Devi, *Revive Our Dying Planet*, cit., p. 4.

[43] Sarala Devi, *Vidroha se Nirman tak ki Yatra*, in *Uttaron Ke Shikharon Me Cheta Ki Ankoor,* cit., pp. 85-86.

[44] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds*, cit., p. 14.

In India

In India, Heilemann worked for four and a half years at Vidya Bhavan, the progressive school at Udaipur, founded on the idea of "social reconstruction through education"[45]. She was already familiar with and inspired by the work of early 20th century thinkers of alternative education in the west, such as Ellen Key, Maria Montessori, Paul Geheeb, Rudolf Steiner, A.S. Neill, and John Dewey. Most of these progressive thinkers on education argued for child-centered holistic education that could counter the effects of industrial urban life and that emphasized learning through practical experience than rote memorization. During her days at Udaipur, Heilemann also read about Gandhi's early experiments in the field of education and was much drawn to his emphasis on practical knowledge such as linking productive work with education that was aimed at preparing nonviolent workers for the attainment of an exploitation-free and egalitarian society.

At Vidya Bhavan, Heilemann was mainly responsible for teaching the junior section of the school and running a hostel of a dozen young children who lived with her[46]. However, she found out that although focused on social reform and child psychology, the educational approach was merely reformative and not progressive. For instance, despite the general poverty of the state of Rajasthan in which Vidya Bhavan was situated, the school catered only for the relatively well-off, middle class, and higher caste children and not the poor and deprived of the villages. The other thing which bothered her was that while oriented to bringing reform in education, the syllabus taught was not practically oriented toward the needs of society. What was more, English was taught and there was a tendency for its preference to the native vernacular.

These issues aside, the accounting work and teaching at the Udaipur school did not leave her with any opportunity to do two things she felt was necessary if she was to participate in Gandhi's constructive program: learn Hindi and spinning. It was Gandhi's vision for an alternate society which drew her to India and her objective was to serve India through those ideals which the Udaipur school obviously did not fulfill.

Despondent, she sought to channelize her energy elsewhere. Her sympathies went toward the depressed classes suffering social discrimination such as Harijans (lower castes), Muslims, and especially women whom she saw were categorically disregarded by the more competent and powerful communities[47]. Eager to play a part in the moral and social reform, Heilemann took keen interest in the women's cause. She saw that not only were the women deprived of

[45] Sarala Devi, Letter to Shri P.N. Sanwal, August 5, 1942, in *Sarala Behn: Smriti Grantha*, cit., p. 303.

[46] Sarala Devi, Letter to P.N. Sanwal, August 5, 1942, in *Sarala Behn: Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 303.

[47] Shri Devi Puraskar, *Adbhut Vyaktitva: Behnji*, cit., p. 99.

education, but also they were kept in seclusion under the *purdah*[48] system, having thus, no constructive role to play in society outside the home. Along with like-minded others, Heilemann began urging purdah-clad women to come out from their reclusive world and spoke openly against such practices that bound women to servitude. But she saw that the root cause of such repression of women and minorities were the ultra-conservative orthodox customs and superstitions and rigors of caste purity.

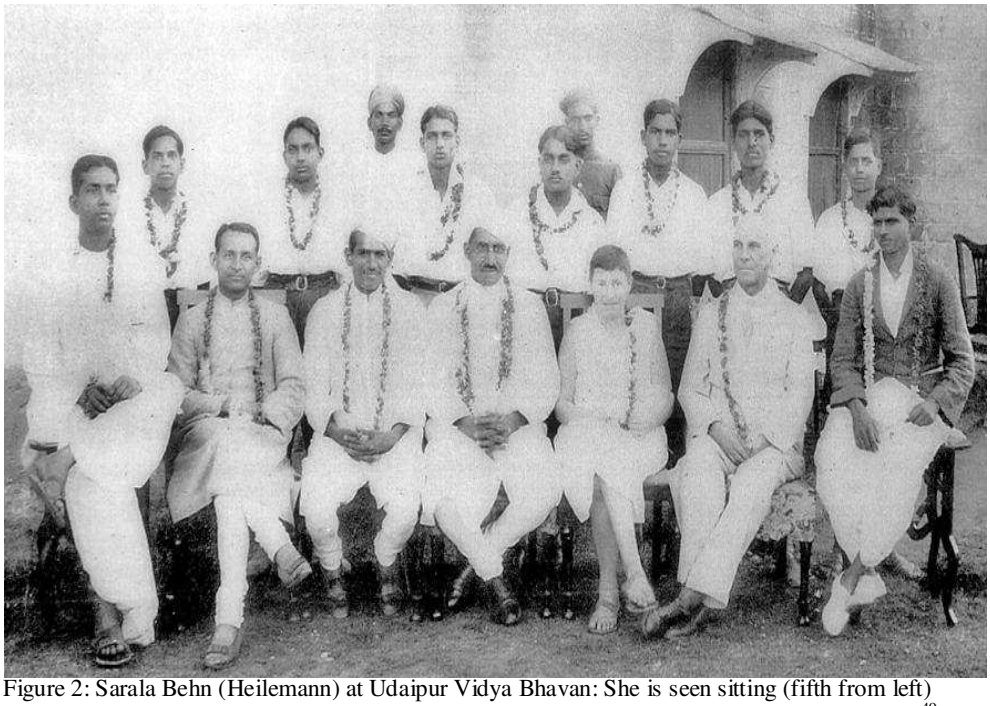

Figure 2: Sarala Behn (Heilemann) at Udaipur Vidya Bhavan: She is seen sitting (fifth from left) beside Shri Mohan Singh Mehta (to her left) founder of Vidya Bhavan and other teachers, 1932[49].

Furthermore, her experience as a child psychologist helped her see that the group worst affected from such practices were none but the children. "False beliefs", she remarked, "take root in childhood from conversations overheard in the home, and eventually become the causes of growing national and international problems"[50]. For some time she worked energetically together with her women colleagues to free the children from "lifeless and meaningless traditions" that she believed imprisoned their personality and stymied their growth. However, she

[48] *Purdah* is literally a veil. Purdah as a system is a segregation of the sexes in northern and western India where Hindu women wore a veil, i.e. *purdah* to cover their faces, necks, and bodies.

[49] Neema Vaishnava, *Sarala Behn with Shri Mohan Singh Mehta, founder of Vidya Bhawan (left) and her fellow teachers. Udaipur,* 1932, David Hopkins Private Collection.

[50] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p. 36.

realized that efforts "were not getting to the root of the evil. As a result, feelings of despondency and dissatisfaction began to creep into my mind"[51].

Not finding solace in the institution-bound teaching work or social reform at Udaipur, she began travelling to other parts of North India to learn about Gandhian educational experiments. She found one Dakshinamurti Vidyarthi Bhavan (Dakshinamurti Student Home), the institute at Bhavnagar set up by an educationist Gijubhai Badheka and its philosophy similar in many respects to Gandhi's Nai Talim[52]. The educational experiment at Dakshinamurti offered a refreshing alternative to that at Udaipur. Heilemann noted that their method was student-centric and participatory based on learning through practical work and free from the orthodox and statist culture of official education. Moreover, the students were self-sufficient and rendered bodily labor.

Instruction was in the vernacular, and was oriented to becoming volunteers to serve their country. Here was an example that strongly appealed to her. She liked the indigenous and locally suited approach of the Dakshinamurti model meant for carving out revolutionaries. As she said, she had come to India not with the dream of a social reformer but that of a revolutionary, working in Gandhi's constructive program, the real basis of the freedom struggle, one that prepared nonviolent workers to serve the nation and its people[53].

Sarala Behn

It was at some point during her Udaipur days, Heilemann became known by her Indian name, *Sarala*[54] Behn, given to her by her Indian comrades[55]. In 1935, as Sarala Behn, she went to visit the Mahila Ashram or Women's Institute[56] at Wardha, which was preparing women workers for community service, for further guidance in the kind of educational work she was interested in. It was during this time that she came to meet Gandhi, at his ashram in Maganwadi, Wardha. The visit opened up new horizons for Sarala Behn. Maganwadi at that time was the vanguard of Gandhi's experiments in rural-based industries. Sarala Behn participated in village sanitation work (then organized by Mira Behn at Sindi) and learnt the art of spinning cotton and the economic and moral basis of the various constructive activities and experiments aimed at village uplift. These experiences at Wardha

[51] Ivi, p. 38.

[52] Girija Shanker Bhagwanji Badheka, popularly known as Gijubhai (1885-1939) was one of the early pioneers of educational experiments for children in India and his work attracted Gandhi's attention before he implemented his Nai Talim. Badheka was in turn, inspired by the theories of Maria Montesssori and played a major role in implementing such ideas while molding them to the Indian socio-cultural and local context. Yogesh K. Singh, *Philosophical Foundation of Education*, APH Publishing, New Delhi 2008.

[53] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds*, cit., p. 36.

[54] Sarala is the feminine for simple and honest in Hindi.

[55] No one really knows when and how she began using this Indian name, as she left no clues in her autobiography or with her students and followers.

[56] The Institute was founded by Jamnalal Bajaj, a philanthropist and freedom fighter and also a close associate of Gandhi, who seemed to be interested in women's education.

were eye opening to Sarala Behn as they taught her what it takes to be a constructive social revolutionary. Until then, she realized, she was only a reformer, not yet a revolutionary[57].

The Wardha experience prompted Sarala Behn to leave Udaipur in May 1936. She now turned to Gandhian constructive work but found it lacking in the way it was implemented. Living with the women and girls at the Women's Institute she came to observe first hand many of the conditions that existed within the institute and was not satisfied with what she found. The whole aura seemed to her forced and artificial. She noted that several of Gandhi's followers could not implement his ideals on education in its true spirit, thus creating a joyless and artificial atmosphere with no connection whatsoever between life and education. Work at the ashram, she remarked: "was not imbued with a feeling of devotion to labor, only a sense of discipline"[58]. However, during this time, two gifted progressive educators, E.W. Aryanayakam and his wife Asha Devi, had joined Gandhi to assist him in this new experiment of Nai Talim. Following their inspiration and Gandhi's encouragement, Sarala Behn joined the Hindustani Talimi Sangh (All-India Board of Education), the Basic Education scheme at Gandhi's ashram at Sevagram endorsed by the Indian National Congress in 1938. This novel experimental education, included in Gandhi's constructive program, implies that "all the various branches of knowledge will be imparted either through a basic productive activity, or else in surroundings close to society and nature". Thus, instead of "Production alongside Education" Gandhi's system, she observed, launched a method of "Education through Production"[59]. While this new responsibility brought her close to Gandhi, Sarala Behn preferred to live and work independently in a village to serve the masses and the "institution-bound teaching work" did not satisfy her: "I was for ever saying to people that arrangements be made so that I might live in some village"[60]. However, Gandhi was not in favor of her leaving Sevagram. For this she earned the displeasure of many at Sevagram because she did not agree with Gandhi on every count[61]. Soon, the intense heat at Sevagram, the heavy workload, dysentery, and recurrent bouts of malaria took a serious toll on her health. Her stubbornness in using only naturopathy further delayed her recovery from malaria. Gandhi later lauded Sarala Behn for her resoluteness in refusing mainstream medicine. But while Gandhi's denial was motivated by the religious symbolism of an ascetic disregard for the body and belief in the indivisibility of the *Atman* (Soul/Self), to Sarala Behn holistic cure made a better practical sense because conventional medicine, she believed, led to toxic effects on the human body[62]. As part of her own plan for treatment, she began searching for a cooler location where she could regain her health and work towards developing Gandhi's constructive program on education. Incidentally, she heard about a Gandhi ashram at Chanauda,

[57] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p. 48.

[58] Ivi, p. 52.

[59] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p. 55.

[60] Ibidem.

[61] Sarala Devi, *Vidroha Se Nirman Tak Ki Yatra*, cit., p. 88.

[62] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds*, cit., p. 173.

a hill town in Almora district of the Uttarakhand Himalayas which worked to promote woolen spinning and weaving as well as trained nationalists to fight the colonial rule. In August 1941, on Gandhi's encouragement she decided to settle at this place to recuperate and start her own project. But leaving Gandhi, her Sevagram 'family', and the children there whom she loved dearly was not easy for her. She recalls: "It felt as if I was renouncing the world to go and live in the forest"[63].

In the mountains

Following Gandhi's advice she spent a year familiarizing with the local conditions and the people. The mountain air soon improved her health. Together with the founder of the Chanauda Ashram and her close friend, Shanti Lal Trivedi, she hiked up to the interior of the Kumaon hills covering hundreds of arduous miles in the *Bhotiya*[64] region and border districts of the then United Provinces such as Jouhar, Munsyari, Choudans, Vyas, and Dharchula. Realizing the potential for hand-spun wool work in the hills, she bought Tibetan wool for spinning and on her way took part in the selling of *Khadi*[65] or hand-spun cotton, lived with the village people, acquainted herself with the language, religion, and culture of the land, studied the socioeconomic conditions and political awareness of the people, and then tried to organize women's meetings. It was during these long journeys by foot as described in her autobiography that Sarala Behn came to encounter for the first time the hardworking women of the hills.

While she saw that women of the hills do not practice purdah and have freedom to work in public places, she found in them a lack of self-confidence when the need came to speak out against moral and social wrongs. She also became aware of the sharp discrepancy in the sexual division of labor in the traditional agri-pastoral communities of the mountains. While only men did the plowing and managed irrigation of the fields, the women did practically all agricultural operations working in their "fields and their forests in sun, rain and frost, weeding, harvesting, carrying heavy loads of fuel, fodder and litter, from early dawn to falling dusk, to sustain their family"[66]. Yet, she noted that the women, while taking their life as a matter of course were not ready to relinquish their right to work in the fields and instead took pride in it[67]. This made her aware of the pivotal role of women in hill economy and society. To initiate a conversation, she often met them in the fields where they worked, instructed them on childrearing and housework and "would

[63] Ivi, p. 81.

[64] Bhotiya refers to the nomadic pastoralists of the Indo-Tibetan border region, which was part of the United Provinces in British India. The Bhotia people moved into India when borders were closed in 1962.

[65] Khadi is the name for hand-spun cotton. Spinning weaving, and wearing of khadi was part of Gandhi's constructive program for village self-reliance and implied communal unity and economic freedom of the masses from British imperialism.

[66] Sarala Devi, *What is Development?*, in *Himalaya: Man and* Nature, June 1977-May 1978, p. 11.

[67] Sarala Devi, "The Women of the UP Hills", July 18, 1974, Shobha Vidyarthi Private Collection.

even go to the extent of combing their hair and picking lice"[68]. But despite her efforts, she realized painfully, the village ladies did not show any interest in constructive work or in their own social and moral progress. When called for a meeting, they would say, "What do we know, we are only destined to labor like animals. Meetings and other such things are meant for men not for us"[69].

This poor show of self-confidence and self- respect convinced Sarala Behn of the urgency of the need to address the cause of the women in the hills. She reckoned, "the development of women's power is … one of the main duties of our village workers, so that it may become a force not merely for agriculture and dairy production, but for the true development of a healthy society"[70]. Thus she asserted, the "extension of the power of the women from service of the family to service and regeneration of society is a 'must'"[71].

Figure 3: Sarala Behn with Shantilal Trivedi, at Narayan Ashram, Dharchula in 1941[72]

While she did not see clearly yet whether or how she could help the local women, she understood that sustained and direct contact with the village women was an imperative to bring any change. Thus, her experiences in the various villages concretized in her mind the need for a fixed place from where she could work[73]. A small house on a hilltop in Kausani was donated to her by a social

[68] G.R. Kala, *Sarla Behn's Trial*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 316.

[69] Vimla Bahuguna, interview with author, Dehradun April 14, 2011.

[70] Sarala Devi, *What is Development?*, cit., p. 11.

[71] Sarala Devi, "A Practical Strategy Towards Conservation and Decentralized Responsibility", Shobha Vidyarthi Private Collection.

[72] "Shantilalji ke saath Narayan Ashram me" [Sarala Behn with Shantilalji, Narayan Ashram], 1941, in Shantilal Trivedi and Radha Behn (eds.), *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* Kausani, Lakshmi Ashram; New Delhi, Himalaya Seva Sangh 1984.

[73] Sarala Devi, Letter to P.N. Sanwal, August 5,1942, in *Sarala Behn: smriti grantha*, 304.

worker, who had named it after his wife Lakshmi, for her use in constructive activities. This eventually became known as Lakshmi Ashram.

Political and social activism

Meanwhile, the Quit India Resolution was passed and all Congress activists were arrested, following which a leaderless nation tuned to fever pitch action in demand of a free India. The movement quickly reached the hills and wanton police repression in the form of arrests, beatings, whippings, and firings went rife. Sarala Behn, who intended to carry out her constructive activities, realized that her self-respect demands that she disobey Gandhi's instructions that western supporters of the constructive program should not take part in political activities. She considered "only if the situation became intolerable, as once was the case with Mira Ben [*sic*], should I deliberately court arrest"[74].

Figure 4. Sarala Behn in khadi sari, 1942[75]

The nature of British repression in the hills indeed seemed intolerable to Sarala Behn and like Mira Behn, she played an active part in political and social activism during the Quit India movement. There were open firings on nonviolent processions at Sult, Salam, and Deghat regions of Almora district and flagitious crimes committed on the villagers everywhere such as looting of property, ghoulish torture and killing of farm animals, and burning down of houses, agricultural

[74] Sarala Devi, "Letter to Shri P.N. Sanwal", May 8, 1942, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 305.

[75] Sarala Behn, *A Life In Two Worlds,* cit., cover page.

implements, and standing crops[76]. In one village of Salam all men were arrested and imprisoned while the women and children fled taking refuge in the forests or in caves[77]. At that time, the Chanauda ashram was the power house of nationalist movement in the hills. The deputy commissioner of Almora reported to the commissioner of Kumaon region warning that as long as the Chanauda Gandhi ashram operates it will be difficult for the British to rule[78].

On September 2, 1942, on false charges of arson attack on a government resin depot at Totashilling, a conspiracy of the local revenue officer and head of the police station, all fifteen workers of the ashram including several villagers were arrested, property confiscated and auctioned, and the ashram sealed. The district judge further imposed individual fines on those arrested to be imprisoned as well as a collective fine of Rs. 30,000 on the villagers, seven times the annual revenue of that area[79]. The incident shocked Sarala Behn. She took it as her duty towards humanity that she should stand between the people and this ongoing tyranny and oppression of the British.

To protest this injustice, Sarala Behn prepared a petition and collecting one *anna*[80] from each family of the villages of Almora to fund her trip, set out to see the English commissioner, Mr. Acton, in Nainital. There she met eye to eye with the British officer requesting the release of those imprisoned with these words of solidarity: "I have come with the humble request that justice be done for the sake of humanity, for those who are innocent, so that future history does not stigmatize the English for doing this injustice to people"[81].

Her audacious words queered the overweening commissioner who threatened to send all ashramites to the gallows. As per reports from her close acquaintances, the commissioner later hounded the home of a local nationalist where Sarala Behn had put up with the intention of shooting her for the 'crime' of opposing the British government despite being a British[82]. Lacking a search warrant the haughty officer however, could not carry out his desired plan of action.

Disappointed but determined to fight for truth and justice, Sarala Behn drafted appeals and went to court as political trials were conducted deceitfully in constructed tents outside prisons. Her appeals and statements disclosed the case as a false one based on spurious witnesses which saved the death sentence of one accused and helped in reducing the fines of others though their term in prison remained unaffected[83]. Sarala Behn realized that incarceration, and eventual death

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[76] Govind Sahai, *42 Rebellion*, Rajkamal Publications, Delhi 1947, p. 266; Pratap Singh Bora, *Salam Kranti me Sarala Behnji*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 175.

[77] Pratap Singh Bora, *Salam Kranti me Sarala Behnji*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 175.

[78] Shanti Lal Trivedi, *Mere Jail Jeevan Ki Yaadein* [Memories of My Life in Jail], Sanskriti Vibhag Uttarakhand, Dehradun 2014, p. 22.

[79] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p. 165

[80] Currency unit used in British India.

[81] Shanti Lal Trivedi, Anupam Vyaktitva, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 168.

[82] Shri Balvant Rai Tayal, *Sarala Behn ke Prati*, and Banke Lal Consul, *Daliton ke Sakha: Sarala*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 158; 181.

[83] Shantilal Trivedi, "Seva Murti Sarala Devi", *Uttarakhand Smarika,* cit., p. 39.

sentences of the political prisoners directly impacted their families with heavy fines and auction of their land, crop, and properties; in addition to the fear or pain of losing their loved ones. She witnessed British 'fair play' and how colonial administration could reduce once prosperous farming families of the hills to paupers. The suffering of these families tormented her day and night. She collected food grains and money from various sources and began touring several villages in Baurari, Katyur, Salam, and Sult areas of Almora and Pithoragarh districts, reassuring and extending help in all form to the troubled families of imprisoned activists.

Along with co-worker Trivedi, she carried out an elaborate relief work for nearly two months and at times covering twenty-two miles on foot in a day on mountainous terrain[84]. To avoid police interventions as well as save money on bus fares, she journeyed for three days from Kausani to Almora, covering some fifty-eight miles through dense forests and treacherous terrain of the hills. Other times, she traveled to the plains in Bareilly, Lucknow, and Agra to meet prisoners languishing in jail, brought them news from their homes, and sought help from able lawyers for their release.

Soon Sarala Behn was put under house arrest at her place in Kausani for helping native political revolutionaries. She defied imperial orders and carried on with her humanitarian relief work. True to the principles of nonviolent noncooperation, she informed the District Magistrate every time she left home. Sooner or later, she was arrested when she was on her way to Allahabad to appeal at the high court for the release of political prisoners[85]. A trial was held at Almora and she was incarcerated for a period of three months.

On her release from prison, Sarala Behn resumed her activities to reach out to the families of freedom fighters. Along with Trivedi, who in the meantime was also released, she went to Lucknow, Wardha, and Bombay on a fund-raising tour and collected a sum of Rs. 45,000 by September 1944 for distribution[86]. To avoid trouble from British intelligence agents Sarala Behn, in her usual way, traveled in the night through the woods to reach Almora before dawn.

Her associates vividly recall how on reaching Almora, she would immediately hide herself by climbing a tree, visit the villagers' homes only at nightfall, and sleep in someone's cow-shed until daybreak when she would go into her hiding again. Like a true missionary, she traveled from village to village, consoling distraught families of those incarcerated who were left high and dry without any resource or means of survival, organizing help of all sorts such as bringing messages to family members from their loved ones in jail, arranging to send their children to school, caring for the sick and the disabled, and providing food and ration such as rice and wheat which she often carried herself as head loads[87].

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[84] Shantilal Trivedi, *Mere Jail Jeevan Ki Yaadein,* cit., p. 24; 52.

[85] Shantilal Trivedi, *Mere Jail Jeevan Ki Yaadein,* cit., p. 57.

[86] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p. 135.

[87] Sadan Mishra, interview by author, Garur, April 17, 2011; Shri Himmat Singh Bhakuni, *Behnji ki Smriti Me*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 113.

She made the sorrow of the poor and the persecuted her own, consoling bereaved families and shedding tears with them. When news came to her of the painful death of a prisoner inside the prison, she spent sleepless nights and suffered. "Never in my whole life had I experienced such personal grief", she revealed. Her hard work, courage, sacrifice, and perseverance filled the villagers with nothing but reverential love and admiration for her.

One such villager, Narayandatt Mumgai's father was a freedom fighter imprisoned by the British. Mumgai's family suffered the wrath of the British government who had all their belongings auctioned off seven times. Narayandutt lost his mother at this juncture and was left to fend for his three younger brothers and sisters. The young boy of eighteen was at a loss how he would feed his brothers and himself as well as pay for the fees and books in school. Sarala Behn came to his aid with these reassuring words: "Narayan, you do not panic, do not be frustrated and sad, take these eighty rupees and nurture yourself and your family. Have faith, your father will surely come back from jail".

Her words calmed the distraught boy who later recalled with gratitude, "[t]hose eighty rupees were not only enough for us, but it was enough to meet all the expenses of the family and for paying school fees for one whole year. As a result, in May 1945, I was able to graduate Hindi middle school and could pull through this difficult time"[88]. Families benefited in this way by Sarala Behn's motherly affection and benevolent work soon became self-sufficient and returned to a normal life in their community. Bhagirathi Devi, wife of a political prisoner, whose land and property was confiscated revealed to her how she was able to overcome the indignity of a life lived off alms:

> Behn*ji*[89], when you gave me that grain, for fifteen days I ate to fill my belly. For months I had been eating only two *rotis*[90] a day, and I had no strength left at all in my body. When I recovered my strength then I began to work in others' fields. Since then I haven't missed a single day's labor, and my children haven't gone hungry any day[91].

The British government was aghast and infuriated by the political and social activities of this dauntless white woman in sari, which aptly earned her the title of the "most dangerous person in the district"[92]. Unable to contain her activities and due to her repeated and open flouting of imperial orders Sarala Behn was finally arrested a second time leading to a year's rigorous imprisonment. When an Indian judge confronted her stating that as a British she ought to be ashamed of her anti-British stance, her prompt response was that it was he, not her, who as an Indian ought to be ashamed for helping the British against India[93].

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[88] Narayandatt Mamgai, *Anathon Ki Sahayika*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 183.

[89] 'Ji' is gender-neutral honorific, used as suffix after first or last names and as a show of respect for persons.

[90] Indian flattened bread.

[91] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p. 166.

[92] Ivi, p. 143.

[93] Vimla Bahuguna, Interview with author, Dehradun, March 17, 2011.

Figure 5. Lakshmi Ashram of Kausani, the historic building where Sarala Behn was under house arrest in August 1942[94].

Even when in prison, Sarala Behn continued without relent with her plans to bring relief to the distressed. She made arrangements for someone to carry out her work in Almora and to bring her news. Saving up money from her own food allowances she sent monthly money orders to the family of those imprisoned[95]. For psychological and moral support of her prisoner 'brothers' she sent them hand-woven and dyed *rakhis*[96] she made herself and even tied one on the wrist of the prison guard, who on receiving it was "quite overcome with emotion"[97]. Inside prison, noticing the callous disregard for medical attention and care, she "continually" "fought and argued" with the prison doctors and compelled them attend to the needs of those who were ill[98].

[94] David Hopkins, *Lakshmi Ashram, the original and historic building where Sarala Behn was placed under house arrest in August 1942* [ca. 1972-73], David Hopkins Private Collection.

[95] Shrimati Bhagirathi Devi, *Sarala Behn Ji Ki Kripa*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 179.

[96] *Rakhi* is a bracelet (a talisman) usually made of cotton and which a sister (or any woman) ties around the wrist of her brother (or someone whom one considers a brother) to express her love and regard for him. The tying of *rakhi* marks the *Raksha Bandhan* festival (Hindu religious festival) held on the full moon of the month of August.

[97] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p. 149.

[98] Ivi, p. 167; 146.

When the Interim government was formed in 1946[99], Sarala Behn lost no time and met the then Chief Minister of the United Provinces, Govind Ballabh Pant, to ask for the restitution of the harm done to the people by returning the auctioned and mortgaged lands of the political prisoners as well as the improperly appropriated fines. Pant sent her to the Home Minister, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, who expressed the government's willingness to proceed on this task but lacks data to work with. "Everyone is adamant in saying that this task must be undertaken, yet nobody wants to take the trouble to present figures", he complained[100]. Assuring Kidwai that she would do the needful, Sarala Behn, toured the villages of Kumaon region with the intelligence agents still at her heels. It was an onerous task but she managed to gather all necessary statistics on time to take it to the government headquarters at Lucknow. By 1950 all fined money was returned to the families and auctioned land restored to their lawful owners.

Lakshimi Ashram

Since her arrival in the Kumaon hills, Sarala Behn spent about five years traveling extensively in the villages of the three districts of Nainital, Almora, and Pithoragarh to study the conditions of the village women. She first got acquainted with the lives of the Bhotiya women of the north and then while working for political relief, she came to appreciate the nature of the hill women better. She observed that even in the midst of despair and harassment, these women strived to fend for their families while bravely facing oppression of the foreign rulers with a pride that their husbands were imprisoned for the noble cause of the nation[101]. Astonished at their indomitable spirit and courage, devotion to and sacrifice for their families, Sarala Behn mused, "What a fund of strength is hidden here, if only it could be used for constructive social purposes!"[102]. During her yearlong sentence in 1945, Sarala Behn also came in close contact with the women prisoners from the hills many of whom were destitute widows abandoned by their husbands and victims of various kinds of invidious gendered practices and social oppression. She noticed that women who were accused of criminal acts were either falsely charged or were victims of circumstances and thus could not be held wholly morally culpable for their acts. Once released, these women, she realized, could not be absorbed back into society, would be treated as outcastes or rejected by their family, and further exploited. Concerns about how such women could find their place in society absorbed her. Society does nothing for the rehabilitation of such women. She found a gaping hole in the conventional approach towards criminal

[99] Towards the end of the British imperial rule, the elections of 1946 led to the formation of the Interim Government led by the Indian National Congress in the Provinces.

[100] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p. 180.

[101] Sarala Devi, "The Growth of People's Movement: From Girls' Education to Conservation – a Non Violent Strategy", February 27, 1979, David Hopkins Private Collection.

[102] Sarala Behan (Behn), *Our Moral Responsibility Towards Women*, in "Bhoodan 6", 20, 1961, p. 153.

justice: "[t]here is no question of 'after-care', neither any chance of getting any kind of employment of labour"[103].

As a result of these varied experiences on the condition of the hill women, both in the prison and outside, Sarala Behn recognized that an experiment in basic education for girls was an imperative for the hills. There they led miserable lives, with little or no formal education, were married off early and often without consent, and were responsible for almost all household and farming work. The need of the hour, she realized, was a revolution in values in education, as suggested in Gandhi's alternative to the colonial system of education, or Nai Talim, which encouraged learning through practical work. In addition to receiving academic training the students of Nai Talim learned to be self-sufficient in meeting their basic needs. Along with such basic educational reform Sarala Behn realized the need for reform of women's role in society, "to build up stamina and morale amongst the women-folk and bring them to realize their status they are entitled to and should assume in society"[104].

She became convinced that national reconstruction through the spread of basic education, in particular the education of girls and women, could pave the path to transformative social change. She decided to launch her new project in Kausani. Soon after her release from prison, she went to see Gandhi at Pune to seek his advice and blessing. Lacking knowledge of the hills, Gandhi could not advise her on her project but remarked: "I do have enough faith in your practical wisdom that whatever you want to undertake will indeed be fine", adding that it would not be good to fail in any such endeavor[105].

As a worker with firm focus on devoted service rather than personal satisfaction in producing desired results, she promised Gandhi that she would dedicate twenty years to this task of educating girls with the long-term mission of instilling in them "new values of life in the face of a hostile world"[106]. From Pune, Sarala Behn went to Ahmedabad where she studied the conditions of *Vikas Griha* (House of Progress), an educational and rehabilitation center started by the Gandhian, Mridula Sarabhai, for "child widows, battered wives, and elderly women"[107]. Sarala Behn noticed, women who received education and vocational training there came out self-respecting and fully self-sufficient and achieved success in whatever profession they pursued. She found Sarabhai's experiment inspiring. She felt confident to start her own and went on a second and extensive fund raising tour with Trivedi. She had in her mind an education center that would set an example for the whole nation. Thus, she considered collecting donations for her proposed education center from the poor and rich alike, from the local Kumaoni people, members of parliament, central and state government ministers, business and social

[103] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p. 147.

[104] Sarala Devi, "The Women of the U.P. Hills", July 18, 1974, Shobha Vidyarthi Private Collection.

[105] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p. 173.

[106] Ivi, p. 174.

[107] Aparna Basu, *Mridula Sarabhai*, in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History* ed. Bonnie G. Smith, Vol.1, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008, p. 637.

service organizations etc[108]. Their democratic efforts yielded a substantial amount of Rs.70, 000 and work on the center thus began with the help of full public approval and cooperation[109].

However, the positive atmosphere of hope waned rapidly after the gaining of political independence. Sarala Behn was dismayed to see that most Congress leaders moved "further and further away from Gandhi's path" and that the movement based on the twin ideals of truth and nonviolence which earned the nation its political independence "had come to an end, to be replaced instead by the coming age of compromise"[110]. Given the sincerity with which she accepted Gandhi's vision of a free India, these new developments made her cringe. When the nation began celebrating its first anniversary of independence with pomp and grandeur, Sarala Behn, who would observe a ritual fast on such a day, expressed her thoughts thus:

> *Bapu*'s[111] dream will not be made from hoisting national flags, leading morning processions, and delivering long speeches. We have to make strong resolutions in our minds on this day to bring this freedom to the hundreds and thousands of slums of India. Now we have only got political independence. For the liberation from intellectual and economic slavery that has taken its deep roots in society, we and many others have to spend our entire lives. The task to change the values of society is more difficult than the fight for independence, because the rebellion then was against the British, now it has to do with our own homes, our own society, and with our own mindsets[112].

Inspired by the pragmatic spirit of Gandhi's educational philosophy on one hand, and determined to supplement the deficiencies of government education system on the other, Sarala Behn set before her the task of developing a decentralized, basic education program in the hill villages of Uttarakhand. True to her word to Gandhi, she carried out her promised service of social transformation with missionary zeal through basic education for girls for the next twenty years. Beginning in 1946 her institution, Kasturba Mahila Utthan Mandal (Kasturba Association for Women's Uplift) after the memory of Gandhi's wife Kasturba, popularly called Lakshmi Ashram, became the first one in the region to educate rural women and girls. Her years of selfless service to the families of the freedom fighters bore fruit, as they sent their daughters to her school. Though she employed the basic framework of Nai Talim in her educational experiment at Kausani, she was neither in thrall to a system to live by the letter of Gandhi's thoughts nor to consider Nai Talim as a fixed charter or a matter of orthodoxy.

Instead, Sarala Behn effectively integrated the Gandhian perspective of education and visions of Gram Swaraj with her own that was orientated to address the interests of the neglected women of rural India. Her integrated philosophy of education was tailored to counter the alienations in human personality in a divided

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[108] Sri Shantilal Trivedi, *Anupam Vyaktitva*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 170.

[109] Shantilal Trivedi, *Mere Jail Jivan Ki Yaadein,* cit., pp. 80-83.

[110] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p. 175.

[111] Bapu means father both in Hindi and Gujarati. Gandhi in India was reverentially called 'Bapu,' and is honored with the title as the father of the nation.

[112] Vimla Bahuguna, *Manav Shilpi Behnjji,* in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 75

society through holistic and harmonious development of the personality, involving education of the head (intellect), the heart (moral and affective dimensions), and the hand (productive action). Such ideas, were part of an ongoing globally significant intercultural discourse and practice on alternative education, found not only in Gandhi, but also in the work of Rabindranath Tagore and prominent educational thinkers of the west, such as Pestalozzi, Goethe, and progressives such as John Dewey and Paul Geheeb, all of whom emphasized the need for harmony or balance between the development of the body and the soul. Education at Lakshmi Ashram thus meant *sarvangin sikhsha* (all-round education) which combined intellectual work with the practical such as agriculture, animal husbandry, and health. The philosophy of the Scottish educationist, Alexander Sutherland Neill and his famed Summerhill School in Suffolk also deeply inspired Sarala Behn. Like Neill, she believed that the educationist should emanate love as the parent of the child and placed a special emphasis on making the children not fear authority[113]. Lakshmi Ashram thus emerged as a democratic, self-governing community based on love and responsibility and an awareness of the equal status of all members, young or old, teacher or student, where students learned not how to conform to authority but rather to question it. Such was the impact of Sarala Behn's transformative education that caste discrimination became a thing of the past as the children at the ashram became unaware that they belonged to any caste but Indian[114].

The principles of basic education she employed were geared to build the hill women's self-confidence or *atmavishwas* as well as self-reliance or *svabalamban*, to strengthen the weakest links in the nation's chain, the lives of the women, by addressing their drudgery, poor health and nutrition, poverty, and inequality. The primary objective was to integrate women into the project of Gandhi's Gram Swaraj, and through that address the question of gender inequality and social welfare. Girls taught at Lakshmi Ashram were thus trained to become community activists, work for social uplift, and establish Sarvodaya through Gram Swaraj. It created a model of womanhood that enabled the girl students to develop their capacity of independent thinking and judgment as well as a sense of responsibility for the community as a whole. It encouraged women whether married or not to assume socially responsible roles of decision-makers, reformers, and activists outside their traditional domestic spheres and responsibilities. With the education and training they received, several ashram graduates were able to step out of the limited traditional roles of their gender, caste, and class and became frontline leaders in social movements and village reform. They played a pioneering role in women's empowerment, self-reliance of villages through appropriate technology, and the movements against alcoholism and environmental conservation such as the

[113] Shrimati Bhavani Kunjwal, *Sanskar Ki Pratikriya*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 120; Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p. 35; 60.

[114] William McKay (Bill) Aitken, *Sarala Behn: A Study in Self-Respect*, in *Sarala Behn: smriti grantha,* cit., p. 204.

internationally famed forest protection movement called the Chipko (Embrace the Tree) in Uttarakhand[115].

In more recent decades, ashram graduates participated in the Uttarakhand movement for a separate hill state and expanded their activities for the protection of the hill environment. The institution stands today as an inspiring project of self and community transformation. It helped create a new concept of womanhood in the hills as self-confident and empowered agents of reform, not merely "objects of reform"[116].

It is important to note that while Gandhi sought to change women's psychological mindsets of subservience to patriarchy motivating them to assert their moral agency and realize their freedom, he could not challenge patriarchy per se. One major shortcoming of Gandhi in this direction is that he did not see early the necessity of vocational equality of women in public life[117].

Sarala Behn appropriated Gandhi's feminine moral thinking but constructed a creative political style of women's empowerment that not only challenged patriarchy but also took Gandhian ideas to radical directions. She combined the Gandhian notion of Indian womanhood, which extols motherly virtues of self-sacrifice and traditional traits as nurturers or caregivers with the progressive values and social ideals of equality, freedom, and strong sense of independence that characterizes western social activist women.

This combination created a model of womanhood for India that made women more indisputably visible in the public sphere than they were during Gandhi's times. Thus, while Sarala Behn drew from Gandhi's emphasis on the role of women in reconstructing society through direct public participation, her approach was a significant advance over Gandhi's own version of the role of women in Gram Swaraj.

Post-Gandhi social reconstruction movements

During the sixties, when Indo-China hostilities erupted the Gandhian Shanti Sena (Peace Corps)[118] as a non-violent alternative to the army began to address the

[115] The birth of environmental movements such as the Chipko in the Uttarakhand Himalaya ought to be analyzed in the background of the theoretical and practical enterprise of both Mira Behn and Sarala Behn. I have argued this point extensively in my doctoral dissertation.

[116] Rebecca Klenk, *Gandhi's Other Daughter: Sarala Devi and Lakshmi Ashram*, in "Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies", 34, 1, 2014, p. 102.

[117] Gandhi significantly revised his position on women's empowerment and patriarchy only in his later years when he vigorously advocated vocational equality of women. Howard cites how at the time of India's Independence, Gandhi had made a remarkably progressive turn from his earlier views stating if he had his way, "the President of the Indian Republic will be a chaste and brave Bhangi [untouchable] girl". Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Speech at Prayer meeting*, in CWMG, v. 95, 1999, p. 347, accessed June 14, 2012, http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL095.PDF. Veena R. Howard, *Rethinking Gandhi's Celibacy: Ascetic Power and Women's Empowerment*, in "Journal of the American Academy of Religion", 81, 1, 2013, p. 157.

[118] The Shanti Sena was formed in 1958 inspired by Gandhi and advanced by his followers. It was originally conceived as a local action group with trained activists.

problems of boundary dispute between India and China. The Gandhians were at this stage split into two divergent camps. On one hand Jay Prakash (JP) Narayan advocated an "immediatist approach" of unarmed peacekeeping force composed of civilians who pledged to confront an armed force nonviolently appealing to both sides to quit fighting; and on the other, Vinoba Bhave stressed his "gradualist approach" of "peacebuilding through spiritual awakening" such as addressing the causes of war[119]. The rift between the two led to a compromised form of nonviolent action organized by the World Peace Brigade, called the *Vishwa-Maitri Yatra* or World Friendship March towards China (Delhi to Beijing). Sarala Behn, along with other Gandhians participated in this peacemaking mission to heal relations between the two nations and promote transnational cooperation and dialog. The Friendship March was critical of both Indian and Chinese arms and policy and as such refused to sanction either India's war effort or unequivocally condemn China. In a situation where anti-China feelings had reached a fevered point, Sarala Behn spoke at a meeting to discuss the Friendship March in which she clarified how animosity between the nations is not merely the fault of China alone, suggesting a more balanced approach and amicable resolution between the two nations[120]. Her position on the war was immediately interpreted by Indian intelligence agents as a British citizen blaming India for the fighting with China and she was denied permission to travel inside the Inner Line or the Indian side of the border with Tibet[121].

In November 1966, she was invited to attend an important meeting organized by the Sarvodaya activists on the question of consolidating constructive work to boost self-sufficiency and nonviolent defense potential of the vulnerable Himalayan border areas. To add insult to injury, a request by her colleagues to obtain an entry permit for her in that area was declined because she was now seen as a 'foreigner.' The incident was looked upon by Sarala Behn, who accepted India as her 'home' and dedicated her whole life fighting for justice for the Indian people, as a fundamental breach of human trust and distressed her to such an extent that she decided to leave the hills.

For the next few years, Sarala Behn traveled to Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka. She played a remarkable role in post-Gandhi social reconstruction movements such as Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan-Gramdan movement (voluntary gift of land to the landless and village gift for equitable land distribution) and especially in the rehabilitation of the bandits of the Chambal Valley Peace Mission in Madhya Pradesh. The Chambal valley and its uninhabitable ravine land were at that time home to some notorious bandits for centuries and government was not been able to redress the issue through the usual statist methods of force and

[119] Thomas Weber, *Gandhi's Peace Army: The Shanti Sena and Unarmed Peacekeeping*, Syracuse University Press, New York 1996, p. xx; 142-43.

[120] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., pp. 262-263.

[121] The 'Inner Line', a British invention, is an internal frontier drawn through the mountains of Garhwal and Kumaon, and lies south of the international border between India and Tibet/China. Indians living south of this line required special permit to cross it while foreigners were not allowed to cross this line at all. *The Inner Line*, "Himalayan Journal", 17, 1952, accessed March 20, 2012, http://www.himalayanclub.org/journal/the-inner-line%e2%80%99/

violence. When Bhave and Narayan began working towards the surrender and rehabilitation of these bandits, Sarala Behn joined their mission and went to the rebels' families to persuade them to surrender.

She kept regular personal contacts with the bandits who surrendered to the government and who were put in jail taking care of their needs, eating lunch with them, writing letters to their families, doing moral counseling and guiding them to live a more constructive life[122]. Focused on reparation and rehabilitation, her approach was restorative, aimed at healing people, communities, and relationships. As Lakshmi Ashram graduate, Shobha Behn (Vidyarthi) who joined Sarala Behn in this mission put it, "Sarala Behn approached the bandits and their families like a mother, speaking to them with love and creating a homely atmosphere, even when she met them in the jail.

She was always interested to know what circumstances turned those people into bandits, and worked to reform and bring them back to society"[123]. Rebels, Sarala Behn observed, were born either out of economic inequalities or when they were incriminated falsely. Therefore, to address the problem at its roots, she reasoned, "the first step is to awaken feelings of humanity in society and with that to overcome the gulf between rich and poor"[124]. On one occasion, when an assistant criticized her for showing concern for mere bandits who he believed were by nature beyond any cure, Sarala Behn retorted:

> What did you say, Gopal Bhai? Is not the bandit a person? What are you and me then? … It is he who doesn't earn his own livelihood or work hard a real bandit, you should understand this. If they are rebels, then we are responsible and accountable for them, they are not … I have to take care of their people, they deserve sympathy and compassion…

In this way, Sarala Behn advocated a shift in our cultural attitude of solely blaming criminals for their actions toward understanding the root causes of crime such as the underlying structural and cultural biases in our political, social, and economic systems. Her patient reform work amongst the bandits and their families played a significant role in converting several of them into good, peaceful citizens[125]. Her inspiration and those of several others were pivotal to the surrender of infamous bandits such as Mohar Singh, Madho Singh, and one hundred and eighty others during 1971-72[126].

This work of Sarala Behn affirms the view that novel social experiments could be successful through nonviolent means, provided "the government and the public, working together as one made the necessary efforts"[127].

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[122] Sarala Behn, "Personal Diary," January to May 1972, Shobha Vidyarthi Private Collection; Ramchandra Mehrotra, "Astha ka naam Sarala Behn," [Sarala Behn, faith is her name] in *Sarala Behn: smriti grantha*, cit., pp. 194-195; Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds*, cit., p. 365; 367-369.

[123] Shobha Behn (Shobha Vidyarthi), interview by author, Dharamghar, April 14, 2011.

[124] Sarala Devi, "Ahinsak Padhyati Ki Khoj: Chambal Ke Baagi Khetra Me Ek Naya Prayog", April 11, 1967, Shobha Vidyarthi Private Collection.

[125] *Ibidem.*

[126] Prabha Pant, *Karmayogi Sarala Behn,* cit., p. 47.

[127] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds*, cit., p. 369.

Conclusion

A love for independence and a fiery zeal to fight patriarchy and imperialism characterized Sarala Behn's early life. She lived as a citizen of the world challenging provincialism in every aspect of life that obscures one's view of the essential oneness of nature and humanity. She did not only question British imperialism, but also that of the nation-state, government, education, and religion if these became systems of oppression and corruption. She challenged conventional roles of women in society. Though she did not take a vow of *brahmacharya* (celibacy) as many women of Gandhi's ashram, she did not accept marriage although she did not oppose marriage for her activist students whom she mentored. In fact, she helped liberate the concept of marriage from narrow immures of the private family to forge new 'familial' relationships with the larger nation and the world.

Figure 6. Sarala Behn on the occasion of the marriage of Shashi Prabha Rawat, a student of Lakshmi Ashram and Gandhian activist Man Singh Rawat, 1953. The Rawats dedicated next six decades of their life to the uplift of the Boksa tribal people of Uttarakhand[128].

Colonial India had many European women, majority of whom came to live in India with their husbands and were addressed by the natives as *memshahibs* (married white upper-class women), and those who came from their home country

[128] David Hopkins, *Sarala Behn on the occasion of the marriage of Shashi Prabha Rawat and Man Singhji Rawat, this marriage was held at the ashram only.* [ca. 1972-73], David Hopkins Private Collection.

to do missionary work. Most of these women believed in and identified with the empire and maintained a civilizational superiority over the colonized. There were Victorian feminists too, who considered improving the lot of the Indian woman was part of the "white women's burden", an idea that served as justification for the civilizing mission of the imperial government[129]. These "imperial feminists"[130], as Valerie Amos and Pratibha Palmer illustrates, maintained their colonial identity and that too with respect to a racialized construct of the colonized other.

However, emergent scholars in this field such as Sharon Macdonald points out that there were many who did not fit in this reformist and/or feminist group and even left their missions (social or religious) to become supporters of the Indian cause for liberation[131]. Many of these women found in Gandhi and his nonviolence, a spiritual power to challenge the colonizing and missionizing activities of Britain and a vision of a society free from race, class, caste, gender, and religious prejudice.

As a British woman in colonial India, Sarala Behn's interest in serving the Indian women's cause might seem similar to those of the colonial British feminists, such as her opposition to practices of child marriage, the treatment of widows, and purdah and advocating the education and empowerment of women, health and hygiene etc. However, these were issues which the Gandhian constructive and nationalist movement also addressed and cannot be seen as unique to the British feminist movement in India. Moreover, as Antoinette Burton argues, even British feminism was not a monolithic construct and could not be the only story of the time of feminist theory and practice[132].

Sarala Behn's feminist leanings, as Klenk points out, were different than those of the liberal middle class bourgeois feminists or those keen to bring modernity to the colonized[133]. She differed significantly from her feminist counterparts in that her position adopted the Gandhian critique of western modernity and was anti-colonial, anti-racist, exhibited non-conformist background, critiqued Christian patriarchy but was spiritually motivated, and believed in nonviolence.

In the process of encountering with and immersing in the native culture of her adopted land Sarala Behn well-nigh erased her own English identity and defied commonly held European codes of behavior specified for *memshahibs* and conforming upper class Indian elites that urged maintaining distance with the natives and the poor. In this way, she also challenged conventional constructs of colonial feminism and Indian elitism that seemed to ally with patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism.

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[129] Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 1994, p. 10.

[130] Valerie Amos and Prathibha Palmer, *Challenging Imperial Feminism*, in "Feminist Review", 80, 2005, pp. 44-63.

[131] Sharon McDonald, *Neither Memsahibs nor Missionaries: Western Women Who Supported the Indian Independence Movement*, PhD diss., University of New Brunswick, 2010.

[132] Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists* cit., p. 9.

[133] Rebecca Klenk, *Gandhi's Other Daughter*, cit., p. 101.

While it may still be argued that as the "Other" in the eye of the Indian women, Sarala Behn may not be equated on same terms, she nevertheless had a unique ability to assimilate herself in the local culture with a directness and simplicity that was unlike her British peers.

As revealed by her close acquaintances: "We were hesitant at first when we saw this English woman amidst us, but as we started getting close to her, all our doubts went away naturally…We noticed that while discussing matters with us not a single English word came out of her mouth"[134]. She refused to entertain English-speaking urban elites who often came to meet her and greeted them with her familiar comeback in Hindi: "Why, don't you know Hindi?" pronouncing further: "I am now wholly devoted to India and have therefore forgotten English"[135]. For social service it was important for Sarala Behn to gain trust and acceptance of the society and culture in which one works so her dress, dialect, food habits, and lifestyle always used to be in harmony with her Indian surroundings. In this way, she developed a large family of friends and acquaintances wherever she went and people often became unaware that she was a foreigner[136].

Sarala Behn's feminism was thus a product of her inborn urge to oppose wrong values and her passion for justice that emerged in course of her experiences during the War and the discrimination she suffered in her own society in England. The nature of her personal background immediately makes her feminism reject the regnant theoretical constructs of the west, not only of imperialism but also the *status quo* as in conventional outlook based on gender, race, class, nation, religion and every other institutionalized form of oppression and injustice that it perpetrates.

Spiritually, Sarala Behn was not inclined towards organized religion. She harbored a certain dislike not only for priests, but also monks and sadhus and their like, and did not accept superstitions, traditional rituals, or images of any sort. Yet, she came to regard on equal terms the religious traditions of village India without identifying herself with any of them. In her educational experiments she adopted Gandhi's inter-religious teachings which reached a new dimension under her socio-anthropological lens.

Her ashram exhibited a cosmopolitan atmosphere which included people from various religious traditions and cultural communities, both foreign and native, working together to create a new meaning of life. While organized religion did not appeal to her, the moral aspect of religion did. Her humanitarian work amongst the masses strongly suggest that she manifested in her life and works the Christian teaching of serving God by serving others perhaps more fully than many missionaries of her time. Thus, she saw spirituality in the common context of human self-knowing in relation to each other and the cosmos. Faith was thus not bound to theoretical abstractions or theological exegesis but its central teachings

[134] Shri Bhuvanchandra Tiwari, *Shraddha-Suman*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 119.

[135] Dada Dharmadhikari, *Do Mahimamayi Mahilayein: Sarala Behn, Mira Behn*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 155.

[136] Sarala Behn, *A Life in Two Worlds,* cit., p. 78.

were oriented to address "current personal, national, and international questions". This she called "practical spirituality"[137].

Sarala Behn spent the last few active years of her life at Himdarshan Kutir (Snow-view cottage) overlooking the eternal snows of the Himalaya at Dharamghar, set amidst thick, dense forests of Oak. From here she worked on Vyapak Lok Shikshan (Comprehensive Public Education) a mass education program on environmental awareness and women's empowerment[138]. She was not only an educator but also a writer and an inspiring public speaker. She spread her word through the press in which she wrote on social and ecological issues, through letters to Sarvodaya activists and ashram girls, and through organizing people's movement in the hills to sustain the Himalayan environment. From Himdarshan Kutir she wrote books on the environment such as *Sanrakshan Ya Vinash* (Conservation or Destruction) and *Revive Our Dying Planet.*

For her lifelong contribution to Sarvodaya work, she was honored with the prestigious award from Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation (Mumbai) in 1979. She utilized the award money in publishing her work and in establishing Parvatiya Paryavaran Samrakshan Samiti (PPSS) or Mountain Environment Protection Committee at Dharamghar in Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand, a center that would cater to the protection of Himalayan environment[139]. As one who lived Gandhi's philosophy of non-possession to the letter, Sarala Behn donated all her personal belongings to the self-sufficiency of this organization, an indication of the importance she gave to the cause of the environment[140]. Additionally, she left her own share from her father's will for the service of women and their empowerment in Uttarakhand, in the name of *Iswar Premi Fund* (Fund for those who love God)[141].

Sarala Behn passed away on July 8, 1982 at Almora. Her legacy lies in her educational program that translated Gandhi's ideas into an evolved, transformative living practice of empowering women by instilling in them self-confidence, making them self-reliant with purpose and agency in shaping society. She served as an inspiring mentor to more than one generation of social activists in Uttarakhand. She believed in a small band of dedicated and active constructive workers who could live simply with the masses and become part of them and who could then act as prime movers of social change.

She did not have faith in expert-driven and centrally-managed organizations which tend to focus more on accomplished individuals than the common people. Thus, even when involved with social work institutions, "she kept her distance from seats of power" to drive home the message amongst her followers that it is

[137] Sarala Devi, *Sarvodaya – A Possible Synthesis Between the Quaker Witness and Communism*, Shobha Vidyarthi Private Collection.

[138] Sadan Mishra, "Pujya Sarala Behn ji ke punyatithi 8th July 2012 ko shraddhanjali ke do shabd" (A tribute to Sarala Behn on her death anniversary, 8th of July) (speech, Lakshmi Ashram Kausani, Almora, July 8, 2012).

[139] Vimla Bahuguna, *Manav Shilpi Behnji*, [Behnji, the crafter of people] in *Sarala Behn: smriti grantha*, cit., p. 76.

[140] Sri Sadan Prasad Mishra, *Sarala Behnji, Jitna Main Samjha*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 105.

[141] Shri Devi Puraskar, *Adbhut VyaktitvaBehnji*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha*, cit., p. 101.

people not "superior beings with special privileges" who can and do bring social change[142]. As her friend and co-worker, Trivedi remarked that her ideals were to offer selfless service, "without name and fame, without press and platform"[143]. Amongst the social workers she mentored, she strove to preserve diversity. Like a true educator, "[s]he wanted everyone to keep his/her individuality intact, [and] participate in a common programme only when convinced of its ideology and methodology"[144].

If not a daughter or a disciple of Gandhi, Sarala Behn can be correctly acclaimed as the "Mother of Sarvodaya activities in the hills of Uttarakhand," and "a teacher who teaches through action"[145]. As a mother, she took loving care of the poor, the sick, the oppressed, and the downtrodden. As a teacher, she created and nurtured a culture of holistic education that molded lives and one and that was, to borrow her words, "vyavaharik" or practical. Scottish author Bill Aitken, who lived and worked in Sarala Behn's ashram at Kausani, considered her as "one of those rare souls who understood that life was a privilege to be used. In an age when the state encroach[es] on the right of the individual, her life stands out like a lone banner ranged against the mass columns of convention"[146].

[142] Shri Devendra Kumar, *Sarala Behn – A Tribute To*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., pp. 197-198.

[143] Shantilal Trivedi, *Kuch Madhur Yaadein*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha*, cit., p. 174.

[144] Shri Devendra Kumar, *Sarala Behn – a tribute to*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p.198.

[145] Sunderlal Bahuguna, "Address by Shri Sunderlal Bahuguna on the occasion of the release of the book 'Revive Our Dying Planet', by Smt. Sarla Devi at NMNH, New Delhi on 12.1.1982", Sarala Behn Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

[146] Bill Aitken, *Sarala Behn: A Study in Self Respect*, in *Sarala Behn Smriti Grantha,* cit., p. 203.

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"The Other West": Gandhian Quaker, Marjorie Sykes (1905–1995)

by

Sharon M.H. MacDonald[*]

Abstract: Gandhi enjoyed the friendship and support of numerous members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), largely because they held similar views on a number of political, ethical and spiritual matters. Interestingly, several of Gandhi's female friends from the west, became Quakers while living in India. Marjorie Sykes, very young British born Cambridge graduate, arrived in India in 1928 to teach. She lived in India for over sixty years, fully endorsing Indian independence by becoming a citizen of her adopted country. Sykes did not have a religious upbringing but eventually became a member of the Religious Society of Friends. Within Quaker circles, she developed an international reputation for her peace work. Upholding Quaker testimonies or principles of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship, Sykes found in India, a spiritual home where she could carry out her life's work as an extraordinary teacher, peace activist, grass roots organizer, writer, editor and translator. Respected by Gandhi, Tagore and other leading figures in India, Sykes, as one memorialist wrote "played an important role in interpreting the East and the West to each other".

Introduction

In *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays*, Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph (2006: ix.) refer to such thinkers as Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin, Henry Thoreau and Edwin Arnold as "the other west". They profoundly influenced Gandhi's philosophical and moral development. In turn, Gandhi (who could be thought of as representing "the other east") had a huge influence on the American civil rights movement as well as peace and reconciliation movements globally. In this essay, I focus on one particular western woman, Marjorie Sykes[1]. Among

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[1] Marjorie Sykes is included in a collective biography of western women who supported Gandhi and Indian independence (Sharon M.H. MacDonald, 2010). The other women included Mary Chesley (Tarabehn), Anne Marie Petersen, Esther Faering, Mary Barr (Marybehn), Pearl Madden (Motibehn), Margaret Jones, Mary Ingham (Shantabehn), Mirabehn (Madeleine Slade), Saralabehn (Catherine Heilemann), Muriel Lester and Agatha Harrison.

 ISSN 1824 - 4483

western women who were closely attuned to Gandhi's mission, particularly as it pertained to his ideals regarding non-violence, education and village uplift, she holds a prominent position. Sharing much common ground with other like-minded women, she stands out in a number of ways, not least of which is the fact that she lived in India the longest. First arriving in India at the age of twenty-three, she made India her home for over sixty years. Her life spanned the greater part of the twentieth century and she is well remembered by many individuals still alive in India and elsewhere. Sykes lived an extraordinarily productive life as a teacher, social activist, writer, editor and translator. She served as a mentor to both Indians and westerners because of her integrity, intelligence and commitment to the non-violent revolution that Gandhi espoused. Like the other women, Sykes had already chosen a pacifist path and a materially simple lifestyle and had developed a philosophy that had strong similarities to Gandhi's own, long before the two met. Although her engagement in educational programs that Gandhi spearheaded largely occurred in the years after his death, Gandhi had recognized Sykes' abilities and asked her if she would come to Sevagram to teach the principles of his *Nai Talim* (Basic Education) program when she was free from other responsibilities. Sykes made this promise, but by the time she was able to commit herself to this work, Gandhi had died. Thus, the actual personal contact between Sykes and Gandhi was limited. Sykes had good friendships with several women close to Gandhi, and, through her Quaker connections and research into Quaker history in India (Marjorie Sykes, 1997), she knew something of those, like Mary Chesley, a Canadian Quaker friend of Gandhi, who died before an opportunity for the two women to meet presented itself. Sykes has been the subject of a biography and much of the following biographical information has been derived from this source (Martha Dart, 1993).

In this essay, I would argue that, rather than being mere camp followers, even before meeting Gandhi these women had already developed their own political and social ideas, which complemented Gandhi's philosophy and mission. Extending the term "the other west" to include these women, I would suggest that they played a part as interpreters, in bridging the gap in understanding between the east and west.

Early Experiences

Sykes' formative experiences growing up had parallels with other western women friends of Gandhi and some of these will be noted. Marjorie Sykes was born in a small coal-mining village in South Yorkshire in 1905, only fifty miles from the birthplace of Mary Barr, another woman in Gandhi's circle who eventually became one of Marjorie's close Quaker friends and a neighbour in later years. From an early age, Marjorie witnessed, yet was somewhat cushioned from, the debilitating effects of poverty. Her parents, both teachers, had grown up in relatively poor but not impoverished families. Sykes' father, as headmaster of a school in a poor district, did not have a large salary; nevertheless, Marjorie had an emotionally and intellectually rich childhood. Marjorie exhibited early signs of intelligence and creativity. Because of her father's position, the household received sample copies of children's books from publishers, so Marjorie had access to a

good library and learned to read at an early age. Her parents and inspiring teachers along the way would nourish this love of literature. As well as reading and play-acting with her siblings and playmates, Marjorie received an excellent practical education through both her parents. From her mother she learned to cook, bake and sew. Her father loved gardening and the natural world, so Marjorie had her own vegetable plot and, during long Sunday morning walks in fields and forests, her father introduced her to the flora and fauna of the area. Sykes did not have a church-going background. Her later spiritual development was likely nurtured by those Sundays with her father who shared with his children a deep reverence for all growing things. The skills that Sykes learned from her parents in an unforced and organic way would eventually stand her in good stead for the life she would choose in India (Sykes, 1990).

Sykes was only nine years old when World War One erupted. The first direct effect of the war was felt when a beloved teacher, who happened to be German, was forced to leave her position. Because Sykes' father had studied in Dresden in his early years and still had German friends, the family felt even more keenly the divisive and cruel nature of war (Dart, 1993). Sykes, as a young girl, may not have been able to articulate fully her reaction to war's irrational transformation of friends into enemies, but undoubtedly the groundwork was laid for her later pacifism. Sykes' experience also echoed the experiences of other women friends of Gandhi. Catherine Heilemann (Sarala Behn) directly felt the blow of discrimination when her father, though not even German, but of Swiss-German descent, was interned as an enemy alien (Sarala Behn, 2010). Madeleine Slade (Mira Behn) likewise saw the hatred with which ordinary Britons suddenly turned on innocent Germans because of war propaganda (Madeleine Slade, 1960). The Canadian Quaker, Mary Chesley, wrote letters home from Paris to her parents during the war expressing her dismay about such hateful attitudes (MacDonald, 2010). In the post-war period, both Slade and Chesley actively sought to counter hatred towards Germans – Slade through reintroducing German music and conductors to the London stage and Chesley through fundraising for German children who were victims of war.

Losing a favourite teacher was not the only loss Marjorie Sykes and her family would endure because of the war. Her father, in spite of his own distaste for war, eventually felt the pressure to volunteer for service. When he returned from duty, Marjorie had no recollection of the event. She had fallen ill in the huge influenza epidemic and, as a consequence, missed a fair portion of the school year. During her recovery the family made a move to a new town where her father took another job. At the time he was unable to settle back into teaching, although he would eventually return with renewed enthusiasm for his vocation. Nevertheless, the war's toll on the family continued to be felt for some time. Once Marjorie was safely on the mend, her mother's health broke down and, for a period of months, the teenaged Marjorie, the oldest child, took over the running of the household, caring for her younger siblings and doing all the chores.

This "apprenticeship" not only helped Marjorie to consolidate all those practical skills that she would put to use in India, but undoubtedly developed in her a sense of responsibility and the capacity to take charge. By the fall of 1919, Marjorie's

mother had recovered and Marjorie entered a new school with inspiring teachers. This experience must have been all the more appreciated after having given up her schooling during her mother's illness. She received an excellent grounding in literature and the religious education at the school also appealed to her. She attended the Cathedral in the town. Sykes would later reflect:

> I absorbed the lovely music of the ritual, and the magnificent prose cadences of the Book of Common Prayer…. In school some of the great passages of English poetry 'haunted me like a passion' in much the same way as did the prayers. There was no division between the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. I was being prepared to understand to some extent how other great religious poetry, such as the *Qur'an* or the *Vedas*, may have a 'meaning beyond meaning' for those whose roots are in the Islamic or Hindu culture (Dart, 1993).

Sykes' love of learning translated into excellent marks and she was fortunate to be coming of age at a time when educational opportunities in Britain were opening up for someone such as herself who did not come from a privileged background. After taking the Cambridge entrance exams, Sykes received not only a university scholarship but also grants from her local riding and the national government, which covered her fees and living expenses. Newnham College Cambridge offered Sykes a superior education in every sense of the word. Not satisfied with simply handling the courses mapped out by her tutor, Sykes attended many open lectures on subjects outside of her chosen areas of study (English and linguistics); she participated in some sports and also made friends with students from around the world. Sykes' own ideas about the futility of war, initially fostered by her father, were further developed at Cambridge under the inspiration of teachers whose own convictions about peace and social justice were influenced by the life and teachings of Jesus. It was during her time at Cambridge that Sykes developed her understanding of and commitment to the ideals of truth and non-violence. This conviction, based on the teachings of Christ would later be enriched by her contact with Gandhi and others in India.

Not surprisingly, most of the people Sykes met at Cambridge came out of a Church of England background. What is relevant is that the church leaders who had the most impact on Sykes were far more radical (and one might suggest "Quakerly") in their approach to questions of the spirit and their pacifist convictions than would normally be found within the established church. Sykes was not aware of the existence of the Religious Society of Friends (or Quakers) at this time. Interestingly, she would discover later that her four closest friends at college either joined or worked closely with the Society of Friends in subsequent years and engaged in reconciliation work and other forms of service, indicating at least two things – that the mentors at Cambridge made a profound impact on their students and that Sykes established her closest ties with like-spirited individuals. Years later, in India, Sykes would meet Jehangir Patel with whom she would co-author a book of reminiscences of Gandhi. Patel, it turned out, was also a student at Cambridge during the same period as Sykes, although they did not meet then. He, too, received a formative education at Cambridge that would prepare him to accept the challenges of Gandhi's "fight". As Patel and Sykes would recount in their book:

> 'This is my second university', Jehangir would sometimes say to Gandhi. 'It's a university of service, and I am happy that you should be its Chancellor. Cambridge and Sevagram go very well together'. As it happened, a considerable number of India's national leaders of that generation were Cambridge men; people used to comment that at certain stages of the struggle for independence meetings of an India 'Cambridge Society' might have been held, and well attended, in more than one of the government's jails. Certainly we both found the experiences in Cambridge and in Sevagram, far from being incompatible, complemented and enriched one another (Jehangir P. Patel and Marjorie Sykes, 1987).

As stimulating as Cambridge was, it was ultimately the example of her father that inspired Marjorie to become a teacher. On a holiday at home, she observed her father who, having returned to his original calling, provided an excellent model of how to be creative and joyous in one's approach to students and all subjects. Like Mary Barr and another friend of Gandhi, the Danish Anne Marie Petersen, Sykes was fortunate to have been exposed to an educational approach that was far more progressive than would have been the standard education curriculum and this informed their later teaching in India. In 1926 Sykes graduated with first class honours (English Tripos) from Cambridge and then remained at Cambridge to take teacher training.

Of the women referred to in this essay, Sykes shared the most in common with Chesley in regard to experiences in university. Although all the women had post-secondary education or had initiated their own course of personal studies, Chesley and Sykes both received university degrees before going on to take teacher training. They shared a passion for academic learning, nature, sports, spiritual seeking and pacifism. Chesley received her first degree and teacher training in Canada but went on to complete a second degree at the London School of Economics. She also spent time at the University of Oxford (MacDonald, 2010), meeting inspiring professors there who inculcated some of the same values as Sykes' mentors at Cambridge. Sykes and Chesley shared a love of literature and languages. Sykes' linguistic study at Cambridge exposed her to Anglo-Saxon, Greek, Latin, French, German, Danish and possibly Sanskrit. This training inevitably aided her in India, where she learned at least three Indian languages – Hindi, Bengali and Tamil. Chesley went to the Sorbonne to study French and also studied Esperanto, the language of "hope" for those who believed in international friendship. Whether Chesley knew any other languages is not known (her major at the London School Economics was political economy—it is unknown what courses she took at Oxford), but in her short time in India, she studied Hindi. Both women would become Quakers and both would garner the respect and admiration of Gandhi for their intellect, compassion and commitment to India. In spite of not knowing one another personally, they were linked through common friends, most obviously Mary Barr and Gandhi.

Upon completion of her coursework, Sykes let it be known to the friends she had made among international students and teachers during her time at the university that she would be interested in a possible overseas position. Before moving to India, Sykes had come into contact and made friends with international students, indicating, at the very least, openness to diverse cultures. This is another commonality she shared with western women in Gandhi's circle. In Mary Chesley's letters home while she was in university, she talked of her friendships

and conversations with international students. Catherine Heilemann also recounted her growing knowledge of Indian politics that she gained through friendships with Indian students in Britain.

Travel to India

After graduation Sykes taught for a year in England; however, when she received an invitation to take a position at a girls' school in Madras, she accepted and sailed to India in October 1928 (Dart, 1993). Upon arrival in Madras, Sykes was met by Alice Varley (later Barnes), the Principal of Bentinck School. Their association as colleagues would develop into an enduring friendship, terminated only by Barnes' death in 1968. From the beginning, they found common ground. The Student Christian Movement (SCM) had played an important formative role for both women during their university years. The SCM had a profound impact on the lives of many inquiring young people in North America as well. For example, it would be difficult to find committed social activists in Canada who entered university in the first half of the twentieth century who did not credit the SCM with providing the formative experiences that led them towards community service and social activism.

Alice Barnes belonged to the Madras International Fellowship and Marjorie also joined. Founded by an Indian Christian, the group included people of all religions as well as different political persuasions. Sykes first met Quakers through this group and it was through the Fellowship that she was introduced to Chakravarti Rajagopalachari (familiarly known by all as Rajaji or C.R.), a close friend of Gandhi and a leading light in the independence movement. Rajaji helped introduce Sykes to India, particularly from a political and public affairs perspective. His correspondence reveals a man of wit and warmth. Widowed in 1915, he never remarried. An outstanding intellect with a strong moral commitment to Gandhi's program of social service, Rajaji left a successful law practice as early as 1919 to dedicate himself to Gandhi's mission of village service (Rajmohan Gandhi, 1984). Gandhi and Rajaji became in-laws when their children married.

Even in his later political life as the Premier of Madras Presidency and in his role as last Governor General of India, Rajaji maintained a simple lifestyle. At the time that Sykes met Rajaji, he lived in an ashram with a group, including all castes, serving in nearby villages. His would be the first ashram that Sykes visited in India (Dart, 1993). In addition to Rajaji's tutelage on life in India, she was exposed to the political, social and educational currents through other Indian friends and colleagues.

Through Ted Barnes, a chemistry teacher at one of the colleges in Madras, Alice had begun attending a small Quaker group in the city and Marjorie also attended. Not surprisingly, given the kind of values upheld by Friends, Sykes found a spiritual home among Quakers and, when she went on her first furlough to Britain in 1936, she formally joined the Religious Society of Friends (Dart, 1993). Quakers were unconventional in many ways. They did not adhere to a creed, but they held certain principles, which they called testimonies concerning simplicity,

pacifism, integrity, community, equality and stewardship of the earth. An important aspect of Quaker life is putting into action one's belief in these principles. Consequently, Quakers historically have been at the forefront of social movements such as the abolishment of slavery, civil rights, women's equality, the peace movement and other causes for justice. It is notable that westerners in India who did not belong to the established church or have colonial attitudes with regard to Indian politics found themselves attracted to the Religious Society of Friends. While there are people born into established Quaker families, many join Quakers later in life. A significant number of Gandhi's western friends became Quakers and the others were often closely associated through friendships and organizational affiliations.

By the time Sykes joined Friends, she had been in India teaching for eight years. In 1930, her friend Alice Varley had married Ted Barnes. As was customary (or mandatory) for the times, Alice, once she became a married woman, gave up her position as Principal. The Indian teacher who took her position also married, so Sykes, still in her mid-twenties, became Principal. While in this position she made some dramatic changes in the educational approach. In the older grades, classes were still taught in English. However, the younger children learned in Tamil. Sykes invited Indian women actively engaged in Gandhi's non-cooperation movement to come to speak to the children in Tamil about their work. Such women, with their English schooling, had some discomfort with Sykes' request, fearing that their Tamil was not good enough; however, most agreed and, through their involvement in the school, exposed the youngest children to role models within their own culture. The school, open to children from all castes, encouraged the development of egalitarian principles. When, in 1937, Gandhi published an article in his journal, *Harijan*, describing his vision for education in India, Sykes immediately found resonance in his ideas. On her own, she had already implemented certain programs that echoed Gandhi's philosophy. This realization of common ground was timely for Sykes, for, by the mid-1930s in India, the climate, both political and social, had become more restrictive due to the British government's creation of separate electorates divided along religious lines. The cross-cultural, cross-denominational friendships that had flourished in such groups as the International Fellowship became more difficult. As well, the government increasingly took greater control of education.

Teaching and Translation at Santiniketan

Sykes, with her unconventional ideas felt the need for more independence. The possibility of an opening at Rabindranath Tagore's school at Santiniketan came up, so in 1938, during her Christmas vacation, Sykes travelled to Sevagram where she met Gandhi for the first time, then went on to Santiniketan, Tagore's international school. Warmly welcomed in both places, Sykes was impressed by the rapport both Gandhi and Tagore had with children. Tagore invited Sykes to join his staff. Santiniketan (originally developed by Tagore's father Devendranath Tagore in 1901) had expanded to the extent that it included an international university by the time Sykes joined the faculty in 1939. As a totally independent school with no

government involvement, Santiniketan had the freedom to create a curriculum without the usual constraints, which appealed to Sykes. The Friends Service Council in London funded her position, indicating the support that Quakers were willing to give not only to someone like Sykes but also to alternative institutions that creative Indians such as Tagore were building for the new India.

Sykes quickly became an integral part of a community that welcomed intellectual, cultural and religious diversity. C.F. Andrews, a former Anglican priest who had longstanding friendships with both Tagore and Gandhi – "known as the 'hyphen' between them" – moved back to Santineketan, the place he considered home (Dart, 1993). Sykes had met Andrews a few years earlier on a trip to Britain and in the short remaining time that he had to live, the two became close friends. When Andrews died in 1940, the relationship between Tagore and Sykes grew closer as he began to rely on her to translate his writings into English from Bengali, Sykes' most recently acquired language. Sykes translated several of Tagore's plays, his childhood reminiscences and other writings (Tagore, trans. Sykes, 1943, 1950). *My Boyhood Days*, Tagore's childhood memories have subsequently been translated into many Indian languages and continue to be reprinted.

Community Engagement

Sykes' productive and creative life at this time was not without its challenges and losses. While she was vacationing with Alice and Ted Barnes in May 1941, Ted became fatally ill with malaria and died within the month. After helping her friend Alice through this period, Sykes returned to Santiniketan to find Tagore in fragile condition. He died soon after. Months later Sykes' own health broke down while on holiday and she took a leave of absence from the school. While recuperating with her friend Alice Barnes, she began writing a book for children about the life of Tagore. Once she was on the mend, the Women's Christian College in Madras asked Sykes if she would fill in as an English teacher for a time. Because of restrictions on travel during the war, replacement teachers from Britain were not available. Santiniketan agreed to a temporary loan of Sykes to the college. Instead of living on campus, Sykes chose to live in one of the slums of the city. In her poor neighbourhood she initiated a nursery for the young children of working parents and put forward a proposal to the students in the college to help finance the nursery teacher's salary. This project, much expanded over time, has continued into the present day. It was during this period that Sykes took in a number of orphans, helping them both to get an education and then to establish themselves. One of the girls, Rani, became an adopted daughter.

Teaching was not the only preoccupation for Sykes during this period. On the international stage, World War Two presented a deeply disturbing development for pacifists like Sykes. With the Quit India Movement in full swing (Gandhi had declared Indian non-compliance with Britain), Sykes, along with her students, organized a committee so that they could carry out constructive work. As part of his national strategy Gandhi had encouraged a "Grow More Food" Campaign and Sykes, an experienced gardener, helped plan a vegetable garden with her students,

and, ever frugal, used bath water to irrigate it (Dart, 1993). Amidst the community work, the teaching and numerous other college responsibilities, undertaking Quaker business and keeping fellow pacifists in touch with one another for support, Sykes hosted the many people who came through her life (for a time sharing her house and veranda with several dozen neighbours who had lost their homes in a fire). She completed her children's book on Tagore and it was published in 1943 (Dart, 1993). Sykes also managed to fulfill requests for articles and book reviews from a number of journals and publishers. After two productive years in Madras, Sykes returned to Santiniketan, this time, to work on a biography of C.F. Andrews in collaboration with Benarsidas Chaturvedi, an Indian journalist who had been, along with C.F. Andrews and Gandhi, an anti-indenture activist in Fiji and South Africa (Sanjay Ramesh, 2004). In 1945, during the course of her research, she met with Gandhi to discuss Andrews' correspondence with him. When asked if she would come to Sevagram to help with the Basic Education program. Sykes agreed to consider it once she had completed her writing project. Research also took her to Britain where she made contact with family and friends of Andrews and collaborated with Agatha Harrison (another Quaker and friend of Gandhi), Andrews' literary executor. Sykes, Harrison and Barr, in particular, had close affiliations not only with Gandhi and Sevagram but also with Santiniketan and the Tagore family. This speaks to the Indian leaders' respect for these women. It also reflects the women's diverse and shared educational, political, social and artistic interests. Tagore, the poet and artist, integrated the performing and literary arts in his educational program. Gandhi had little time for or interest in aesthetics, and his educational approach was of a purely practical nature. Yet, even Mirabehn, who most closely identified with Gandhi's frugal, practical approach, had an artistic side. She liked to sketch and designed what would become Gandhi's house in Sevagram; the interior walls are decorated with her simple but elegant relief work. Once, in a conversation with Gandhi, Agatha Harrison, who loved flowers, asked him why he did not include beauty amidst the practical. Gandhi found it difficult to understand why people could not see, and be satisfied with, the beauty of vegetables. For him, if one could not eat a plant or produce something useful from it, the time spent on cultivating it was a waste. His spiritual path was one of asceticism. For Tagore, beauty and artistic creativity were essential for spiritual wellbeing. The women referred to in this essay, though so closely allied with Gandhi, embraced both the ascetic and the artistic – another indication of their independence of thought[2].

[2] An amusing example of Gandhi's diversion from the strictly practical is evident in Sarojini Naidu's letter to her son when she, Gandhi and others were in prison. Naidu, India's famous poet (referred to as "The Nightingale") and known for her irreverent wit, called Gandhi by the nickname of Mickey Mouse because of his big ears. Absolutely devoted to the cause, she nevertheless did not feel compelled to wear *khadi* or adhere to Gandhi's austere regime. Gandhi, taking advantage of Mirabehn's artistic talents, allowed his imagination to stray from more serious matters for the diversion of his good friend Naidu. The following excerpt was written on her birthday, 14 February 1943: "Would you believe it that lying so exhausted and helpless in his bed, [Gandhi's] puckish humour devised an amusing birthday gift for me—the model of a *good* Sarojini Devi (or Amma Jan as he calls me)…lying on a couch obedient to medical orders as distinct from the bad Amma Jan, who flouts all physicians and refuses to lie down. It is very crude but cleverly executed by Miraben,

Work at Sevagram

It was not until 1949 that Sykes was able to fulfill her promise to Gandhi that she would go to Sevagram. In the early post–Independence days, she returned to Madras to be with her daughter in the months leading up to Rani's entrance into a nursing training program. There she worked as the Librarian at the Women's Christian College. Because she had been domiciled in India for so many years, she had no trouble gaining citizenship in the new independent nation. Once her daughter entered nursing school, Sykes felt free to honour Gandhi's earlier request, although he was no longer alive, having been assassinated in January 1948.

Marjorie Sykes spent ten years at Sevagram, training teachers for Gandhi's *Nai Talim* program. Such training involved learning every possible skill that would be needed in a village setting. In a letter to friends, Sykes' description of the training paints a vivid picture of the expectations for both teachers and students in Gandhi's ideal community:

> Every year a new class of students is put down here, away from towns with their piped water and municipal lighting and sanitation, in a settlement in the middle of village India… We say to them, 'Here you are…Grow your own food, pick your cotton, spin yarn and weave your clothes, plan and care for your own sanitary system, keep your surroundings clean and hygienic and your buildings in repair. Tackle each of these jobs as intelligently and scientifically as you can; find out what sort of knowledge and skill you need to do them efficiently, and find out how you can get it. When you have re-educated yourself in REAL knowledge by these means, you will be ready to do your bit in the education of the nation. We teachers spend our days alongside the students in the field and kitchen and workshops, helping them with the technique, with the organisation, with the recording, analysis and study of their daily chores and with the machinery of responsible self-government that goes with it all…Side by side with the teachers' training school… is the… school community, where growing children are being educated by these methods of self-reliance and intelligent work. The two communities help each other and pool their resources for emergencies and special needs (like harvesting). But there are never enough workers here for all there is to do; there are constant calls on us to help the new 'basic national' schools and training centres in other parts of the country…The days are not long enough for all there is to do-we fall asleep before we have finished. But if you believe, as I do, that Gandhiji was fundamentally right in what he declared to be necessary for human welfare, it is absorbingly interesting and worthwhile (Dart, 1993).

Sykes had many other responsibilities and injected her own creative ideas to keep children engaged in what might have otherwise been considered dreary work. Undoubtedly her experience and observation as a child with parents who seemed to

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according to the Fasting Man's sudden design!!". Sarojini Naidu, *Selected Letters 1890s to 1940s*, ed. Makarant Paranjape, Kali for Women, New Delhi 1996, p. 307.

seamlessly combine practical work with joyful play and exploration helped Sykes to develop a similar teaching model. In addition to the work at Sevagram, Sykes travelled to basic education schools around the country, helped organize both national and international conferences (the World Pacifist Conference in 1949 held its meetings in Sevagram and Santineketan), hosted a constant stream of visitors interested in observing the *Nai Talim* program in action, addressed Quaker concerns and, when Vinoba Bhave began his Bhoodan Movement, Sykes and her students and teachers took part in *padyatras* (journeys on foot with a purpose) to the villages in the district. The Bhoodan or Land Gift movement was one in which wealthy landowners were asked to voluntarily give over a portion of their land to the landless. In the mid-1950s, Sykes spent some months away from teaching in order to write about Basic Education and translate from French into English a book by Lanza del Vasto on the Bhoodan Movement. Lanza del Vasto, a Sicilian Christian living in France, visited Gandhi at Wardha and became committed to non-violence and started an organization, Action Civique Non-Violent in the 1950s (Hardiman, 2003). For a period of months Sykes also split her time between Sevagram and the Friends Rural Centre in Rasulia when a staffing crisis arose. Once Vinoba Bhave resurrected Gandhi's idea of a *Shanti Sena* – a "Peace Army" which was intended to train volunteers to carry out non-violent peace keeping, Sykes became involved in this development.

Kotagiri and Beyond–Mentoring Youth, Peace Keeping and Food Security

As her decade at Sevagram drew to a close, Sykes contemplated her next step. She wished to organize non-violence training, but on a smaller more intimate scale than at Sevagram. She moved to Kotagiri in the Nilgiri Hills of Southern India. Her friend Alice Barnes was already living there. Mary Barr also retired to Kotagiri. Living in a terraced valley to which one could walk, not drive, down a steep slope to get to the house, Sykes conducted training camps for groups of seven or eight students who would live, work and study with her. Like the life at Sevagram, each person was expected to participate on every level and the days were full. Sometimes, between training groups, Sykes herself engaged in peacekeeping work. In 1962, she went to the North East Frontier during a border dispute between India and China. In 1964, the North American Regional Council of the World Peace Brigade asked the *Shanti Sena* to send someone to help train peace workers in the United States and Canada. Marjorie was chosen by the group to go. She worked with both white and African-American students and her overall impression was that the African Americans were far more disciplined because of their civil rights training, which had been greatly influenced by Gandhi's approach to civil disobedience.

Sykes had no sooner returned home to India, than Jayaprakash Narayan (widely known as J.P.), a leading Gandhian and *Shanti Sena* organizer, asked her to go to Nagaland on a peace mission. When the British lightly controlled Nagaland, which borders on Burma (Myanmar), American missionaries had converted many Nagas to Christianity. Culturally and ethnically, Nagas are more similar to groups in Southeast Asia than to those Indians living on the Indian plains. Because of cultural and religious differences, Nagas had hoped for full autonomy after 1947. Disputes broke out between Naga guerillas and Indian forces. The Nagas themselves wished

for a peaceful resolution and a cease-fire was made possible through the efforts of J.P. and other Gandhians (Dart, 1993). Sykes became a core member of an Observers Team that mediated disputes between the two sides. The work, both physically and mentally challenging at all times, suited Sykes. One can only imagine that she had remarkable stamina as well as tact, for she gained the trust of the Nagas *and* the Indian troops. Sykes would have stayed longer than three years had she not been drawn back to the Nilgiri Hills because of her older friend Alice Barnes' failing health. Within the next couple of years Marjorie lost not only her two closest friends in Kotagiri, Alice Barnes and Mary Barr (Christine Easwaran, 2007), but also her adopted daughter, Rani, who died of cancer at the age of 36.

Sykes' mediation work between opposing forces is mirrored in the work of the majority of the western women who were friends with Gandhi. Mary Barr, Agatha Harrison, Margaret Jones, Mirabehn, Saralabehn and Muriel Lester all participated in negotiations and peace-making efforts in war zones. Chesley, though she did not have an opportunity to participate directly in such work, publicly proclaimed the message of peace and reconciliation during a time when such ideas were largely unpopular. Courage through conviction distinguished these women. Most of this dangerous work was carried out quite apart from Gandhi, and, in a number of cases, well after his death. Gandhi, where involved (in the case of Margaret Jones and Agatha Harrison, for example), requested their participation because of his trust in their abilities. Gandhi had a genius for friendship; he could be friendly with almost anyone. However, the people he relied on had to be trustworthy, intelligent, hard-working and totally committed to non-violent change. The work that these women carried out during their lifetimes provides ample evidence that they were leaders and initiators in their own right, rather than mere camp followers of Mahatma Gandhi.

In spite of losing those closest to her, Sykes continued to keep her base in Kotagiri for some years to come. After Mary Barr's death, she took on the editorship of *The Friendly Way*, the Quaker newsletter for India. Now in her mid-sixties, Sykes would remain extremely active for more than another two decades, engaged in gardening, studying, writing, editing, translating and teaching workshops to the many young people who sought her out and lived with her for a time in order to learn more about non-violent mediation and environmentally sustainable living. Her international reputation among peace activists, Quakers and those interested in Gandhi, Tagore and C.F. Andrews meant that she was invited to give workshops and lectures and share her experiences in countries across the globe. Because she had engaged in work with tribal peoples in the Nilgiri Hills (H.N. Kalla Gowder, 2003), Sykes had a particular interest in investigating the conditions of indigenous peoples in the countries that she visited. In 1979, when she returned to India after various research and lecturing stints abroad (she also served as Friend in Residence for several months at Pendle Hill, a Quaker retreat near Philadelphia), Sykes took up an invitation from the Friends' Rural Centre at Rasulia to join them in their experiment in 'natural farming' (Masanobu Fukuoka, 1978, 1990). Pratap Aggarwal, who had been a volunteer at Rasulia years earlier, had become the Centre's coordinator and was instrumental in pushing forward this work.

In the early 1960s, many countries around the world took up what became known as the "Green Revolution" in which increases in food production were brought about by the introduction of new seed varieties, chemical fertilizers and

pesticides. Initially there were remarkable results in terms of crop yields; however, Sykes and her Indian coworkers (as well as Mirabehn and Saralabehn) recognized early on that large-scale agricultural practices were neither environmentally sustainable nor a way to eradicate hunger among the poor. While India's food yields went up, the poorest people continued to suffer because the concentration of land remained in the hands of the wealthy and the poor could not afford to buy the produce. Higher food production has not lessened world hunger and, according to Peter Rosset, an agricultural ecologist for the Institute for Food and Development Policy, by the mid-1980s, green revolution practices were proving to be environmentally destructive and non-sustainable (Peter Rosset, Joseph Collins and Frances Moore Lappé, 2000; Vandana Shiva, 1993).

Sykes stood solidly with Gandhi and others of like mind who believed that small-scale local cultivation would be the only guarantee of food security for the poorest. The project at Rasulia, initially considered retrograde, eventually gained greater respect as the negative impacts of the green revolution became apparent. However, after Aggarwal left Rasulia in early 1988, the Governing Board of the Centre hired a more conservative coordinator. The most creative of the young workers at Rasulia found the atmosphere too restrictive and left to begin their own experiment (Lorry Benjamin, 2003). Sykes stayed on briefly to help the community, but left later that year when invited to take a position as Friend in Residence at Woodbrooke College, a Quaker Centre in England. By now in her eighties and in frail physical health, Sykes nevertheless continued to give talks and write. She worked on her history of Quakers in India; at the request of Indians, she translated more of Vinoba Bhave's writings from Hindi into English (Bhave, trans. Sykes and K.S. Aharlu, 1977; Bhave, trans. Sykes, 1994). In 1990, she had come across Quaker Geoffrey Maw's notes in a British library on his earlier experiences in India and decided to bring his work to the public (Geoffrey Maw, ed. Sykes, 1991). In her remaining years, Sykes returned to India briefly, but, due to serious illness, was taken back to England. She died in 1995 before completing her history of Quakers in India, but it was published posthumously (Sykes, ed. Geoffrey Carnall, 1997). After Sykes' death, her executors wrote to those whose addresses were contained in Marjorie Sykes' address book and, with the many tributes that poured in, published a memorial booklet with quotations from these letters (comp. Barbara Bowman, Julian Brotherton and N. Ramamurthy, 1996). The tributes are a testimony to Sykes' profound impact on so many lives. Among the many tributes from India, one sees how deeply she was integrated into Indian society. "She became the Indian of the Indians", wrote Dayal S. Gour. Representatives of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in India wrote, "She played an important role in interpreting the East and the West to each other". Sykes' wish to return "home" to India was not fulfilled while she lived. Her ashes, however, were taken to India for immersion in the Narmada River.

The Other West

Perhaps of all the western women who were close to Gandhi, Sykes most readily moved between east and west, culturally, spiritually and linguistically.

Because of her physical traits, she was sometimes mistaken for Indian. In many senses, she might be called a "Renaissance" woman for her diversity of talents. Not unlike Gandhi, Sykes displayed a rare combination of remarkable self-discipline and flexibility that enabled her to focus on tasks and accomplish so much yet still remain open to constant change. Not as extreme as Gandhi (for example, with regard to sexual relations, Sykes once wrote "I think this is one of the places where I most basically part company with Gandhi") (Dart, 1999). In spite of the fact that Sykes and the other western women friends of Gandhi were single, celibate women, they were not prudish. In some cases, they were remarkably open-minded and some had close friendships with men who were known to be homosexual. While seldom in the spotlight, Sykes nevertheless had her own charisma, based on a powerful intellect, an engaging personality and a rigorous ethical foundation. Like Gandhi, in spite of her capacity for great warmth, humour and compassion, she also had outbursts of hot temper in situations where she detected dishonesty, greed or exploitation (Bowman et al, 1999). Frugal, like Gandhi, in her paring down personal needs to a minimum, she did not necessarily expect everyone to have the same standard, but in certain situations could not abide unthinking waste. As she aged, she gained recognition for her spiritual wisdom, and her Quaker faith must have seemed as solid and ancient as the rock of ages to her younger students and admirers. Yet, like everything else in her life, Sykes achieved this strength of spirit through continuous work, study and experience. A letter written in 1949 to Horace Alexander, one of Gandhi's British Quaker friends and a member of the India Conciliation Group, is revealing in a number of respects. Alexander and Sykes were part of a group who were trying to establish an interdenominational friendship organization in post-Independence India. Alexander had sent a draft of the proposal to Marjorie for advice, both editorial and content-wise. Sykes ended her comments with a frank personal disclosure about her "faith":

> Quite apart however from my doubts of the organisational side, it is a source of embarrassment to me and of potential embarrassment to others to be named as a kind of stable pillar of any religious organisation wherever. No matter how non-intellectual and undogmatic we [Quakers] may be, that implies some stable faith which I do not think I can claim to possess. It seems that I am fundamentally agnostic, and my code such as it is essentially pragmatic though not perhaps quite crudely and selfishly so. I have had only the dimmest glimpse of the experiences to which the mystic bears witness; and I am bound to ask myself whether even that dim glimpse is susceptible to another explanation. In fact I am first a 'seeker', a questioner. It is this knowledge of my own position which made the situation in Madras so intolerable, when it seemed that true Quaker experience and understanding was failing, and the Meeting dying for lack of it, and I knew I (the 'official' Quaker) could not supply the experience. And I also knew that if I attended Meetings the temptation to act a part as though I felt what I was expected to feel, would be very strong (Letter to Alexander, 1949).

Based on later writings, it would seem that Sykes grew into a deeper, more assured faith than she had at the time of writing this letter. What her words reveal is the importance she attached to truthfulness and that she understood the temptation she might have to act a part that would be less than honest. They also indicate that Sykes did not profess a blind allegiance to any religious group, even one as "undogmatic" as Quakers. As a seeker or questioner, she studied all traditions. Her knowledge of and appreciation for Hindu, Buddhist, Hebrew and

Muslim texts is apparent in her writings and to some extent, Sykes' philosophical and intellectual outlook was a synthesis of the wisdom from all the great religions.

Sykes, who did not have an implicitly religious family upbringing, grew into her faith over the course of a lifetime. She had the opportunity through her school years of being exposed to conscientious Christians who made their mark on her thinking. In India, her contact with people of all faiths enriched her journey as a "seeker" but ultimately, she found herself most at home within the Religious Society of Friends. Like Gandhi, Quakers did not separate the practical aspects of living from intellectual, political, ethical and spiritual considerations. Sykes lived holistically, transforming words and ideas into action. Like Gandhi, she gave as much weight to the necessary "menial" jobs as she did to intellectual pursuits. The fact that Gandhi and Tagore, two of India's most influential figures of the twentieth century and men of ideas and action, recognized Sykes' multifaceted gifts and invited her to teach in their respective institutions speaks volumes. Other leading independence figures such as Vinoba Bhave, Jayaprakash Narayan and Rajagopalachari also deeply respected and called upon Sykes' skills and wisdom. That Sykes is still well remembered is evidenced by an article published in a major Indian newspaper on the centenary of her birthday, which paid tribute to her life and contributions to Indian society (Rengarajan, 2005). A news article on the unjust imprisonment of a brilliant doctor, Dr. Binayak Sen, who has given more than thirty years of humanitarian medical service to the tribal poor in Chhattisgarh, also made reference to Sykes. "As a young man [Sen] – star pupil with the world at his feet – he had turned his back on the many rich career options before him to take a job at a rural medical centre in Hoshangabad run by Quakers, where he was greatly influenced by Marjorie Sykes". (Shoma Chaudhury, 2008). This article not only brings out the fact of Sykes' influence in helping Dr. Sen choose to direct his skills to the most disadvantaged, it also shows that in modern-day India, there are still heroic figures who risk everything in order to live the simple, honest life of service that Gandhi and the women from the "other west" believed could transform society.

In her writings, time and again, Sykes referred to non-violent revolution or revolutionary change. Many people believed that Gandhi and his co-workers were against modernization and wished to turn their backs on all "progress". Sykes disagreed. In an article that addressed the principles of the *Nai Talim* system of education, she discussed a number of key principles and beliefs that she shared with Gandhi (Marjorie Sykes, 1955). Countering the idea that Gandhi wanted to "set the clock back," Sykes stressed the revolutionary nature of the *Nai Talim* system. Gandhi maintained that in order for a human being to become mature and whole, "two things are needed, love and work." Describing the importance of family and community life for the developing child, Sykes suggested that the decline of family life and the disappearance of small communities "bound together by a common economic life and the provision of mutual services", particularly in the west, "denies the little child so many of the experiences and satisfactions which he needs". A school using the Basic Education system "is an attempt to build up a purposeful, organic community." *Nai Talim* operated on the idea that hard work provided children with "the satisfaction of achieving physical endurance and skill"

and that "many of the so-called labor-saving devices of Western civilization deprive students of the chance to take pride in their prowess". Another aspect of the training was to instill in the children a respect for all of creation, not only humans but also plants and animals and that the earth should not be exploited.

"Simplicity of living is both a deliberately chosen method and a goal of the work". Apart from the idea that simple living can be motivated by a desire to be socially responsible, in the eyes of Gandhi, as well as Quakers, voluntary simplicity could be considered "good *in itself*, conducive to the true development and real happiness" of human beings. It was believed that an education in simplicity would lead to personal, social and international peace. Sykes made a final point on the educational philosophy and one that made particular sense in a country that had millions who lived in poverty:

> Closely related to simplicity is the willing and wholehearted acceptance of the limitations of circumstance. True education does not consist of wandering more widely but in pondering more deeply. If the school provides its students with experiences that touch the basic needs of life, the kind of experiences which arise naturally in an intimate community engaged in cooperative enterprises like those described, it makes possible…the highest development of mind and spirit. The restless urge to see more places and read more books can only in itself, result in the amassing of information; the development of a mature personality, the true goal of education, needs the leisure and relaxation of mind that comes with simplicity and contentment. This is not a call to go back; it is a call to go forward. The hard work it demands is not drudgery, but intelligent and purposeful labor… The craftsmanship it encourages is not primitive crudity, but the release of a truly creative energy of mind. The simplicity it upholds does not belong to the Dark Ages; it is the fruit of the wisdom of the most enlightened of mankind. The enlightened choose a so-called 'poverty,' not because they must, but because they may. The mature mind and spirit made a free conscious choice of simplicity of outward circumstances, because such is the nature of man that only through simplicity can the individual find himself aright, and the well-being of society be assured. Will India and the world listen? If not, and if our modern 'progress' as it well may, destroys itself, the tiny communities of the 'New Education' may be among the seeds from which a new and saner civilization will grow (Sykes, 1955).

Sykes firmly believed and lived this philosophy. No mere armchair philosopher, she spent her ninety years bringing such ideas into practical application. Sykes and other women friends of Gandhi chose so-called 'poverty', yet they lived rich lives, simply, courageously and with integrity. Eschewing western privilege, Sykes and the others were an extraordinary collective of modern, independent women who shared much in common with one another and with Gandhi, yet each one found her own way to express and put into action common goals. It is no mere coincidence that the women were teachers (whether with formal training in education or not), with a love of learning and a desire to share that love with others. Whether consciously or not, each woman must have understood that knowledge meant power. Higher learning had given them the power to choose unusual life paths. Through teaching, Sykes and her cohort opened the key to learning for those who, otherwise, might not have had such opportunities. Combining down-to-earth practicality with intellectual curiosity and love of nature, they individually and collectively deserve to hold a place in the history of India's movement for social and political change.

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Ellen Hørup and Other Gandhian Women in Denmark

by

Holger Terp[*]

Abstract: This paper summarizes a life-long archive research on Ellen Hørup, and the other Gandhians Anne Marie Petersen and Esther Faering, three extraordinary Danish women who got in touch with Gandhi, and were involved in social work, and peace-keeping. Until 1921, Mohandas Gandhi and the Indian non-violent struggle for freedom in South Africa and in India was unknown in Scandinavia, except – as we shall learn – for a little group of Danish missionaries in India and their friends back home – especially Anne Marie Petersen and Esther Faering. Ellen Hørup's first work was on Gandhi and his non-violent struggle against British imperialism in India.

My interest in Ellen Hørup started in the mid-1980s with the findings of a few of her chronicle collections from the time of World War II. Initially, I was amazed at her subjects, analyses and interpretations of contemporary politics. They were very human. Active humanism in a time of reaction and wars on the agenda, even though, with the League of Nations and in international politics, efforts were taking place in a different direction, especially in the first ten years of the League.

I continued my research and read about her in the Danish Biographical Lexicon. Then there were visits and studies in the Royal Library's catalogue rooms and to Ellen Hørup's large private archive in the National Archives. Viggo Hørup's wife Emma had adopted a Wiener child and I managed to find this man's son. We became good friends. He still had big part of Ellen Hørup's archive in the loft in the apartment Ellen Hørup lived in when she was in Denmark. I bought them from him, with the intention of writing her biography. All my Ellen Hørup archives, 33 box files, have been submitted to the Women's History Collection. They are in the

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 ISSN 1824 - 4483

National Archives of Denmark now. The Ellen Hørup diaries were handed over to the Danish Royal Library.

With Ellen Hørup, Gandhi and the other personalities mentioned in this paper, such as Anne Marie Petersen, and Esther Faering, appeared in the aftermath. A large part of my old books and journals about Gandhi originate from Ellen Hørup[1].

Ultimately Ellen Hørup decided to move to Italy, where she financially helped some of Mussolini's opponents and wrote about the war crimes trials in Italy. Unfortunately, I do not know much about her in this period of her life. This paper summarizes a life-long research on Ellen Hørup, and the other Gandhians, Anne Marie Petersen and Esther Faering, three extraordinary Danish women who got in touch with Gandhi, and were involved in social work, and peace-keeping. Besides, this writing would be a possible input, hoping for a possible new research on Hørup's work in Italy.

Gandhi and Denmark

Until 1921, Mohandas Gandhi and the Indian non-violent struggle for freedom in South Africa and in India was unknown in Scandinavia, except – as we shall learn – for a little group of Danish missionaries in India and their friends back home.

The first article about Gandhi appeared in Danish newspapers on August 25, 1921: "There is a revolt against the English in India. The revolt is led by Gandhi"[2], the readers learned. A pacifist corrective to the newspaper articles came in the next number of the magazine of the Danish chapter of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. A five-page article by the Ceylon-born Reverend Ariam Williams – "Gandhi-Bevægelsen og dens Principper"[3] – introduced Gandhi and his policy of non-violence to the members of the peace movement. Within a few years all who wanted to know about the development of the political situation in India could read about it in the news and in the writings of Gandhi himself.

However, it was another person who sparked the interest of the Scandinavians for the Indian scene. In 1913 the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature and a few of his books were published in Danish. In May 1921 he was on a much-publicized visit in Denmark where he told the press about

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[2] Victor Elbrling, *Danmark under Verdenskrigen og i Efterkrigstiden*, p. 195.

[3] Freds-Varden,1921, pp. 61-68.

Gandhi. At the same time the Danish missionary Esther Faering[4] wrote an article about Tagore's school[5].

The breakthrough came with the publication of the French writer Romain Rolland's biography of Gandhi in 1924, together with an anthology of articles from Gandhi's magazine "Young India". Rolland linked the philosophy of Gandhi to anti-imperialism and to a hope for a future of unity and cooperation. In the late twenties the first meetings about Gandhi and non-violence were held in Copenhagen. The snowball started rolling and grew much bigger when the journalist Ellen Hørup established the Friends of India Society in Copenhagen in October 1930. She also established the first monthly magazine devoted fully to Mahatma Gandhi outside South Africa and India.

Until about 1920, Gandhi was little known outside India, South Africa and Britain. Probably the only book about Gandhi, published outside India, was a biography *Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa* by Rev. Joseph J. Doke, published in London in 1909, with a foreword by Lord Ampthill. In fact, Gandhi carried the manuscript to London and the publication was intended to secure understanding and support for the struggle of the Indians in South Africa against oppression.

In London, there were also news reports about the Indian struggle in South Africa, then a British colony, and Gandhi's two visits to London on behalf of the Indian community. An article by Professor Gilbert Murray in "Hibberts Journal" (January 1918) attracted some attention, especially from pacifists. Another early Gandhi biography was written by Henriëtte (van der Schalk) Roland Holst: *De Revolutionaire Massa-Aktie*, Een Studie, Rotterdam 1918[6].

Gandhi became a leader of the national movement in India by 1919, but the strict British censorship prevented news of the movement from reaching other countries. In Denmark, however, Gandhi received some early publicity because of a few liberal Danish missionaries who admired him – especially John Bittmann, Anne Marie Petersen and Esther Faering.

Anne Marie Petersen (1878-1951)

Anne Marie Peterson life is best summarized in the Tine Elisabeth Larsen's book Anne Marie Petersen: a Danish woman in South India – A Missionary story 1909-1951[7] and in Holger Terp – Enuga S. Reddy (eds.), Friends of Gandhi. Correspondence of Mahatma Gandhi with Esther Faering (Menon), Anne Marie

[4] See the paragraph "Esther Faering".

[5] "Højskolebladet", Kolding, 1921, n. 46, columns n. 665-668 and 691-695.

[6] *Schalk, Henriette Goverdine Anna van derat*, Biografisch Woordenboek van het Socialisme end de Arbeidersbewerging in Nederland, at: https://socialhistory.org/bwsa/biografie/schalk .

[7] Tine Elisabeth Larsen, *Anne Marie Petersen: a Danish woman in South India – A Missionary story 1909-1951*, Lutheran Heritage Archives, Gurukul 2000.

Petersen, and Ellen Hørup, Danish Peace Academy, Copenhagen 2006[8]. She was born on August 1, 1878. She was a teacher and a missionary. She attended the first women's high school in Denmark, Frederiksborg Folk High School, in 1896. In 1900 she graduated from Vejle Forskoleseminarium as a teacher. She came to India in December 1909 to join the mission of Eduard Løventhal (1841-1917). Early she wanted to establish her own national Christian ashram and school for Indian children and women. She became a member of the Danish Missionary Society in India in November 1912.

During World War I, she took over the oversight of two Danish missionary educational programmes. On a research journey around the country collecting information about Indian Schools, where Miss Faering worked as her assistant, they met Gandhi for the first time on January 6, 1917. Miss Petersen became attached to Gandhi, who wrote many letters to her[9].

She returned to Denmark on vacation from June 1917 to August 1919. After the death of Edvard Løventhal in 1917, she took over and continued his mission. In August 1920 Miss Petersen participated in a meeting at Vellore, where Gandhi was the main speaker. Anne Marie Petersen wrote in Højskolebladet:

> I hoped to be able to hide in one of the fringes in the crowd, but it turned out to be impossible. My peculiar figure caught the eye of one of the leaders, a white woman wearing an Indian dress, and whether I liked it or not, I had to take one of the chairs near the platform. I felt very strange as the only woman and only European in this large crowd of people. And he – the great – worshipped like a saint in India – put both his hands to his forehead and greeted me […]. The leaders standing by stared at me with wonder. I was so embarrassed that I did not know where to hide. But Gandhi waved at me: "Come over here Miss Petersen." "No, no!" I said with a deprecating gesture. But the people standing close to me whispered: "Gandhi wants it, Gandhi wants it". So, there was no excuse. I had to climb the platform. And there in front of the gazing crowd, he took both my hands in his and said: "I am so happy to see you"[10].

Dissatisfied with Mission's policy on equal rights and its policy towards her school, she left the Danish Mission, and founded an ashram – and a school for poor women and girls (The Christian National Girls' School) – on September 17, 1921 at Porto Novo / the Indo-Danish Mission, also named *Sevamandir* (temple of service). Her Danish support group was led by Reverend P. Reimann (1848-1928).

Gandhi visited Porto Novo on September 17-18, 1921, and stayed that night at Petersen's home[11]. Later, Gandhi and Anne Marie Petersen met often. She visited Gandhi on December 30, 1921[12]. After a pilgrimage to the mountains of Himalaya during 1922, Petersen introduced Sundar Singh to Gandhi at Sabarmathi Ashram,

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[8] Further bibliographic information could be found here: http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/nordic/annebib.htm#notes ; while, *Friends of Gandhi* is available here: http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/nordic/friends.pdf.

[9] See *Friends of Gandhi*, cit.

[10] "Højskolebladet", Kolding, 1920, columns 1383-1384; Tine Elisabeth Larsen, *Anne Marie Petersen: a Danish woman* cit., p. 75.

[11] "The Hindu", January 23, 1924, p. 14. Quoted from: Bent Smidt Hansen, *Dependency and Identity / Afhaengighed og identitet: Problems of Cultural Encounter as a consequence of the Danish Mission in South India between World Wars I and II*, (thesis), Aarhus University Press 1992, p. 82.

[12] Bent Smidt Hansen, *Dependency and Identity*, cit., p. 203.

near Ahmedabad. She called on Gandhi in Yeravda jail on April 1, 1923. In 1924 she met Gandhi together with Esther Faering (Menon)[13], and before she returned to Denmark on holiday in June, 1926. When Anne Marie Petersen wanted to return to India in November 1927, she couldn't get a visa. Mrs. Petersen travelled through the continent to Armenia, where she met the Danish Missionary-teacher Karen Jeppe[14]. On December 8, Anne Marie Petersen was back in India, just in time to the yearly meeting of the Indian Congress Party at Madras. On December 16, 1928 Ellen Hørup and Cathinca Olsen[15] came to Porto Novo. Before Gandhi was arrested at the National Congress Party's meeting in Madras, on January 4, 1932, Anne Marie Petersen met Gandhi twice. Around November 1, 1933 Anne and Gandhi met at Gandhi's Sevagram Ashram, where Mrs. Petersen wanted to encounter C. F. Andrews. In January 1945 they met at a pedagogical conference at Sevagram and the year after they met at the National Congress Party's 60-year jubilee. Petersen assisted at one of the working sessions of the Congress.

In 1936-1937 Anne Marie Petersen was in Denmark. For the second time the British authorities refused her visa to India in December 1937. Nevertheless, during World War II, Anne Marie Petersen was able return to India. Her support group continued to collect money for her and the school, but Mrs. Petersen could not receive the funds before October 1945. Even though she did get a little money from Americans, Seva Mandir was falling into decay and Anne Marie Petersen was tired of waiting for the war to end.

On June 23, 1946 Anne Marie Petersen returned to Denmark on a holiday which lasted until December 1947. On August 15, 1947 Mother India was liberated. As a part of the liberation there came freedom of religion, but not for the Christian missionaries. All of them, including Anne Marie Petersen, had to report to the authorities once a month, and if they were taking a journey this also was to be reported to the police. Anne died in India January 9, 1951. "The Harijan" wrote: "There was a peculiar spiritual understanding between herself and Gandhi, who used to call her, "My Annie Marie". To the end she remained a devote admirer and follower of Gandhi and she belongs to the blessed groups of foreign friends who served India in complete harmony"[16].

[13] See paragraph on Esther Faering (Menon).

[14] Danish missionary and social worker, known for her aid given to Ottoman Armenian refugees and survivals of the Armenian Genocide. About Karen Jeppe and for further bibliographic information, see: Eva Lotus, *Karen Jeppe: Denmark's First Peace Philosopher*, The Danish Peace Academy, 2003, available at: http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/ukjeppe.htm.

[15] Cathinca Olsen was born in Copenhagen, Denmark August 3, 1868 (d. 1947). Ceramist, painter and designer. She travelled to India with Mrs. Hørup and met Gandhi. Active in the Friends of India 1930-1939, a brief biographical note is available here: http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/nordic/bionotes.htm#Olsen.

[16] "The Harijan", March 24, 1951, in Tine Elisabeth Larsen, *Anne Marie Petersen: a Danish woman* cit., p. 219.

Esther Faering Menon (1889-1962)

Eshter Faering[17] was an educated teacher of religion at Frk. Zahles Seminarium in Copenhagen. She got her missionary studies at Carey Hall Missionary Training College. Esther Faering went to India in November 1915. She visited Gandhi's Ashram on January 6, 1917 with Miss Petersen and was very much influenced by him[18]. She wrote:

> Anne Marie Petersen selected me to join her visiting schools around India, although I was the youngest. It was them we met Gandhi. My discontent and uneasiness about being a part of an organised society originated from this meeting. He utterly fascinated me and his ideal was mine too from my very youth[19].

She stayed in the Ashram for some time in 1920. She became a devotee of Gandhi, and he treated her as a daughter, and wrote around 150 letters to her[20]. These letters were published in *My dear child. Letters from M.K. Gandhi to Esther Faering* (1956)[21]. The Government soon considered her presence in India undesirable and tried to deport her under the new Memorandum A, B and C on mission to India from the Indian Office, London, from 1918. On August 22, 1919, Gandhi first wrote to the Governor of the Bombay (now Mumbai) Presidency, Lord Willingdon, requesting him not to deport her. Then he wrote to the governor of the Madras Presidency. Soon after Gandhi also sent his friend, the English missionary, Charles Fraser Andrews, to the governor to speak about her case. On October 22, 1919, he informed the Government of Madras that she had arrived at the Ashram.

In 1921 she was betrothed to Dr. E. Kuhni Menon, and that provoked much criticism within the Danish Mission Society as well as from Hindus. She left for Denmark in March 1920 and married Menon in Denmark on July 1, 1921. The British Government for some time refused her permission to return to India. However, they returned without permission to India in late December 1922, where they spent some time helping Anne Marie Petersen with the school and the ashram she established in Porto Novo. Mr. Menon was overseeing the building of the school and when it was finished in January 1924, he was awarded medical tools for 2000 kr. by the support group of Anne Marie Petersen[22].

They then moved to Kotagiri, a hill station in Nilgris, where Dr. Menon helped poor patients. Both the Menons' salaries were paid by Anne Marie Petersen's

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[17] For further information about Esther Faering (Menon), see Holger Terp – Enuga S. Reddy (eds.), *Friends of Gandhi*, cit; Alice M. Barnes (ed.) *My dear child. Letters from M.K. Gandhi to Esther Faering*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad 1956, available at: http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/nordic/child.htm; and Karl Baago, *Mahatma Gandhi's Dear Child*, in Frede Hojgaard (ed.) *Friends of Gandhi: Inter-war Scandinavian Responses to the Mahatma*, "NIAS Report", 7, 1991. The original letters from Gandhi to Ester Menon are at Håndskriftafdelingen the Royal Library, Copenhagen. Files n. Ny Kongelig Samling, 2251 and 4308.

[18] Rasmus Anker-Møller, *Porto Novo Missionen*, cit., p. 208.

[19] Tine Elisabeth Larsen, *Anne Marie Petersen: a Danish woman* cit., p. 28.

[20] A selection of Gandhi-Esther Faering letters could be found here: http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/nordic/index5/index5.htm#Esther.

[21] Alice Barnes (ed.), *My dear child*, cit.

[22] Bent Smidt Hansen, *Dependency and Identity*, cit., p. 180.

support group. On March 10, 1923 Gandhi was arrested on a charge of sedition and sentenced to six years in jail. The correspondence of Esther with Gandhi was interrupted since Gandhi was only allowed to send four letters a year. She wrote in her Gandhi biography that a letter from her was returned because the prisoner Gandhi was not allowed to receive letters[23]. Gandhi was released in January 1924 because of illness. Esther Menon and Anne Marie Petersen travelled to Poona and were at his bedside, when the news of his release was made public. They were together with him for eight days. Esther's two daughters, Nan (Ann) and Tangai (Sarawati Ellen), were born in September 1923 and 1926. But the hot climate began to affect the health of Mrs. Menon from this time. Right after the birth of Nan, Esther got malaria. The Menons left for Denmark again because of Mrs. Menon's ill-health and Mr. Menon was in England from 1927 to 1933 as he studied surgery at Birmingham, while Mrs. Menon and her children were in Denmark. In 1931 Esther Menon visited Gandhi for two weeks, when Gandhi was in London[24]. Mr. Menon was associated with the Woodbrooke Settlement, a Quaker institution in Birmingham which Gandhi visited in 1931 and lived at Selly Oak, Birmingham.

The Menons returned to Porto Novo on February 10, 1934. Mr. Menon established a hospital there. After the second world war Esther Menon and her girls returned to Denmark, where Esther died in 1962.

Gandhi and Anne Marie Petersen on education

Their common interest in education was the reason why Anne Marie Petersen first met Gandhi in January 1917. The poor had to be educated in order to be able to protest against their conditions of slavery and to support themselves. However, there was no common education in India at that time.

"In my opinion the present educational system is absolutely bad! At any rate it is no good for us here in India. All these exams which you have to take are of no use whatever except for a few people who want to make their way in the world. The students are filled with a whole lot of knowledge which they had better forget again. I personally have had to unlearn a good deal of my English education"[25], said Gandhi to Bokken Lasson[26] and Ellen Hørup.

Gandhi developed a national school and educational program, taught at the Wardha Ashram: basic craft education, where the children learnt through the work of their hands. Basic craft education was divided into three parts: 1) pre-basic for small children, 2) children's schools for pupils aged 7-14 and 3) post-basic, general

[23] Ester Menon, *Gandhi. En karakteristik og Fremstilling af de sidste Dages Begivenheder: Med Forord ef Jens Rosenkjær*, H. Hagerups Forlag, Copenaghen 1930, p. 33.

[24] Esther Menon, *En Dag med Gandhi i London.* "Porto Novo", 11, 1931, pp. 160-167 and *Af et Brev fra Fru Menon*, "Porto Novo", 1, 1932, pp. 5-8.

[25] Holger Terp – Enuga S. Reddy (eds.), *Friends of Gandhi*, cit., p. 428.

[26] Caroline (Bokken) Lasson, was a Norwegian singer and writer; she visited India in 1930-31 with Ellen Hørup, and met Gandhi at Anand Bhavan, Allahabad, in February 1931. For further information see: http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/nordic/index5/letter26.htm.

education, which included the universities and problems relating to the enlightenment of the masses of whom only a few were able to read and write[27].

When Anne Marie Petersen came to India in 1909, she left a country with a poor common education system. Militaristic Danish governments in the 19th century used more than half of the public funds to pay for past wars and the militarization of Denmark. From 1844, progressive teachers and churchmen established free schools for children and folk high schools for adult peasants and workers with the goal that the pupils would become good citizens. The schools became part of the political process which made Denmark more liberal before and after the turn of the twentieth century. In the words of Anne Marie Petersen to Gandhi:

> Only by indigenous education can India be truly uplifted. Why this appeals so much to me is perhaps because I belong to the part of the Danish people who started their own independent, indigenous national schools. The Danish Free Schools and Folk-High-Schools, of which you may have heard, were started against the opposition and persecution of the State. The organisers won and thus have regenerated the nation[28].

When she arrived in India in 1909, Mrs. Petersen had a vision of establishing a Christian National School, a home school for children and women. Her school at Porto Novo was one of the first national schools in India build on Gandhi's ideas.

Why a national school? The school at Porto Novo should become a Christian part in the process of the liberation of India, beginning at the basic, children and women. All education and upbringing should be for the life. There were special conditions in India. When the Western schools came to India, knowledge and examinations became somewhat of an idol. "As one of India's great leaders said to me", wrote Anne Marie Petersen in "Vor Skole" (1918) where she quotes Gandhi: "India suffers from brain fever; we are running after literary knowledge and despising the work of the body. But India is a big agricultural country; there the progress has to be made. The work of the hand must be honoured and aided forward equal with the spirit"[29].

Anne Marie Petersen, together with a young missionary, Esther Faering, undertook a research journey in India investigating Christian and Hindu schools. They were in Guntur with Dr. Kugler; Poona with Professor Karve; Mukti near Poona with Pândita Râmabai; and Ahmedabad with Dr. Taylor and Gandhi. Mrs Petersen liked Gandhi's educational philosophy, but did not feel at home in his Ashram. "I spoke with Mahatma Gandhi about what he thought and would advise me to do (with the school plans). "Yes", said he, "when you ask, I will answer, that my demand for a national school first and foremost is that it is independent (self-supplying), and therefore it should be established in response to a demand from the people. Ask the nationalists you to begin at Madras, recieve the offer! But", he added, with a roguish twinkle in his eyes, "if I know you right, after all you act not

[27] Rasmus Anker-Møller, *Porto Novo Missionen*, cit., p. 26.

[28] Holger Terp – Enuga S. Reddy (eds.), *Friends of Gandhi*, cit., pp. 353-354.

[29] "Vor Skole", 1918, p. 181.

after the advice from others, but only according to what you believe is right for God"[30], wrote Anne Petersen.

Anne Marie Petersen had hoped her national girls' school at Porto Novo would attract attention in India, but it became controversial within the Danish high school and missionary circles. Out of the heated debates grew a wider knowledge of Gandhi in Denmark. On June 21, 1921 her school project was named the Mission at Porto Novo / Portonovomissionen[31].

Before the laying of the foundation stone of Sevamandir on September 17, 1921, Gandhi wrote an article about National Education in Young India. Anne Marie Petersen's friends in Denmark published his article and her comments to it.

The school was opened on January 20, 1924. The pupils got an intercultural education which combined the work of the hand with the work of the spirit. They learned to spin in order to produce their own clothes, grew their own food, and learned to read and write as well as their lessons on Indian history, religions and culture. Anne Marie Petersen and Esther Menon travelled from Porto Novo to Poona to tell Gandhi the happy news. On February 5, 1924, Mrs. Petersen wrote: "Then I nevertheless came to congratulate the Mahatma with the release. When I came to the hospital 9 pm and they told it, it was about to overwhelm me. May it now be to happiness for India and may an wall of love – and intercession be built around Mahatma Gandhi, so he is allowed to live as a free man – not only free from prison – for that he is – but free from the burden of being him who shall lead and carry India"[32]. During the All India Teachers Conference in 1930 Anne Marie Petersen spoke about her school. Mrs. Visalakshi visited Porto Novo according to The Voice of Youth[33].

When I, on April 1, [1933, wrote Anne Marie Petersen] visited Gandhi in the Yeravda prison, he looked so happy and easy of mind, as ever I have seen him. We talked a great deal, both about, what we, what our little mission could do for those untouchable – here with us in South India – the so called Parias edifying. I also included the question, which so long has burned in me, and I wanted to receive a direct answer from the great reformer of India: if he during Swaraj would have compulsory school attendance or not. To this he answered, that he was against all compulsion, but namely was a hater of compulsory school attendance "I want good schools and free schools for all, so all children and young ones can have an opportunity to receive the best possible enlightenment. But even the best school attendance is destroyed if it is compulsory. "But", he added, "I know, I am in a pitiful minority in this, as well as in so many other questions".

"Bapu, it does not matter if you ever are so alone, You have the justice and the truth on your side, and we few, which believe in the victory of freedom, will be victorious. So poor as she is, it is impossible for India to carry through compulsory school attendance; this will help us." When I left him, I asked, when I should see him again. He laughed and said: "When you return back from Kashmir". But I

[30] "Porto Novo: meddelelser om arbejdet ude og hjemme", 22, 1922, p. 11.

[31] P. Riemann, *Portonovo. Højskolebladet*, 1921, column 977.

[32] "Porto Novo: meddelelser om arbejdet ude og hjemme", 2, 1924, p. 6.

[33] "Porto Novo: meddelelser om arbejdet ude og hjemme", 4, 1930, pp. 87-89.

cried: "Here in the prison? God forbids it!" "Why not," he answered, "I have," and he showed his five fingers, "so many years left! I am completely happy here." "But the question is not, if you are happy or not; but if we are happy with you in prison, if we, if India can do without you". That Gandhi admitted, and we parted agreeing, as the will of God is, so will it turn out"[34].

The education system Gandhi adopted in 1937, was called The National Basic Craft Scheme of Education[35]. As a member of the Rural Reconstruction Workers Association, in 1939 Anne Marie Petersen was invited to speak at the conference for the rural reconstruction workers at Kengeri. She was the only women at the conference. Mrs. Petersen spoke of the need for educating women teachers and suggested that her school in Porto Novo was developed into a women's teacher training college which it became in April 1949[36].

Communication between Denmark and India became difficult, during World War II, after the German occupation of Denmark on April 9, 1940. Even though the support group continued to collect money for the Indo-Danish Mission, it couldn't be sent to India. In August 1940 as the school at Porto Novo was recognised by Talimi Sangh and Mahatma Gandhi as a Basic Craft School, Anne Marie Petersen had to send most of the pupils home for lack of money. Gandhi showed solidarity. He mailed Mrs. Petersen 200 Rupees[37]. In January 1945 Anne Marie Petersen attended the "All India National Basic Craft Educational Conference" at Sevagram. On the last day of the meeting she visited Gandhi and got a smile from him[38]. A short while thereafter she was invited to participate in the Constructive Workers Congress in Madras, where she met Gandhi again. Back in Porto Novo from Denmark, on December 11, 1947, Anne Marie Petersen was welcomed by half the town. More than 1000 people, mostly Harijans, greeted her. Seva Mandir had expanded to two Harijan schools, with more than 80 children; Seva Mandir was buying fields to grow their own rice to feed the pupils during the hunger periods.

The murder of Gandhi came as a shock for Anne Marie Petersen as well as many others. Mrs. Petersen's work continued. Her school was recognised by the District Educational Officer. Also, she made a village school. Memorials for Gandhi were suggested. Anne Marie Petersen saw herself going into local politics of the town. She rejected plans of a statue and suggested as alternatives: 1) building of a waterworks, 2) establishing a centre for Khaddar, 3) help to the untouchables, 4) developing Sevamandir into a common school by employing Hindu and Muslim teachers, and 5) establishing a hospital for women. The governor of Madras came to the school on June 19, 1948. Anne Marie Petersen wanted the school to remain

[34] "Porto Novo: meddelelser om arbejdet ude og hjemme", 6, 1933, pp. 80-81.

[35] "Porto Novo", 5, 1949, p. 92.

[36] Sara Joshus, *Kengeri-Mødet for Landsby-Genrejsnings-Arbejdere*, Porto Novo, 4, 1939, pp 92-97 and Anne Marie Petersen, *Kvinden og Hjemmets Plads i Arbejdet for en ny Skole og for Landsbylivets Genrejsning*, Porto Novo, 5, 1941, pp. 113-117

[37] Anne Marie Petersen, *Brev fra Anne Marie Petersen*, Porto Novo, 1, 1941, p. 1.

[38] Rasmus Anker-Møller, *Porto Novo Missionen*,p. 25 and Anne Marie Petersen, *To Møder*, Porto Novo, 3, 1946, pp. 57-70.

independent. In April 1949 Serva Mandir got the permission to educate the first 60 women teachers.

Within the framework of the struggle for Indian political and social liberation Anne Marie Petersen and Gandhi pioneered a North-South dialogue. They were in India, but came from different cultures. Also, it was an early North-South dialogue including development aid, because Anne Marie Petersen couldn't have made her school (as big) as it became, without financial support from Christian friends and friends from the Folk High school movement in Denmark. Some of the concepts and terms they used in developing a national Indian school were later used in the development of the pedagogy of liberation, based upon "the ethical indignation, the preferential option for the poor and finally the liberation of the poor and oppressed - and of the oppressor"[39]. The educators of the oppressed and the poor Latin Americans who have learned from Gandhi might also benefit from ideas from the Danish Folk High School movement.

In 1919, Anne Marie Petersen mentioned Gandhi for the second time in a Danish publication: "The great Indian reformer Gandhi, said to me: Yes, I would like to go to Denmark. It is one of the countries in the world we can learn most from. India is a large farming country; we need to learn from Denmark agriculturally, we need good public education, and we need unions, loan banks and co-operative societies as in Denmark"[40]. He said the same to her in 1924 and also told it to Carl Vett in 1925. Two years later Gandhi suggested in an interview to Hans and Emilie Bjerrum, that Denmark should give development aid to India: "Let them (the Danes) teach us their life-giving industry of cooperative dairy and cattle-breeding". In 1963 India was among the first "underdeveloped" countries to receive development aid from Denmark, the Hessarghatta cattle-breeding project in Karnataka.

There was censorship on news from India after the Salt March of 1930. Carl Vett, a Norwegian barrister of the Supreme Court and his wife, Edward Holton James, an American barrister from Boston, Ellen Horup and Caroline (Bokken) Lasson "created a little self-constituted commission, whose members all travelled to India on their own", meeting once in a while in India. The journey of Ellen, Caroline and Carl to India lasted from November 1930 to April 1931.

Ellen Hørup (1871-1953)

The Danish journalist Ellen Hørup (1871-1953) wrote more than 600 feature articles and editorials, and more than 300 shorter articles in newspapers, magazines and books about international politics, armament and disarmament, and imperialism. Her first work was about Gandhi and his non-violent struggle against British imperialism in India. Later she wrote against Fascism and Nazism, against totalitarian governments as a whole, and militarism, including NATO. Most of her work was done in the 1930s and 40s, which made it natural for her to write about

[39] Marina Jacobsen, *Fra Barbari til værdighed*, RUC, 2001 p. 271.

[40] Anne Marie Petersen, *Danmarks Verdensmission*, 1919, p. 64.

subjects such as the Spanish Civil War, The League of Nations and political as well as religious refugees (long before Amnesty International).

During the German occupation of Denmark, when she was unable to write about foreign political matters, she set her mind upon writing about another oppressed group: children. She became a strong critic of Danish public childcare, an effort for which she is not completely forgotten. In fact, some people still remember her with gratitude, and a new magazine about children's conditions in Denmark is named after her, "ELLEN".

Ellen Hørup was, in many ways, a person ahead of her time. She wrote not only about the subjects already mentioned, she also wrote about agriculture and pollution. Being one of the first female foreign policy journalists in Denmark and internationally, she also took great interest in women's liberation and wrote a great deal about it. Her main focus was, however, her peace work. She was a cosmopolite. Not only did Ellen Hørup speak and write in Danish, but she also spoke and wrote excellently in English, Italian, German, Russian and French.

Ellen Hørup was a member of Danish and international peace groups. However, she never was a member of any political party or religious group, even though she had friends in unexpected places. Ellen Hørup was a "grassroots" 50 years before the word was invented[41]. She was the daughter of the famous Danish anti-militarist, journalist and politician Viggo Hørup (1841-1902)[42]. In October 1884 he founded the daily "Politiken", which slowly grew to become one of the biggest newspapers in the country. The shares in "Politiken", which she had inherited from her parents, made her economically independent.

After the death of her mother, in late 1923, Ellen Hørup divorced her husband and settled in Rome. After translating some of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales into Italian in 1927, she made the acquaintance of Gandhi's non-violent fight for freedom and decided to carry on her father's journalistic work by describing the activities of the Congress Party as well as the activities of Mahatma (as he was called) Gandhi. She visited Gandhi and worked for him in the late 1920s together with other female friends: the world-famous Danish painter, ceramist and designer Cathinca Olsen and the then equally famous Norwegian singer Bokken Lasson. Both worked in the Friends of India Society in Copenhagen and Oslo.

Despite the fact that her father had taken part in establishing "Politiken", and she was a shareholder and member of the board (from 1933 to 1949), as a part of the Danish establishment, the paper was not always happy to publish her controversial articles and analyses of international politics. But the paper did so in spite of growing political disagreement. Throwing out the daughter of the founder and late leading journalist in Scandinavia would not look too good in the public's eyes.

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[41] The files of Ellen Hørup are placed at Rigsarkivet (The National Archives), Copenhagen, Privatarkiv, File n. 8094.

[42] Viggo Hørup's writings and biography are unfortunately not translated into English. See Holger Terp, *The History of the Peace Movements* for references to Danish and Norwegian biographies.

The International Committee for India

In order to get her pacifist information out to a larger international public, as well as in order to be better informed herself, she moved to Geneva in 1933. Here, before moving, in October 1932, she established "The International Committee for India" and in 1935, the news agency "Journal des Archives". "The International Committee for India" held at least three international conferences in 1932 and 1933 in Geneva. Some of the organizations and individuals which were connected to the Committee were: "The Friends of India Societies" in London, Copenhagen and Oslo, "The Indian Conciliation Group", London, "The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom", Alice Paul, Agathe Harrison, Edmond Privat, Dorothy Detzer, Edit Pye, Margerith Cousins, Sidney Strong, Magdalene Rolland – the sister of Romain Rolland – and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence. (Some of the women mentioned here were supporters of the Suffragette movement and members of "The Womens' International League for Peace and Freedom". Others were "Friends").

"The International Committee for India" published the magazine "Indian Press", 1934-1935. The peace news agency published the now extremely rare, and to my knowledge, never since quoted magazines "Letter from Geneva" and "Journal des Archives" in English, French and German. In 1930, in Copenhagen, she had already formed the organization and magazine "Indiens Venner" / Friends of India Society. At the time there were similar pro-Gandhi organizations which supported the Indian nationalist struggle in Norway, Sweden, England, Belgium, France, Bulgaria, Japan and the U.S.A., as well as other countries. These organizations and their magazines are mostly forgotten today.

The Danish "Friends of India Society" lasted from November 1930 to around 1938 and had some 250 members[43]. Among the members were Danish missionaries who had travelled and lived in India for a long time. Among them were Anne Marie Petersen, the headmaster of "The Indian National School", Porto Novo; Gandhi's "dear child" Ester Færing (Menon), Johan Bittermann and his wife – who lived in India for 42 years and the Swedish missionary Mrs. Karlmark from "The Swedish Church Mission". Besides the stories of the Indian liberation movement, the magazine also carried cultural and religious articles, thus painting a broader picture of India than the ordinary magazines of the peace movements of the time.

The role of women in civil disobedience

Ellen Hørup admired Gandhi whom she visited and worked for in the winter of 1929/30 and again in the winter of 1930/31 when she followed him and worked for him during his journey from India to the Round Table Conference in London. She also corresponded with Gandhi through the years. In one of the first letters she wrote to him from Rome, dated May 2, 1929, she writes:

[43] Membership book of "Indiens Venner" at Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen.

> In Denmark we have a Socialist-Radical ministry. Two of my friends have been ministers, one of foreign affairs, another of justice (Minister of Foreign Affairs P. Munch and former Prime Minister and Minister of Justice Carl Th. Zahle), so I hope that there shall be no difficulties with my passport for India in a year and a half. My first article about India has been published. I send you the number of the paper although it is in Danish, because I remember your expression when you asked me "what I was doing in Rome". My second article is called "Mahatma Gandhi and his Ashram". It is already mailed and will be published this month. The Danish ministry is a disarmament ministry in accordance with my father's ideas[44].

On June 6th, 1931 Ellen Hørup wrote to Bapuji, Gandhi's nickname among friends:

> Yes, it would have been nice, if we could have met each other oftener. But I don't complain. I went to most of your meetings, and I attended more than twenty times to the evening prayer. But I always felt, that I had no right to take your time […]. I am on my way back to Denmark, where I shall let my friends make me a member of the board of my paper Politiken. During this year I shall stay in Copenhagen and try to make the paper a little less yellow and a little more truthful. If I can do nothing, I must make "The Friends of India" larger and broader and leave the others alone[45].

In December 1931 she published the book "Gandhis Indien", on Gandhi and the political situation in India which shows how passionately she felt for the cause of India. It gives witness to the degree to which she could penetrate into, and familiarize herself with, Indian ways of life and mind. Yet the curious thing is that however deeply she may be seized by the sentiment of the individual festive moment, she remained a cool and sceptical observer with a sharp eye for the paltriness of her fellow human beings.

In a totally natural way, Ellen Hørup describes the conditions and ways of life which were enormously remote from the life of contemporary Europeans. The reason why she was able to do this is that she did not travel as a typical tourist - satisfied with the stereotyped sightseeing usually presented to the curious European - she visited ordinary Indian quarters, dined at the native restaurants, listened to all kinds of people. She also went to the villages where she observed the poverty in which the people lived.

When Ellen Hørup, unlike so many of the followers of Gandhi, drifted somewhat away from him, it was not because of the policy of non-violence, with which she agreed. But because, in her view, the fight for the liberation of India should be still further developed. The workers and the women of India should be included more, but Gandhi would support neither the Indian workers' unions nor the women's liberation groups. In fact, Gandhi supported the trade union of textile workers in Ahmedabad and advised them on their strike in 1919. That union followed his principles - and later many unions followed him. He did not believe in class struggle, like Communist trade union leaders. He did not set up a women's organisation, but supported women's equality. The All India Women's Conference

[44] The first article by Ellen Hørup about Gandhi: "Mahatma Gandhi" is published in "Politiken", February 28, 1929. A copy of the cited letter is at the Gandhi Informations Zentrum, Berlin. The other letter from Gandhi to Ellen Hørup are published in "Indiens Venner", 6, 1933. The original letter from Gandhi to Ellen Hørup are at Rigsarkivet. File n. 8094.

[45] Letter from Mrs. Ellen Hørup, May 2, 1929 (Rome), Rigsarkivet, Copenhagen, File 8904.

was set up in the 1930s by women leaders, many of whom were his followers. Ellen's statement is, therefore, controversial.

In an address held in Copenhagen, for the Danish "Friends of India Society" on November 23, 1936, "My relationship with Gandhi" Ellen Hørup among other things said,

> His ideas, my admiration for him, the longing to meet the man, who gave me what I have been seeking all my life - something which together is called devotion, reverence and love - was what led me twice to India. I wanted to see Gandhi, and I wanted to see the 350 million meek Hindus who follow him. While in India, I sought out only him and his followers. In every city, my first goal was the Kaddar-shop, where I just had to show a little medallion of Gandhi which was sold in the streets for 10 cents, before all faces would change, all hearts open and all hands be ready to greet me. I found what I sought. But that was all I found. I did what one of my friends wrote that she had done! I identified India with Gandhi. And Gandhi meant, to me, the apostle who would bring, not only to India but to the entire world, the gospel of the future - the abolishing of violence from mankind. And he still does. But as the years have passed and after I have been to London attending the Round Table Conference India now means more than Gandhi to me. And I have become wiser from reading and from meeting many people from Gandhi's country, and I have learned that there are different movements in India just as there are in any country. And I have drifted from Gandhi in many ways. I follow him on his journeys among the peasants and in the cities among the workers. I read what he says about the women, and what he says to them when they ask for advice. Gandhi admires them highly. He has called them out from their isolation, freed them from the purdahs. But Gandhi still has the mind of a man, and besides that, the mind of a Hindu[46].

However, she was able to express her dissent against Gandhi's too traditionalist ideas about women, as we can read in her speech dated 1936.

> In Gandhi's magazine "Young India" from 1929 there is an article entitled "The Hindu Wife", where he is asked for advice regarding a woman married to a man who treats her meanly. But Gandhi is against separation. What women need is education and upbringing. But when a man ties a woman to a pole to make her look at his outrageousness, then I don't understand that the women is the one who needs education. Gandhi declared that she should go back home and find a job. But she has never learned anything, and possibly her parents are so poor, that they can't take her back. Does Gandhi know the words of the Chinese mother to her daughter, who, driven to the uttermost despair, runs from her husband back to her mother, who exclaims: "What do you come here for? Don't you know I can't help you, or have you forgotten the way to the river?" But Gandhi is against separation. And even if the parents took her back, then she is, according to Hindu law, segregated from anything resembling normal life. She is not even seen as a widow. Instead the women have to suffer and do without a normal life. Why? Is it justice that she is going to be punished because her parents gave her to a bestial man? In one of the last numbers of "Harijan", Gandhi discusses birth control with an English advocate of the cause. Gandhi is against it. He too doesn't want children before India has been liberated. But he demands abstinence. Only when the intention is to create new life is intercourse ethical. If two persons do it only for the sake of the enjoyment, then they are, instead of being near the divine, near the devilish. Is this not the unnatural teaching of Asceticism, which all healthy people, including the scientists, have long ago abandoned as dangerous? Gandhi says that women are stronger than men. When a woman would rather die than give in, the worst beast can't make her do something against her will. But when the English woman then asks what a poor woman should do when her husband takes another

[46] The first article by Ellen Hørup about Gandhi: "Mahatma Gandhi" is published in "Politiken", February 28, 1929. A copy of the cited letter is at the Gandhi Informations Zentrum, Berlin. Other letters from Gandhi to Ellen Hørup are published in "Indiens Venner", 6, 1933. The original letters from Gandhi to Ellen Hørup are at Rigsarkivet. File n. 8094.

> wife, Gandhi answers that the English woman is changing the subject. Are there no poor women? Has Gandhi forgotten the girl-child married away in the age of 12 to 14? Is she not the one who has to fight for her life in order to escape pregnancy every time her husband wants her, and who no beast of a man can overcome? Has Gandhi no idea that a woman has the same need for devotion as a man, and suffers the same trouble of jealousy as Gandhi himself did when he was at school knowing that his wife was visiting her friends?[47]

When Gandhi was nominated for the 1937 Nobel Peace Prize by the Norwegian chapter of the "Friends of India Society", Ellen Hørup wrote to a number of influential persons to make them support the nomination. She got positive replies from Romain Rolland, C. F. Andrews, The Danish Nobel Laureate Henrik Pontoppidan, and the German Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Professor Ludvig Quidde, the Danish MPs Hassing Jørgensen and Edv. Larsen, Bart de Ligt, Maria Montessori, The Danish chapter of "The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom", as well as support from numerous other Danish organizations and individuals. But Gandhi, in spite of the popular Scandinavian and international demand, never was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize[48].

After her mother's death and her divorce, Ellen Hørup settled in Rome from 1924 to 1933, when she moved to Geneva. In the inter-war years, she helped some of Mussolini's opponents financially, so they could emigrate from Italy. She had a continuing interest in Italian relationships.

Ellen Hørup continued in the late 1930s to write and publish articles about Gandhi and the Indian struggle for freedom, and later, in 1948, she became a member of the board of the "Danish Indian Friendship Union"[49]. After World War II, she wrote about the war crimes trials in Italy and the floods in the Po Valley in 1951.

At the age of 81 years Ellen Hørup died from a combination of lung cancer and a cold, which she contracted doing research among the poor farmers in Italy in the spring of 1953. Ellen Hørup died dictating her last articles protesting against the Korean War. She was not able to hold a pen in her hand nor to sit at the typewriter.

[47] Unpublished speech in Danish, dated November 23, 1936. Manuscript in the files of Holger Terp.

[48] Gandhi and the Nobel Peace Prize. See the article by Thomas Weber, *Gandhi and the Nobel Peace Prize*, in "South Asia. Journal of South Asian Studies", 1, 1990, pp. 29-47. Ellen Hørup's correspondence in connection with the nomination of Gandhi to the Nobel Peace Prize, see: "Indiens Venner", 8, 1937, p. 9.

[49] See the minutes of the Danish Indian Friendship Union 1949.

DEP Deportate, esuli, profughe
Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile

In the Mountains

di

Sarala Behn[*]

Sarala Behn ha formato alcune tra le principali attiviste indiane e si è adoperata per rendere consapevoli le giovani donne del loro importante ruolo sociale. Sono le donne infatti le principali attrici del movimento Chipko che sorge negli anni Settanta per la protezione delle foreste dal disboscamento.

Tratto dalla sua autobiografia, tradotta dall'hindi da David Hopkins e intitolata *A life in two worlds. Autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi's English Disciple* (Lakshmi & Pahar 2010) il brano che segue illustra il primo arrivo di Sarala a Kausani. L'autobiografia di Sarala dedica ampio spazio alle vicende esteriori, alle condizioni del prossimo, dimostrando come la vita intera di questa coraggiosa donna fosse dedita all'aiuto dei più bisognosi. E le principali protagoniste sono soprattutto le donne delle montagne e la natura.

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Not knowing the way to Chanauda, I decided to go by way of the Gandhi Ashram in Meerut. As I alighted on the platform in Meerut, a gentleman asked very politely, "Where are you going? Can I arrange for some conveyance for you?" As I had a lot of luggage I gladly accepted his help. Later on I came to know that he had been sent from the intelligence department for this help.

The following day I was called to meet someone from the intelligence. When I came I found this gentleman from the station also sitting there. When I set off from Meerut he again came to see me to the station.

The office and the central store of the Gandhi Ashram in Meerut were in a large building constructed in the middle of a beautiful garden belonging to the Gandhi Seva Sangh. The Sangh had given it to the Gandhi Ashram for their activities. The workers' dwellings were small houses made of earth, thatched with grass and straw. In the shade of the mango trees these cottages seemed very beautiful. The workers lived there very contentedly; among them was a total feeling of mutual give and take. Spinning and weaving were done in the villages, while dyeing, printing and finishing where done here. The finished goods were sent to sales centres throughout the state. The most highly respected person in the institution was the old watchman who had been working in the Ashram from the very beginning.

[*] Catherine Mary Heilemann, (Londra 1901-1982), alias Sarala Behn, collaboratrice di Gandhi, impegnata nella lotta per l'indipendenza indiana, attivista sociale; nel 1948 fonda il Lakshimi Ashram, un centro educativo per ragazze sulle colline dell'Himalaya, a Kausani. Si ringrazia il traduttore David Hopkins per averci concesso la pubblicazione di questo breve estratto di *A life in two worlds. Autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi's English Disciple.*

 ISSN 1824 - 4483

Vichitra Bhai had gone out on tour, and in his absence Rajaram Bhai had assumed responsibility for his work. He had had some raw wool washed, and was having it spun on a spinning wheel, which in appearance resembled a pedal-operated sewing machine. The spinner's features looked rather Mongoloid. Rajaram Bahi told me that I would have to learn this skill, among such people.

After one or two days I set off for Chanauda. I had been told that, while it was possible that I might catch the last bus from Haldwani going towards Chanauda, it was more likely that I would miss it, which would mean spending a night in Almora and continuing the following morning to Chanauda. He had informed the Gandhi Ashram in Almora by telegram about my arrival. However I got a bus as far as Someshwar. I decided to leave my luggage in the bus and walk the three miles to Chanauda in the fresh evening air. After Mussoorie it was the first such opportunity that I had had to walk in such cool and bracing air.

That day Jamnalalji had come to Almora to meet with the political detainees. People were worried, as I had not arrived according to the telegram. Many days later I also learned that the water flowing in the river, thundering over the rocks. Listening to this pleasing sound I fell soundly asleep.

Following Gandhi's advice, I would get up in the morning at four o'clock, and go walking in the hills covered with pine forest or among the fields of yellow rice, on my return bathing in the river before preparing a simple meal. In the afternoon I would try to spin Tibetan wool on the Kashmiri implements. The fibres of Tibetan wool are particularly long, and therefore it needs more time and care to spin it. Besides learning to spin wool, gathering a group of some of the local women together, I began to teach them knitting with needles. In those days the villagers did not know knitting at all. In the evenings I would put on the cooker and then go out for a walk. Sometimes I would go between the fields to some nearby village. While the children suffered from coughs and colds, also from diarrhea, the old suffered from wind and rheumatism. A small dispensary was run in the Ashram, and I would keep some of their medicines with me.

The mountain women were very hardworking and brave. In all the mountain areas of the Himalayas the women do most of the agricultural work. The men only did the ploughing, repairing of the walls of terraced fields, and the management of the irrigation. The women were entrusted with the full responsibility for sowing, hoeing and weeding, and harvesting. The women also did the difficult work of transplanting the rice. Besides this the women alone cut fodder for the cattle, cut and carried down wood from the forest for use as fuel, etc. In whatever time was left over, cooking, bathing the children and washing clothes kept them ever occupied.

In the evenings after supper I would take my spindle and chat with the manager's family. Shantilal Trivedi, the manager, was Gujarati. His father had renounced the world, and he had been raised and educated by his uncle. The latter wanted to send him for higher studies to America, but Shantilal's leanings too were towards a life of renunciation and the Himalayas. In the end, at the age of twenty he came to a decision and, rather than going to the Himalayas, he started to live in Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram. Working there for several years he became skilled in

spinning and weaving. But he continued to feel the call of the Himalayas. Bapu[1] gave him leave for three months to go walking in the Himalayas. Coming to Almora he accompanied the Congress workers to the villages. He felt as if he had returned home. At that time the Congress had a majority on the District Board, and they wanted to introduce spinning and weaving in the schools in the district. They had written to Gandhi to ask if he would allow Shantilal to stay there on deputation, and Gandhi agreed.

Keeping in close contact with the village schoolmasters and the general public allowed him constant opportunities to wander in the area. In the next elections for the District Board the Congress were defeated, and the new chairman of the District Board began to treat Shantilalji not as a colleague but more as an employee. He submitted his resignation and for the next two years worked in a sugar mill on the *Terai* belonging to Jamnakakji as a social worker among the labourers there. When the Gandhi Ashram took the decision to start woollen production in the hills, the responsibility for this was entrusted to Shantilalji. This activity had now been going on for three or four years and was expanding very fast.

[…]

The Chanauda ashram was built on leasehold land. The buildings were constructed from wood and were roofed with tin. Shantilalji had gathered a group of dedicated young workers around him.

A few days later I received an invitation to go to Almora on the occasion of *Gandhi Jayanti*[2]. Gandhi himself did not like this term, preferring that people refer to it as *Charkha Jayanti*. I went there. Every morning at dawn a procession was taken out, while in the middle of the day we went out selling khadi[3]. Four or five people, khadi cloth on their shoulders, hawked their stock from house to house in the town. At each house they had to explain the importance of khadi in national life, I would go with them and in this way came to meet the women. Almora is situated on the crest of a mountain ridge, and every step found one going up or down. It was difficult to walk with a load on ones shoulder. What we wanted was that people would come to the shop to make purchases, as this would reduce the workload of the workers and maybe more khadi would be sold. At that time the government had slowly began to release the political prisoners, and because of this the numbers of people in the demonstrations increased by the day. […]

Every year Shantilalji would go into the higher reaches of the mountains to purchase and bring back a year's supply of Tibetan wool. He suggested to me that I accompany him. It was the first time since 1931 that I had gone off on foot, and I derived an immense amount of joy from this journey. Two ashram workers carried our bedding, and on arrival at our night halt would make arrangements for our lodging and food. I had misgivings about them carrying such a weight, yet in a way there was no alternative. Shantilalji had a weak foot, while I lacked the strength to carry such a load while walking. Every day saw us proceeding further on our way,

[1] *Bapu*: è l'appellativo affettuoso che Sarala, come altri gandhiani, riserva a Gandhi.

[2] *Jayanti*: birthday.

[3] *Khadi*: tessuto tipico indiano.

sometimes between fields, sometimes along the banks of rivers, sometimes climbing up or dropping down from hills, at times passing through forest. I was ever living in the hope that on reaching some ridge top that we would have a view of the Himalayan ranges. In the daytime they were mostly hidden by cloud, but late in the afternoons fresh snow would begin to fall from these clouds on them, and then the red glow of the sunset would spread across this fresh snow. Whenever our night halt was on a summit we reveled in the joy of such sights.

We mostly stayed at spinning centres of the Gandhi Ashram. Usually two or three workers lived in these centres. The local Congress workers as well as spinners and weavers would also come to meet us. The topics of conversation centred on Gandhi's health and programmes, political activity and local leaders.

Despite the remoteness, there was a great deal of political awareness in Almora district. At the time of the offering of individual satyagraha also, more than four hundred satyagrahis were moving around the villages. There was only provision for eighty prisoners in the jail in Almora, and when the jail became overcrowded, the arrests had to be stopped. At almost every resting place satyagrahis[4] came to meet us.

Finally crossing the 9,000 feet high Kala Muni mountain ridge we reached Munsiyari. We could only complete half the ascent in a whole day, and then stopped at an ancient dak reaching the top, see the red glow of sunrise on the white peaks of Panchachuli. We had now come very close to the Himalayan ranges. It was not even sunrise when we reached the top. Shantilalji jokingly took my muffler and gloves and, lying down as if to take a nap, said, "Wake me up when it's sunrise!" How can I describe the joy of seeing the splendor of the sunrise on the fresh snow while sitting in the middle of that dense forest? After a little while we descended to the valley to commence our task of collecting wool.

Living in the higher reaches of the Himalaya is a community of mixed blood, Tibetan and Indian. Formerly they would go every year in the summer months to Tibet, along with their sheep and goats, mules and *jhabbus* (a cross between the Indian cow and the Tibetan yak). They would return from there in October and spend the winter months moving from place to place on the plains selling their wool and woollen products, at the same time purchasing jiggery, cotton cloth and brass utensils, to be bartered in Tibet for wool, rock salt and borax.

It was very dangerous to cross the high, snow-covered ranges. On taking leave of their families they could not be confident whether they would meet again or not. Often the snow bridges by which they sought to cross the rivers would give way under them; sometimes they were trapped by blizzards. At times they had to maintain homes in three separate valleys among these landslide-prone mountains. In a way theirs was a nomadic way of life. Every year they would go on foot along with their families from their homes on the banks of the Ramganga, flowing in the lower reaches, up to the high reaches of Milam, from whose glacier emerges the Gori Ganga. While moving up during the spring and also on their way down in the autumn, they would halt for a month or two in Munsiyari.

[4] *Satyagraha*: significa "fermezza della verità", ed è il metodo di lotta non violenta adottato da Gandhi e dai suoi collaboratori per ottenere l'indipendenza dell'India.

Sitting out in the sun early in the mornings, we would occupy ourselves with our spinning, chatting, reading and writing. Wild Japanese cherries and French marigolds were in full bloom. In the middle of the day after taking our lunch, we would go on foot to meet with one or another of the big traders on one of the nearby villages. The women could be seen everywhere, busy in spinning and weaving. They wove beautiful coloured rugs, white *thulmas*[5], shawls, cloth, etc., and knitted sweaters. The men's hands too were never empty. The whole day long the spindle danced in their hands.

The nationalist agitation could also be observed in this remote area. Here also as in other parts of the country, we saw and heard people's discussions on politics. From the national viewpoint the importance of the traditional woollen industry had greatly increased. Tibet was also a topic of conversation among them, for example that this year there had been such a severe outbreak of cholera that a great number of men, women and children, falling by the wayside, had been left behind, or that large numbers of bands of robbers were entering Tibet. It may be that they were some community living in Central Asia who had been uprooted from their homeland by the spread of communism. These bands were armed horsemen. What could an ordinary caravan of traders going on foot do when faced with them?

The families from the lower valleys, along with their flocks of animals, would set off in the mornings around six o'clock, and by around ten o'clock would set up the camp somewhere. On arrival the women would remove the children's cradles from the backs while the men put up the tents. A stone hearth was made, a search was made for firewood, the fire was lit so as to prepare the meal and then, opening their box looms for weaving wool, the women got down to their main occupation, that of weaving. The men, spinning all day on their spindles, busied themselves in grazing the sheep and goats. The women wore a very broad woollen or cotton ghaghara[6] and a woollen blouse, and also wrapped a very long, white cotton band around their waists. Maybe this helped them while climbing the mountains. In place of a sari they wrapped a woollen blanket around their bodies, and on their heads wore a distinctive kind of white head-dress whose border hang down to their knees.

It was known to everybody that we had come to purchase wool and that we wanted to know how much wool could be made available, what would be the rate this year, etc. Yet in the beginning neither they nor we raised the subject. Only when the opportune moment came did we begin.

The Bhotiya community of this border area of Johar had their own very distinctive and effective social organisation. Rather than competing one with the other, they worked together as a group in their trading activities. The elders among the men chatted one with the other, and in the end one of them opened the subject. Then, seeking out everyone's opinion, a price was fixed, as well as how much wool in total they would supply to us. They also agreed one with the other as to who would supply what quantity of wool. This was a very important decision, for throughout the coming year this rate would remain fixed.

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[5] *Thulma*: a thick woollen betting popular in the hills.

[6] Ghargara: an ample, ankle-lenght skirt.

While all this was going on, one of the Congress leaders of the district, Shri Hargovind Pant, recently released from jail, arrived there on horseback. A number of meetings took place. In the first meeting, opening his speech he said, "I am fifty five years old and today is the first time that I have had the good fortune to come to Munsiyari". It was not everyone who would commit his or her time and energy to go there. Shantilalji though was one of those old hands who had been coming for a long time. I began my speech by saying, "My life in the mountains is but two months old, and yet I have been able to have the good fortune to come here".

Some meetings with the women were also called so that they might better make my acquaintance. There was an ongoing reform movement in Johar. The Arya Samaj[7] and the nationalist movement were having their influence on the women. There was a women's organisation there, whose meetings took place regularly. This was the one and only women's organisation in Almora district. I had tried to call meetings of the women in Almora, but not one woman came to them.

In these upland areas there was a misconception that because of the cold it was necessary to drink liquor, therefore in all the households the women made a local liquor, known as *chang*, from barley, and gave it to their men-folk and to guests. The women themselves did not drink the liquor. This women's organisation had taken up the cause of prohibition. The women had first of all taken a vow that they would not brew liquor in their homes. They had then got their men-folk to take a vow not to take liquor. The women here do not cover their faces, and have complete equality in going out in public places for their work, also working in the fields and forests. Nevertheless they do not mix freely with the men, and also try not to talk directly with them. Therefore they took the help of their older sons in getting their men-folk to take vows of abstinence.

The three elderly women, who were the fountainhead of inspiration for this organisation, were not educated in the modern sense. But there was a farsightedness and wisdom in their eyes, born out of enduring the hardships of these mountains over so many years. Seeing them an English hymn came to mind:

We are grateful for the power of the mountains,
Oh Lord, the Lord of our forefathers,
You have made your people powerful
Through the touch of the soil of the mountains.

The purchase of wool completed, we had it weighed and marked, and then set of with it loaded onto the "Mountain Goods Train", on the backs of goats. Leaving Munsyari we set off on foot along the banks of the Gori Ganga towards Jauljibi. This was extremely beautiful. One felt like losing one's way and just staying there. The name, Gori Ganga, was indeed an apt name. Its white water, breaking often against the rocks, turned into foam became even more pure. Forest covered the high hills on both sides, sometimes extending right down to the water's edge, while sometimes there were expanses of pasture or fields. For long distances there was no

[7] Arya Samaj: Hindu reformist movement founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875.

sign of population or villages. We had set out with three days of rations and slept at night on the verandah of a school or in an empty and open cattle shed.

Jauljibi is situated at the confluence of the Kali Ganga and Gori Ganga rivers, the Gori flowing down from the Johar valley while the Kali rises in Byans. The Kali marks the border between India and Nepal. For a good distance even below the confluence the waters of the two rivers could be seen flowing quite separately. In the end they became one, forming the Sharda river.

The Bhotiyas from the two valleys had set up separate camps. The tents were full of bales of wool and finished woolen goods. Nepali people from nearby villages came to sell ghee and make purchases of honey. Here and there, in very simple shops, heaps of sweets and basic daily needs were on sale. Almora businessmen had also come on the occasion of this fair, and the people purchased small necessities for the coming year from them – exercise books, pencils and books, pins and cotton yarn, knives and scissors, etc. Once the Almora shopkeepers had sold their ware, they purchased wool and woolen goods, honey and ghee, and made the return journey.

During the fair there was also a camp of Christian missionaries and one of the Congress. The fair went on for three days. Every morning the Congress took out a procession. In their meeting in the middle of the day the businessmen, as well as the local public, came along.

Hearing the songs and slogans of the dawn procession people, rubbing their eyes, looked out of their tents, and then quickly washing their hands and faces they would come running to join us. In the midday meetings the slogans, reverberating off the high hills, echoed loudly all around. The message of the Congress had penetrated so far and was so strong, that from this it seemed that this was the demand of the entire country and that Self-rule[8] would surely come. Shantilalji was kept busy all day long in purchasing goods. We also wanted to purchase wool from Darma[9], but this year their traders were late returning from Tibet, so we went up the valley of the Kali as far as Dharchula. The traders had not yet reached there either, so we set off up towards Narayan Ashram. Narayan Swami had come from Karnataka. Shantilalji was well acquainted with him. Because of the spiritual inclinations of his youth, he often liked, to stay in contact with such people.

This was my very first opportunity to stay in a spiritual ashram. I was very surprised. There was no distinctive atmosphere of solemnity, rather there was a natural and deep joy in living and feeling of concern for others – and this was because the one Soul is present in us all, we are all forms of the One. Every year Narayan Swami would go with his followers to Mount Kailas. It was said that on reaching there he went into a transcendental mental state and arrived at *samadhi*, a state of total absorption in the Absolute.

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[8] *Hind Swaraj*, o India Home Rule, vale a dire l'autosufficienza indiana, intende l'autonomia dell'India dall'Inghilterra secondo il programma gandhiano, che prevedeva la rinascita e diffusione delle piccole attività artigianali di villaggio, in particolare quella tessile.

[9] Darma: The valley of the Dhauliganga (E), whose confluence with the Kali Ganga is at Tawaghat.

With an eye on developing the land of the ashram, he was actively increasing his local contacts. The atmosphere in Chaundas Byans was very different from that of Johar. The need there of the influence of the ashram was also felt, and as time went by so its influence was increasing. People had slowly started to come to the ashram from all over India, to find peace and for some time to be freed from the perplexities of modern life. It was a pillar of light in the surrounding darkness. Through Swami's efforts a high school had been established near Jauljibi in Askot to spread education. This school also paid attention to the moral development of the students. Through his efforts arrangements for x-ray machines and other equipment had been made in the local hospital. In this remote area Narayan Swami, like Gandhi, was using the wealth of the rich in the service of the poor, especially for those people who from all social and moral standpoint were backward. Narayan Swami was powerfully built physically, long black hair and a huge beard, a personality shining with joy and well being, but he died premature death from cancer. People experienced a great loss through his passing away. Even after leaving his body there was a glimpse of the joy and peace of *samadhi* to be seen on his face.

We still had to wait, so we went in the direction of Chaundas for a few days. This was an area largely of grass pastures, and among the chestnut trees memories came back of the English countryside. The first evening when we were approaching Sausa village, we heard the sounds of noise and shouting from the forest. We found nobody in the village, only an old woman who told us that some wicked boys from neighboring villages had abducted a girl from her village.

There is nothing new under the sun! This plot was hatched in the *rang-bang*. Imagine the *rang-bang* as being a traditional form of the modem nightclub. The girls of one village pass the night with the boys from another village singing, dancing and drinking liquor. In our travels we had come across one or two *rang-bangs* and, plunged in thought, I could not get to sleep the whole night.

The girls of Sausa village had arranged in the *rang-bang* that on a given evening they would all go into the forest with a particular girl, so that the boys from a neighboring village might abduct her. We felt very bad on hearing this. The following day we went to the village with the hope that we could do something. However, we came to know that nothing could be done, that the marriage had taken place. The boy said, "I had requested her hand from her father. When he refused, then I had abducted her and brought her here". The bride also said that everything was quite all right.

We stayed in Roong with Rukmani Behn. She was a teacher and had helped the women's movement in Johar a lot. Now she had returned to teach in her own village, however she despaired of the situation there. Whenever circumstances permitted, then for one or two days she would go to Narayan Ashram to find some peace of mind.

In this entire valley only two men were making efforts for prohibition. One of them was a primary schoolmaster. Instead of welcoming guests with liquor he had begun to offer them sweets, however the public had started to ostracise him. The second was a very influential trader. People could not ostracise him. Instead of liquor he took honey in hot water, and he said that this gave him the strength to resist the cold. He had also given up eating meat. As well as this he was also giving en-

couragement to the education of women. Many girls from this area have now received higher education and in their turn have imparted education to many more girls. But they do not go back to live in their own area. -

The Bhotiyas of the Chaundas valley are not migrating. They live the whole year in one place and plough the land themselves. The women had to o a lot of work. Getting up at four o'clock they would settle down to weaving, before working the whole day in the fields and forests, and in the evenings, after preparing the meal and feeding everyone, they spun on their spindles. Instead of a skirt they wrapped a red and blue piece of cloth around themselves. This cloth was woven from very fine yarn that they had spun themselves. Every mother taught her daughter before her marriage how to make this fine cloth from the yarn. This cloth was so strong that it was said that only three such pieces were needed to last a lifetime. They made their hair stick to the heads in a very beautiful way. It took a lot of time to fix it in this way, but having fixed it once this hairstyle stayed firm for weeks and did not even get disturbed when lifting loads.

The language of this valley resembles neither Tibetan nor Hindi; likewise, their religious practices have nothing in common with those of Tibet or India. Once we found ourselves present at a religious festival high in the hills in the midst of the forest. There was no temple or anything similar there, just a large bell hanging up. After the worship rice cooked in goats' blood was served as ritual offering.

In such an area there is a great need for other ashrams similar to Narayan Ashram. Everywhere we were received lovingly. Here also the people were keen to hear news of the Movement. Many years before, with the assent of Shantilalji had come to this area and was working in the field of industrial education. People there were long acquainted with him. If there was somewhere that people did not know him by face, seeing his white Gandhi cap they realised who it was. "I had come straight from Sevagram", that was sufficient enough an introduction for me.

Finally, we heard the sound of goats and we understood the people had returned from Tibet. We went back to Dharchula. There it took us some time to complete our work, and then we returned by a different route to Chanauda. Going up and up the hill towards Askot we had our last glimpse of the confluence of Gori and Kali Ganga. Shantilalji said in a very somber voice, "Every year I look at this view and think to myself, who knows whether I will be able to come here again next year or not".

The Bageshwar fair is held at the time of the most important festival of Almora district, *Uttarayani*[10]. This fair has a dual importance, spiritual and commercial. All the commercial activity of Jauljibi went on here on a very big scale, alongside this the women, filled with religious fervour and sometimes coming on foot for three or four days, came in large numbers. With their sparkling skirts and shawls it seemed as if in the streets all around flocks of multicoloured butterflies were fluttering. Bathing at dawn in the icy waters of the Gomti and Saryu rivers at their sacred confluence, they would then go and worship in the temple. It is said that the temple was established following an incident in the Mahabharat. Throughout the day the

[10] *Uttarayani*: A festival falling on 14 January and marking the return of the sun to north; the festival is also known as *Makar Sankranti*.

women wandered in the bazaar and purchased small items for all the family. Often while doing so they met friends and relatives they had not seen for years.

In the evenings at the various crossroads the men of a particular area would gather together·and perform their local folk dances. Such scenes were a delight to see. Here also a procession was taken out daily at dawn, while in the middle of the day meetings were held on a level meadow beside the river. That is to say that the national slogans were reverberating here too among the hills […].

From Bageshwar I wanted to go up into the hills to the Ramganga valley. There I was to stay for a few days with some friends from Munsyari. Shantilalji was worried about my travelling alone. For the first two days I had the company of a Kashmiri district magistrate. The first day we got completely drenched in the cold rain. The third day we awoke to a white world. Since the middle of the night I had been hearing a continual drumming of sound, and could not understand what was going on. When I looked outside in the morning I saw that over a foot of snow had fallen, and now large lumps of snow were falling from the roof. The sun came out in the middle of the day, and we went out walking in the sunshine through the dazzling forest. After leaving home after the Christmas of 1931 this was the first time that I had seen snow.

After the second day our ways parted, and after some days staying with a friend I set off for Bhainskhal […].

We reached Bhainskhal at sunset. I spent some extremely enjoyable days there among the women. Every afternoon we met together to chat. They competed one with the other ·to extend me hospitality. Sometimes I very happily passed the nights in nearby villages. I felt that I was following Bapu's instructions, that is that I familiarize myself with the people, their circumstances and their problems.

DEP Deportate, esuli, profughe
Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile

Costruzione e ricostruzione della donna in Gandhi

di

Sujata Patel[*]

Traduzione di Sara De Vido e Lorenzo Canonico

Abstract: This paper traces the development of Gandhi's ideas on, of and about women. The author attempts to unearth and articulate the core assumptions underlying Gandhi's perspective on women. Gandhi's ideas incorporate assumptions and notions regarding the origin and nature of gender differences on the basis of which he models out social roles. Gandhi envisaged a significant role for women in Indian society—in the family, in marriage and in politics. In a path breaking intervention he made possible not only the involvement of women in politics, but made them realise that the national movement could not succeed without their involvement in the struggle.

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Questo contributo propone un'analisi dell'ideologia gandhiana intesa come una serie di idee su, delle e riguardo le donne. Queste idee incorporano nozioni e ipotesi riguardanti l'origine e la natura delle differenze di genere sulle cui basi Gandhi modella i ruoli sociali, le possibili scelte ed azioni di carattere culturale e politico ed il tipo di coinvolgimento in certe attività cui le donne possono ambire nella società contemporanea. Attribuendo loro certi ruoli e negando loro degli altri, Gandhi estrapola e riformula da questa serie di idee sulle donne in un dato momento storico un costrutto della condizione femminile (*womanhood*) contemporanea. Siffatta riformulazione è a sua volta essa stessa mediata dalla classe, casta e ideologie religiose di Gandhi. Gandhi sta così non solo compiendo un tentativo sulla donna come essa è, ma sta anche tentando di definire come dovrebbe essere. E ciò in quanto questi presupposti sono intrecciati ad una serie di fattori legittimanti che definiscono i concetti di femminilità e della condizione della donna che agiscono come quadri di riferimento prescrittivi. Si ritiene che sebbene questi presupposti siano radi-

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 ISSN 1824 - 4483

cati in una serie di stereotipi sociali sulle donne, l'ideologia di Gandhi sulle donne si è sviluppata nel tempo ed era legata al suo coinvolgimento negli eventi politici che avvenivano nel paese e alla sua reazione agli stessi.

Gandhi è una figura appartenente al proprio momento storico e le sue idee sulle donne mostrano molto chiaramente il suo intenso coinvolgimento nel plasmare la storia e la concezione di quel tempo. Per questo motivo, questo contributo si pone come obiettivo di rispondere alla domanda su come il genere venga *creato* in Gandhi e cerca di farlo in modo diacronico. L'articolo colloca la crescita e lo sviluppo delle sue idee negli anni in cui, consapevolmente e attivamente, egli contempla e dibatte sui problemi delle donne, comprende le proprie stesse contraddizioni e cerca di risolverle. Nel farlo, costruisce e ricostruisce vari aspetti che definiscono la donna nell'India di inizio ventesimo secolo.

L'ideologia gandhiana parte dai seguenti presupposti riguardo alle donne:

1) Uomini e donne posseggono qualità distinte le cui radici sono di natura biologica. Entrambi appartengono a sfere separate nelle società e ricoprono ruoli specifici nella costruzione della nazione indiana, poiché sono complementari gli uni agli altri.

2) Le donne non sono dei "giocattolini", bensì individui creativi che hanno uno specifico spazio per lo sviluppo della propria creatività. Questo spazio è principalmente nello spazio casalingo e domestico. Giocano ruoli importanti come madri e mogli.

3) Nello spazio domestico, quindi come mogli e madri, le donne manifestano qualità femminili insuperabili e talvolta superiori a quelle maschili. Esse sono la capacità di fare affidamento su se stesse, coraggio, pazienza, purezza e la capacità di sopportare il dolore.

4) Per essere una brava madre, una donna deve ricevere una educazione diversa, che le dia una formazione consona non solo al normale espletamento delle necessità domestiche, bensì anche all'economia domestica e che le fornisca basilari informazioni sul mondo in cui vive.

5) le esistenti usanze sociali hindu non permettono alle donne di crescere nel loro nuovo ruolo. I matrimoni infantili, il 'sati' (il suicidio delle vedove) e dote sfruttano le donne e frustrano la loro dignità. Le organizzazioni di donne dovrebbero essere formate non solo per combattere contro queste piaghe sociali, ma anche per far crescere consapevolezza nelle donne con riferimento al loro nuovo ruolo nella India libera. Queste organizzazioni dovrebbero essere gestite solo da donne, in quanto il loro carattere distintivo è compreso solo dalle donne.

6) la qualità più distinta e preziosa della donna è la sua purezza. Per preservare la propria purezza, non dovrebbe svolgere attività economiche; le attività economiche infatti violerebbero la sua purezza e il suo onore.

7) Uomini e donne hanno diritti politici, cioè il diritto al voto. La donna ha anche un ruolo importante in politica – come madre, ella instilla la coscienza nazionale nelle bambine e nei bambini e partecipa nei programmi. Di converso, è importante sviluppare programmi dedicati e diversi per coinvolgere le donne nella partecipazione politica. Durante il movimento di non cooperazione e nel movimento di disobbedienza civile, sono stati introdotti i picchetti di fronte ai negozi di liquore e dei negozi di tessuti stranieri, che sono divenuti programmi speciali per le donne.

8) Se ella è costretta ad entrare nella sfera pubblica, dove non è "onorata" o "rispettata" e se la sua purezza viene violata, deve togliersi la vita con la pura forza di volontà.

9) Il matrimonio è funzionale alla sola riproduzione. Il sesso senza riproduzione è anormale.

10) Una donna può raggiungere ruoli più elevati moralmente e spiritualmente se rifiuta la propria sessualità, la riproduzione e la vita familiare e si dedica completamente al benessere delle persone.

Ogni costrutto trae i propri elementi da un contesto particolare. Sostengo infatti che i presupposti di Gandhi si ricavano da uno spazio caratterizzato dalla percezione di ciò che dovrebbe essere la donna propria di un maschio di una casta hindu elevata di una classe media urbana. Esiste un significativo senso di continuità tra le idee di Gandhi sulla donna e quelle formulate dai riformisti del tardo diciannovesimo secolo. Sebbene Gandhi introduca un concetto dinamico, come quello della politica, nel suo modello di ruolo sociale delle donne, egli non ha rivoluzionato i presupposti su cui si basava la percezione della donna da parte di questi riformisti della classe media. Per Gandhi, la politica andava ridefinita affinché trovasse il suo spazio nella "casa", nel privato.

I riformisti del 19esimo secolo sostenevano la dottrina delle "sfere separate", le cui radici si trovavano nella biologia. Le differenze tra i sessi andavano dunque spiegate in termini di "differenze naturali", il che legittimava i diversi ruoli sociali e culturali di uomini e donne nella società e sulle cui basi sono stati eretti dei presupposti morali permeanti i loro comportamenti e le loro interazioni.

Il matrimonio era l'istituzione sociale attraverso cui venivano articolate le due sfere. Il maschio era il "bread winner", colui che "provvede ai bisogni" e il "protettore" ed in quanto tale "superiore"; la donna era la "madre", la "nutrice", la "caregiver" e l'"inferiore"; esistevano sottili variazioni nelle varie forme in cui si articolava questa ideologia: il maschio poteva essere "egoista" o "indipendente" o "possessivo", eppure mancare di "intuizione" e "forza"; la donna d'altro canto poteva "darsi completamente", essere "paziente", "qualcuno su cui fare affidamento", "piena di coraggio e umiltà". Vedremo come questo tema ricorra come un *leitmotif* nell'ideologia gandhiana sulla donna […].

Formulazione dei postulati di base, 1917-1922

Non sarà una sorpresa per i lettori conoscere che le idee di Gandhi sulle donne si siano cristallizzate in maniera coerente nel periodo tra il 1917 e il 1922. Questa non è infatti solo la prima fase di partecipazione attiva del popolo indiano nella lotta nazionale, ma anche il periodo in cui Gandhi ha preso le redini della stessa. Dato che questa fase è caratterizzata dalla protesta (prima spontanea, poi organizzata) contro i Britannici e dalla partecipazione di sia uomini che donne alla lotta, è difficile separare nell'analisi quale dei due sia sorta per prima: se la partecipazione delle donne o l'*advocacy* di Gandhi a sostenerla. In qualsiasi caso, ciò che rimane significativo è che Gandhi non fosse dispiaciuto dalla partecipazione femminile. Piuttosto, alcuni suoi scritti della prima ora mettono in risalto il suo fascino per le potenzialità che tale partecipazione avrebbe potuto avere in un momento di lotta

collettiva. In linea generale, gli scritti di Gandhi antecedenti al 1916 sulle donne si collocano nel quadro comune di riferimento dei riformisti. Gandhi sembra in special modo dimostrare una particolare affinità con Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar e con le sue idee sull'educazione della donna – idee con le quali concorda e le cui cause egli stesso sposa. In una sola occasione, nel 1906-07, si discosta da questa posizione commentando la lotta portata avanti dalle suffragette alto-borghesi per i propri diritti politici in Inghilterra. Constata con "meraviglia" la "forza virile" che esse hanno mostrato nel confrontarsi con la polizia, in special modo non essendo nemmeno provenienti dalla "classe operaia". Gandhi non esprime alcun commento denigratorio sul loro confronto con la polizia o la loro lotta per l'uguaglianza politica, ma non ritiene neppure che vi siano delle implicazioni per il movimento per le donne indiane. Egli sente solamente che l'intera popolazione d'India dovrebbe imparare una lezione dalle suffragette. A quel punto, non sembra vi sia alcuna consapevolezza in Gandhi del ruolo distintivo delle donne nel risveglio nazionale. Il primo collegamento esplicito tra le donne ed il loro ruolo nel *nation building* appare in Gandhi nel contesto del reclutamento degli Indiani nell'esercito durante la prima guerra mondiale, specificamente nel 1916[1]. A quel tempo, durante il suo viaggio attraverso l'India, chiede a mogli, madri e sorelle di coinvolgere "i loro uomini" nel servizio militare, poiché il reclutamento volontario avrebbe portato allo Swaraj[2].Da quel momento in avanti, Gandhi fa sempre più spesso riferimento alla questione delle donne in India, prima mettendo in discussione le pratiche hindu esistenti che limitano il coinvolgimento delle donne nel risveglio nazionale, come il purdah[3], e poi affermando e definendo il ruolo distintivo che le donne possono ricoprire nel movimento nazionale.

È un processo estremamente lento in cui costruisce le sue idee e crea le mediazioni necessarie per collegare il movimento nazionale e le donne attraverso l'arcolaio, un processo che se procede in avanti, tende anche a retrocedere, finché verso gli anni Venti, non riesce a cristallizzare i propri pensieri su questo problema in modo coerente. D'altro canto, ciò che sembra chiaramente espresso nelle convinzioni di Gandhi […] è la complementarità e l'indivisibilità dei due sessi, radicate nelle distintive caratteristiche biologiche e riproduttive e che si manifesta socialmente in una idea romantica di unità […].

Ridefinizione del matrimonio hindu e della famiglia, 1923-1932

I principi cardine del ruolo della donna nell'ideologia di Gandhi sono stati posti in una prima fase in cui Gandhi estende il concetto di "sfere separate" per affermare una relazione cruciale tra donne e politica. La donna che è depositaria della bontà spirituale e morale della società diviene ora la coscienza del movimento nazionale. L'arcolaio, insieme alla protezione dell'onore delle donne, diventano i simboli di Swaraj. In questo modo Gandhi porta la politica nell'ambiente domestico, se non addirittura la introduce dall'interno dell'ambiente domestico stesso. È importante

[1] Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, CWMG Vol. 7, p. 65.
[2] CWMG, Vol. 13, 1916, pp. 443, 454, 496.
[3] *Ivi*, p. 435.

enfatizzare che questa estensione della politica all'ambiente domestico ha reso possibile una revisione radicale del ruolo della donna nel suo spazio domestico e le ha conferito nuovo status e legittimazione all'interno di questi confini.

Simultaneamente, Gandhi estrae e riformula una nozione di donna hindu ideale, convertendo gli attributi comunemente percepiti come latori di debolezza in punti di forza. Malgrado stesse compiendo un cambiamento radicale, egli spiega che la sua serie di idee è legata ad una comprensione della donna e del suo ruolo nella società tipico della classe media urbanizzata. È stato anche argomentato come alcune di queste idee rimasero espresse in modo ambiguo, specialmente quelle riguardanti il ruolo attivo delle donne nella politica al di fuori della sfera casalinga. Ciò cui assistiamo in questo periodo non è una risoluzione di queste ambiguità. In questo periodo, Gandhi è attivamente coinvolto nel confronto e nella ridefinizione dei contorni dell'induismo. La sua campagna per l'entrata degli Harijan (coloro tradizionalmente definiti come gli intoccabili) nei templi lo portano a mettere pesantemente in discussione le interpretazioni hindu ortodosse contemporanee e a ridefinire per se stesso sia la religione hindu che la figura del custode della coscienza, la donna hindu. Come risultato, egli attacca gli elementi conservatori e ortodossi che imprigionano le donne hindu nella società e che le inibiscono nel loro impegno politico. Attraverso i suoi commenti al matrimonio infantile, delle vedove, sulle doti e la pratica del sati, egli mette in discussione l'ortodossia hindu ed allo stesso tempo la riformula, enfatizzando in tal modo il ruolo del matrimonio come unico regolatore del rapporto tra uomo e donna nella società. Attraverso questo processo di riformulazione, Gandhi fornisce commenti sull'amore romantico e sul suo ruolo nel matrimonio, sulla legislazione concernente i diritti delle donne e sulla divisione del lavoro all'interno del nucleo familiare. Gandhi sta preparando una definizione della donna moderna nella nuova nazione. I suoi scritti in questo periodo indicano il mutamento radicale che sta compiendo svelando e mettendo in discussione i metodi esistenti di sfruttamento delle donne (certo solo di un gruppo di donne, nondimeno il modo dominante di comprendere le donne nella società indiana contemporanea) e i limiti della sua stessa cornice concettuale oltre i quali non riesce ad uscire. Un esame degli scritti di Gandhi nei *Collected Works* indica che, dopo il 1922-23, il suo interesse per le donne si affievolisce, per poi tornare in auge dopo il 1925, quando offre commentari su problemi disparati, quali i matrimoni infantili, delle vedove ed il rapporto tra matrimonio e prostituzione. Dal 1925 in avanti, Gandhi comincia una campagna contro l'intoccabilità e scrive una serie di articoli contro i mali dell'induismo. Come parte di questa campagna, introduce anche il problema delle vedove bambine e sostiene attivamente che queste vedove debbano risposarsi. Questi atti, insiste, sono contro Swaraj – il risveglio sociale, educativo, morale e politico del popolo d'India[4]. In una critica fervente, denuncia nel dettaglio le pratiche discriminatorie contemporanee che legittimano i vedovi a risposarsi, ma non le donne. Egli critica l'argomentazione che un matrimonio precoce renda possibile la preservazione della purezza delle donne ed il loro miglior adattamento nella nuova famiglia[5]. Gandhi risponde che gli Shastra che hanno fatto affermare la pratica del

[4] CWMG, Vol 30, 1926, p. 430.
[5] *Ibidem.*

matrimonio precoce delle ragazze non stiano esprimendo la vera essenza dell'induismo, ma delle "interpolazioni".

È peccaminoso ed illegale dare in sposa ragazze di giovane età. "Lo è!" sostiene: "un male morale e fisico che ci fa arretrare dalla nostra battaglia per Swaraj"[6]. Egli difatti ritiene che vi sia una correlazione causale tra il matrimonio infantile e l'alto numero di bimbe vedove nel paese[7]. Egli invita i genitori ad organizzare per loro nuovi matrimoni e consiglia inoltre ai giovani uomini di sposare queste vedove. È con pari ferocia e zelo che si scaglia anche contro il sistema purdah comune in Bihar, Bengala e nelle Province Unite, così come contro la dote e la pratica sati. Nel suo articolo "Abbattere il Purdah", egli lamenta l'esistenza di questa "pratica barbarica" che sta "facendo del male al paese". Il Purdah, egli sostiene, diventa un impedimento alla crescita delle donne indiane. Poiché elle sono "imprigionate e confinate nelle case e nei loro piccoli cortili, sono persino insicure sul da farsi quando si ritrovano insieme in una stanza ad ascoltare una persona che parla. Fanno 'rumore e chiasso'"[8]. Non biasima tuttavia le donne per questo "chiasso", poiché sa che hanno "alta cultura" e che possono "innalzare se stesse alla stessa altezza degli uomini", ma non è permesso loro farlo. Se il suo attacco nel caso del matrimonio infantile è stato contro gli Shastra, nel caso del purdah è contro la denotazione contemporanea della castità, che costringe le donne ad essere recluse fisicamente nelle loro case. Invece di chiedere loro di "respirare la fresca aria di libertà", Gandhi sostiene che la castità dovrebbe venire da dentro e che "per essere di qualche valore, deve significare resistere ad ogni tentazione. Bisogna essere sprezzanti quanto Sita"[9]. La castità viene ora definita quale nozione prescrittiva morale che risiede all'interno di una donna. La medesima condanna viene scagliata contro la pratica del sati. "Come può la società" – si chiede – "pretendere obbedienza e devozione da una moglie, se non può chiedere altrettanto ad un marito?" Questa pratica, sostiene, trae le proprie origini nelle superstizioni e nel "cieco egotismo dell'uomo". "La donna", sostiene, "non è schiava del marito, ma compagna, la sua metà migliore, collega e amica. Condivide con lui pari diritti e doveri. I loro obblighi reciproci e verso il mondo devono perciò essere gli stessi e reciproci"[10]. Una simile argomentazione viene ripetuta da Gandhi nel contesto della dote, dove "le donne, che sono peraltro *ardhanginu*, la metà migliore, vengono ridotte… al rango di mero bestiame che viene venduto e acquistato"[11]. Gandhi sta senza dubbio compiendo una critica radicale delle pratiche sociali contemporanee e simultaneamente affermando il bisogno di una rivalutazione del ruolo delle donne nel contesto di Swaraj. Nondimeno, questa rivalutazione avviene in un alveo ideologico che, nel migliore dei casi, porta ad una critica parziale dell'oppressione sociale della donna. È importante notare che, a tale riguardo, sebbene fosse critico nei confronti del matrimonio infantile e incoraggiasse il risposarsi delle vedove bambine, egli non fosse

[6] *Ivi*, p. 365.
[7] *Ivi*, p. 340.
[8] CWMG, Vol. 34, 1927, p. 141.
[9] CWMG, Vol. 33, 1927, pp. 44-45.
[10] CWMG, Vol. 46, 1931, p. 75.
[11] CWMG, Vol. 39, 1928, p. 415.

entusiasta della possibilità di risposarsi delle vedove adulte. Nel 1920, infatti si esprimeva così:

> i riformisti impazienti diranno semplicemente che risposarsi sia l'unico rimedio serio ed efficace per questa [piaga della società]. Io non posso dirlo. Anche io ho una famiglia. Ci sono molte vedove nella mia famiglia, ma non riuscirei mai a consigliare loro di risposarsi e a loro nemmeno passerebbe per la testa l'idea. Il vero rimedio è far sì che anche gli uomini giurino di non risposarsi[12].

E quando promuove la campagna per i matrimoni delle vedove bambine, dice:

> La definizione di vedova non si può applicare ai matrimoni dei bambini. Una vedova è una donna che, all'età appropriata, ha sposato una persona di propria scelta o è stata sposata col proprio consenso, che ha avuto rapporti col marito e che ora ha perso il marito. Una donna che non ha consumato il matrimonio o una ragazza di giovane età, sacrificata dai genitori non può e non deve essere inclusa in tale definizione[13].

Il fatto che le ragazze-bambine possano risposarsi perché non hanno "amato" e consumato il loro matrimonio è un dato intrinsecamente correlato alla nuova concezione di matrimonio di Gandhi. "Il matrimonio", asserisce, "è un sacramento", l'unione non solo di corpi, "ma anche di anime"[14]. L'amore è possibile solo una volte nella propria vita e solo attraverso il matrimonio. "È anche un recinto che protegge la religione". Una volta che il matrimonio avviene, allora "uomo e donna diventano una sola anima". Una sposa bambina non può comprendere il significato del matrimonio, perciò non dovrebbe venir fatta sposare da giovane e, se divenuta vedova, deve potersi risposare. Una vedova adulta che è stata sposata comprende siffatto significato di matrimonio e dunque dovrebbe esimersi dal risposarsi. È solo quando una donna "non riesce a trattenersi" che dovrebbe avere la libertà di risposarsi, poiché è meglio "sposarsi apertamente che vivere nel peccato"[15]. "Se non sente il bisogno di risposarsi, merita di essere oggetto di riverenza da tutto il mondo, poiché ella è uno dei pilastri del dharma"[16]. "Una vera vedova hindu", sostiene, "è un tesoro. È uno dei doni dell'Induismo all'umanità. Ramabai Ranade è stata questo tipo di dono". "Dio non ha creato nulla di tanto raffinato quanto una vedova hindu"[17]. Questo tema del carattere sacrosanto del matrimonio permea anche i suoi scritti sul sati. Poiché il vero matrimonio non è solo unione di corpi, il matrimonio non viene distrutto dal mero rompersi delle relazioni fisiche. "L'auto-distruzione è dunque futile"[18]. I morti non possono essere riportati in vita. Essere sati non significa distruggere se stessi, ma "realizzare l'ideale di servizio puramente altruista e umile attraverso la completa fusione della propria individualità in quella del marito". La *sathihood,* per Gandhi, significa la realizzazione della purezza attraverso "rinuncia, sacrificio, auto-disciplina e dedica al servizio al proprio marito". Se Gandhi non vuole che la donna "salga sulla pira funebre alla morte del marito", vuole però che "si sforzi per far sì che gli ideali e le virtù del marito vivano ancora

[12] CWMG, Vol. 18, 1920, pp. 319-321.
[13] CWMG, Vol. 22, 1924, p. 527.
[14] CWMG, Vol. 30, 1926, p. 364.
[15] Ivi, p. 493-494.
[16] CWMG, Vol. 31, 1926, p. 443.
[17] CWMG, Vol. 34, 1927, p. 141.
[18] CWMG, Vol. 30, 1926, p. 314.

attraverso le sue azioni in questo mondo!"[19]. Ciò che Gandhi sta cercando di fare è sollevare una critica verso quegli aspetti della cultura hindu "che hanno portato ad una eccessiva subordinazione della moglie" con la conseguenza che il marito "esercita un'autorità tale da ridurlo al livello di un bruto"[20]. Egli evidenzia alcune pratiche che limitano la libertà della donna di operare all'interno di questa definizione di matrimonio e dunque della sfera domestica. Il matrimonio infantile, purdah, dote e sati, crede, devono essere abbandonati. Devono essere peraltro cambiati anche quei codici giuridici che non trattano donne e uomini come eguali all'interno della famiglia. Le donne, insiste Gandhi, sono compartecipi del potere e dei privilegi del marito[21]. Parimenti, insiste anche sul fatto che la donna non venga sovraccaricata da lavori domestici. Le richieste sul cibo dovrebbero restare semplici e si dovrebbe cucinare solo una volta al giorno, così che la cucina non occupi tutto il tempo della donna. Per giunta, continua affermando che "visto che il cibo deve essere preparato, entrambi (marito e moglie) dovrebbero partecipare alla preparazione"[22]. Gandhi, benché avanzando una critica parziale alle pratiche hindu tradizionali, enfatizza ancora una volta il ruolo cruciale della donna unicamente all'interno del nucleo familiare. In un articolo chiave intitolato "Io, il mio filarello e le donne", egli afferma che crede nella completa parità delle donne. Sono e dovrebbero essere considerate compagne di lavoro. In India, le donne non sono mai state subordinate!"[23]. Solo quelle abbienti e che sono, per questo, divenute oggetti, si sono lasciate subordinare, divenendo così preda dei bei vestiti e degli ornamenti.

L'antica prerogativa delle donne era essere la "regina della casa". Da questa posizione non dovrebbe essere detronizzata, sarebbe invero una casa terrificante quella in cui una donna non fosse l'elemento centrale… chi si prenderebbe cura dei bambini, i gioielli più brillanti delle case più povere? L'uomo, insiste, "è colui che porta a casa la pagnotta" e lavora meglio perché "ha una casa felice". È il lavoro della donna quello di "far crescere i piccoli e di modellare il loro carattere"[24]. "Qualunque sia la razza, la vita di famiglia è la prima e la più grande delle cose. La sua santità deve permanere. Su di essa si fonda il benessere della nazione… Nessuno stato può sopravvivere a meno che la sacra sicurezza della casa non venga preservata"[25]. Vediamo in tal modo che Gandhi sta dando al matrimonio e alla casa una santità religiosa e morale all'interno dei confini dell'ideologia nazionale. Egli sta sì accettando l'eguaglianza formale giuridica tra i partner nel matrimonio e ridistribuendo per certi versi i doveri all'interno del nucleo familiare, ma non sta cambiando i presupposti basilari su cui, nella sua percezione, si basa l'istituzione del matrimonio, cioè la complementarità dei due sessi. Come egli sostiene, uomo e donna non dovrebbero essere divisi in superiore o inferiore. Il posto e le funzioni di entrambi sono "diversi". Gandhi non mette neppure in discussione le altre pratiche istituzionali del matrimonio hindu contemporaneo come le regole che governano la

[19] CWMG, Vol. 46, 1931, p. 75.
[20] *Ibidem.*
[21] CWMG, Vol. 42, 1929, p 5.
[22] CWMG, Vol. 34, 1927, pp. 32-33.
[23] CWMG, Vol. 48, 1931, p. 19.
[24] Ivi, p. 80.
[25] *Ibidem.*

scelta del partner la cui base è il sistema delle caste. Egli afferma, in effetti, il suo convincimento che il matrimonio dovrebbe essere contratto solo all'interno di particolari varnas e condanna il matrimonio tra diversi varna. Sul fatto che Gandhi sia solo parzialmente critico delle pratiche hindu contemporanee è un fatto accettato da Gandhi stesso, che dice in alcune frasi rivelatorie che:

> io adoro il Brahmismo. Ho difeso il Varnaashrama Dharma, ma il brahmismo che può tollerare l'intoccabilità, la vedovanza delle vergini, la deflorazione delle vergini, mi irrita. È una parodia del Brahmismo. Non vi è in esso la conoscenza del Brahmino[26].

In questo modo non solo vediamo Gandhi che solleva una critica meramente parziale delle pratiche sociali dell'Induismo, lo vediamo anche, in questa fase, estendere idee delle e sulle donne, che aveva precedentemente sviluppato. Afferma e legittima nuovamente che lo spazio intrinseco della donna è la casa, simultaneamente postulando la loro uguaglianza formale con gli uomini. Al di fuori del contesto domestico, il problema del mantenere purezza e onore rimane una spina nel fianco di Gandhi. Gandhi non è stato in grado di risolvere questo problema, a dispetto delle sue dichiarazioni sull'arresto della moglie di Das e delle sue sorelle. Eppure, vediamo che esiste in Gandhi un tentativo di far evolvere una nuova definizione di politica, come si dirà. Gandhi è anche oramai convinto che sesso e riproduzione siano solo possibili all'interno dei vincoli del matrimonio e del sesso. Al di fuori del matrimonio e dunque al di fuori della "casa", esso è impuro. Così, ora, contrariamente alla sua posizione precedente, benché accetti che le prostitute siano vittime della lussuria degli uomini, egli obietta veementemente contro la nomina a membri del Congresso delle danzatrici di Barisal. Quel tipo di status, dice, che quelle donne hanno ottenuto è contrario al benessere morale della società. Il Congresso, sostiene, non può incorporare una "associazione di note ladre". In effetti queste donne sono "più pericolose di ladri". "Mentre i secondi rubano possedimenti materiali, le prime rubano la virtù"[27]. E sebbene non esistano barriere giuridiche contro questa loro entrata, l'opinione pubblica avrebbe dovuto tenerle al di fuori. Se, nei suoi primi componimenti scritti, Gandhi protegge la purezza del matrimonio, adesso cerca di proteggere la purezza del Congresso. La politica ed il partito del Congresso vengono ora percepiti entrambi in termini morali. Il forte sentire dell'esclusività sessuale della classe media che dirige la legittimazione del ruolo della donna all'interno della sfera casalinga continua a rimanere parte dell'ideologia di Gandhi e ne si manifesta al tempo del movimento per la disobbedienza civile. Anche prima dell'inizio della marcia Dandi, Kasturba aveva guidato un gruppo di volontari a Satyagraha. Gandhi era rimasto molto turbato da questa partecipazione attiva e nel giro di pochi giorni se ne uscì con un messaggio speciale per le donne d'India. L'indossare il khadi, dice, dovrebbe essere il loro obiettivo, poiché il khadi rappresenta la purezza[28]. Esse non devono, insiste, unirsi al movimento per la disobbedienza civile, poiché "si perderebbero nella folla" e, quando saranno perse, non ci sarà "sofferenza alcuna per la quale potranno agognare".

[26] CWMG, Vol. 34, 1927, p. 142.
[27] CWMG, Vol. 27, 1925, pp. 290-291.
[28] CWMG, Vol. 43, 1930, p. 189.

Sostenendo che esse non abbiano "forza bruta", ma "potere morale", Gandhi chiede loro di partecipare ai picchetti di fronte ai negozi di vestiti stranieri e di liquori poiché "chi può smuovere maggiormente i cuori se non le donne?"[29]. Eppure è ancora turbato per la loro "purezza" in questo tipo di partecipazione, poiché scrive "chi vi rivolgerà uno sguardo malvagio se camminate diritte col nome di Dio sulle vostre labbra? Siate convinte nei vostri cuori che la purezza stessa è uno scudo"[30]. Ciò che vediamo qui è l'incapacità da parte di Gandhi di allontanarsi dagli ormeggi ideologici della classe media concernenti le donne, che potrebbero ricoprire il loro ruolo esclusivamente nel nucleo familiare. Se egli è intrappolato in questo quadro concettuale è anche perché la sua ricerca personale per comprendere la sessualità non lo ha condotto a comprendere le radici sociali o storiche della sessualità. La sua personale soluzione è stata il rinnegare l'istinto sessuale, un rifiuto che – egli crede – non solo porta alla felicità, ma anche guida l'essere umano sulla strada della moksha e rende possibile la crescita della forza morale in grado di contrastare anche una forza fisica illimitata. La sua convinzione che questa soluzione personale possa assurgere a soluzione universale del problema dell'attrazione sessuale, che considera una debolezza, è la ragione alla base del suo fascino e dell'empatia verso il ruolo della vedova hindu. La tradizione, tenendo la vedova separata dalla vita di famiglia, dai piaceri materiali e fisici, l'aveva condannata a una vita puritanamente semplice, investendo su una sua superiorità morale. Gandhi rende questo rifiuto una verità morale superiore. Le vedove diventano per Gandhi le rappresentanti non solo di ciò che di meglio c'è nella tradizione hindu, ma, nell'evoluzione delle sue idee, le rende l'esempio del ruolo che la donna indiana deve ora ricoprire nella società. La vedova è l'ideale attraverso cui Gandhi è in grado di far trascendere i limiti cui la sua stessa moralità lo ha legato nel rapporto con le donne. È ora possibile per le donne, secondo Gandhi, trovare un posto nella vita pubblica senza doversi scontrare con i problemi di "onore", "castità" e "impurità". Diventano l'epitome di tutti gli ideali, una volta che rinunciano a sesso, matrimonio, riproduzione e famiglia. Possono ora dimostrare il loro amore verso l'umanità intera. È ironico e paradossale che il momento in cui Gandhi è stato capace di compiere le necessarie meditazioni per arrivare ad una posizione di accettazione verso l'ingresso e l'affermazione di un ruolo delle donne al di fuori della sfera domestica, sia quello in cui aveva perso ogni speranza nella politica. In questo modo l'immagine delle donne nei suoi scritti in questo stadio è quella di una donna dedicata al servizio della nazione e dell'umanità.

[…]

La donna come "colei che rinuncia", 1932-48

[…]Vediamo ora in Gandhi gli ultimi stadi della ricostruzione di una nuova immagine di donna cui egli attribuisce un nuovo ruolo. È peraltro chiaro che egli abbia modellato questa nuova donna sulla vedova hindu. Già nel 1924 egli aveva affermato che "l'auto controllo [della vedova hindu] è stato portato dall'Induismo

[29] Ivi, p. 219.
[30] Ivi, p. 155.

alle sue vette più alte" e che nella vita della vedova "questo raggiunge la sua perfezione". Una vedova "non guarda nemmeno al dolore come dolore. La rinuncia è divenuta la loro seconda natura e rinunciarvi sarebbe per loro doloroso. Scoprono la felicità nel rinnegare se stesse"[31]. E continua,

> questo è ciò che di meglio offre l'Induismo. Guardo alla vita della vedova come fosse riflesso dell'Induismo stesso. Quando vedo una vedova, chino la testa istintivamente in atto di reverenza. La benedizione di una vedova è un dono di cui faccio tesoro. Dimentico ogni mio affanno. L'uomo non è null'altro che una zolla di terra paragonato a lei. È impossibile competere con la sofferenza paziente della vedova[32].

Gandhi crea ora una donna di fattezze divine, una guida che combatte la violenza e l'ingiustizia. Come incarnazione della madre universale, ella è la custode ed il simbolo di tutto ciò che è moralmente buono nell'umanità. Non è necessario che ella venga coinvolta nella politica per combattere l'ingiustizia, perché è ora la "personificazione della rinuncia" e può così "adornare sia il suo sesso che la nazione"[33]. Non è più debole o sotto il giogo dell'uomo. È sabalam[34], la riserva della forza fisica e morale. È questa forza che le conferisce il potere di combattere ogni attentato alla sua castità ed onore. Può usare le sue unghie e i suoi denti per uccidersi o usare la sua lingua. In lei risiede la forza spirituale della nazione. E solo quattro mesi prima dell'indipendenza, Gandhi si esprime così ad alcune donne lavoratrici:

> Abbiate fede in Dio, confidenza in voi stesse e coraggio. Il timido teme tutto, per cui se continuate ad essere timide non sarete in grado di usare la vostra forza per coltivare il coraggio. Per utilizzare la vostra forza, dovete rendervi contro del potere che risiede in voi [È attraverso] lo sviluppo [del vostro] coraggio morale [che potete] sviluppare una forza immensa. Se le donne decidessero di portare gloria alla nazione in pochi mesi, riuscirebbero a far cambiare il volto del paese, perché il sostrato spirituale della donna indo-iraniana è completamente diverso da quello delle donne di altri paesi[35].

Gandhi crea così una Kali puritana ed ascetica.

Conclusione

[…] L'ideologia gandhiana compie senza dubbio un balzo enorme conferendo alle donne un ruolo significativo nella società indiana contemporanea. Contribuisce anche ad un cambiamento significativo dell'immagine della donna sviluppata dai riformisti. Senza dubbio, Gandhi ha reso le donne soggetto, facendo loro comprendere di avere libertà, qualità ed attributi cruciali per la società contemporanea. In una ricostruzione radicale, ha assegnato loro la fiducia in loro stesse e nella loro essenza. Ha fatto comprendere alle donne che hanno un ruolo significativo e dominante da giocare nella famiglia, che sia loro che i loro mariti sono uguali e che all'interno della famiglia godono di simili diritti. In un intervento pioniere, egli ha reso possibile non solo il coinvolgimento delle donne in politica, ma ha fatto loro comprendere che il movimento nazionale non potrebbe avere successo senza il loro

[31] CWMG, Vol. 22, 1924, p. 523.
[32] Ivi, p. 154.
[33] CWMG, Vol. 83, 1946, p. 398.
[34] CWMG, Vol. 87, 1947, p. 293.
[35] *Ibidem.*

coinvolgimento nella lotta. Gandhi, a conti fatti, ha dato potere alle donne in famiglia e nel matrimonio. Questa ricostruzione delle donne e della femminilità, tuttavia, non ha compiuto un'analisi strutturale dell'origine e della natura dello sfruttamento delle donne; Gandhi si avvale difatti di argomenti essenzialistici per riaffermare il ruolo della donna come madre e moglie nella sfera domestica. Egli priva la donna dei suoi desideri sessuali, eppure enfatizza il suo distintivo ruolo sociale nella famiglia glorificandone alcune qualità "femminili". Attribuendo a queste qualità un senso di separazione e giustificazione della moralità, egli contemporaneamente attribuisce alla donna sposata un ruolo positivo e creativo in certe situazioni, ma la ingabbia all'interno di quelle di altri che si estendono al di fuori della famiglia e della sfera domestica. Se da un lato Gandhi costruisce un nuovo posto significativo per la donna sposata indiana all'interno delle mura domestiche, ne ricostruisce un altro per la donna non sposata al di fuori delle stesse. Eppure, se c'è stato un tentativo di invertire la dottrina essenzialistica delle "sfere separate", Gandhi ha fallito miseramente nel portare a termine la sua demolizione. Se la dottrina delle "sfere separate" è basata su differenze biologiche "date", la nuova donna di Gandhi può ora rompere la "Laksham Rekha" della "casa" solo attraverso il rinnegamento della propria biologia. In questo modo, l'inversione e la messa in discussione non possono mai avvenire ed il matrimonio rimane sacrosanto e l'essenza della società indiana moderna. Non vi è da stupirsi dunque nel constatare che il movimento della donna odierna stia cercando di combattere questa eredità attraverso la lotta. Il ritorno di Gandhi sta avvenendo ad un punto della storia dei movimenti delle donne in cui il focus dell'analisi è passata dalla valutazione delle radici storiche e sociali della costruzione della femminilità e della mascolinità in diversi paesi, regioni e in diverse stratificazioni – classi, caste, etnie, tribù e razze – verso un'accettazione delle distinzioni essenziali tra femminilità e mascolinità che emergono da una crescente preoccupazione verso violenza maschile, sessualità, maternità e pace. Le idee di Gandhi rientrano in questo flusso di coscienza senza difficoltà alcuna. Poiché egli crea una nuova donna, una donna che potrebbe avere forza, coraggio, pazienza e la capacità di soffrire e quindi divenire un simbolo della non violenza e della pace. D'altra parte, non si dovrebbe dimenticare, come mostrato sopra, che la nuova immagine di donna che egli crea è tratta da un contesto storico e sociale particolare e per uno specifico obiettivo politico: unire i diversi *stratas* sociali in India contro l'imperialismo. Gandhi è stato una figura di quel periodo storico e di quell'ambiente sociale. È stato anche uno stratega politico d'eccellenza che ha provato ad unire *stratas* sociali sviluppatisi in modo non uniforme. Ogni estensione delle sue idee a situazioni contemporanee deve essere compiuta nella piena consapevolezza di questo fatto nella valutazione del suo ruolo. Questo contributo è stato scritto non solo per mostrare la coerenza interna delle idee di Gandhi sulle donne nel loro sviluppo nel tempo, ma anche per rivelare e articolare i presupposti chiave dietro alla sua prospettiva sulle donne. Si è argomentato che l'essenzialismo che guida la sua prospettiva è qualcosa che i moti delle donne contemporanee debbono comprendere e da cui devono essere messe in guardia nella loro ricerca di messia alternativi nella lotta contro lo sfruttamento e l'oppressione.

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Kastur – Wife of Mahatma Gandhi

by

Arun Gandhi[*]

There is no record of the exact day of Kastur Kapadia's birth. In ancient India, official birth records were never properly kept. We know grandmother was born in 1869, the same year as grandfather, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. They were also born in the same town: the coastal city of Porbandar, in western India. It is said the difference in their ages is just a few months and Ba, as we called grandmother, was about six months older than Bapu, grandfather. There is no record of the exact day of Kastur Kapadia's birth. In ancient India, official birth records were never properly kept. We know grandmother was born in 1869, the same year as grandfather, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. They were also born in the same town: the coastal city of Porbandar, in western India. It is said the difference in their ages is just a few months and Ba, as we called grandmother, was about six months older than Bapu, grandfather.

Kastur was a middle child, sandwiched between two brothers, the only daughter of wealthy and indulgent parents – Gokaldas and Vrajkunwar Kapadia. Gokaldas was a leading citizen and one-time Mayor of Porbandar. He inherited the trading house dealing in cloth, grain and cotton shipments to markets in Africa and what was then known as Arabia. Despite their wealth the Kapadias did not live ostentatiously. Their home, though well appointed and handsomely furnished, had no garden or out-door courtyard where children could play. A few houses down the lane was the Gandhi family home which had a small, private courtyard. Since the two families were friends and neighbours, it seems likely that the Kapadia children and the Gandhi children, played in the open courtyard.

They may not have been playmates for long, however. Girls and boys, growing up in orthodox Hindu families lived in separate worlds. Kastur did not go to school but learned the art of being a good wife, mother and housekeeper. And since girls in India were married at a very young age, they had to learn their marital responsibilities at an age when small girls today would be entering kindergarten. Sometime in the year 1876, when Kastur and Mohan were both seven years old,

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 ISSN 1824 - 4483

their parents reached a preliminary agreement for their betrothal. Little Mohan was the fourth and last child of Karamchand and his much younger fourth wife Putliba. At that age neither of the two knew the significance of what was taking place but they received some splendid presents which made them both happy.

Because the story of Kasturba Gandhi's life has for so long been enmeshed in, or overshadowed by, the story of Mahatma Gandhi, it is difficult to establish facts about her early years. When I went in search of family records to piece together the story of the Kapadia family I learned that the disastrous floods in the 1930s had destroyed all documents, letters and photographs. The actual wedding did not take place until 1882 – six years after their betrothal. According to family recollections, two other Kapadia daughters whom Kastur never knew, had died several years before she was born. By all accounts Kastur was an enchanting youngster: intelligent, independent, fearless and unusually pretty. Mohan's father Karamchand proposed the three brothers would get married simultaneously to reduce the cost of the wedding for the bride's parents. In the Indian tradition, the wedding is always hosted by the bride's parents and often can be ruinously expensive. The ceremonies begin at least a week before the wedding and friends and relatives from afar come to rejoice on the occasion. Although they were married the couple did not live together until they were sixteen and passed puberty. Kastur would come and go back to her parent's home giving her a chance to gradually get acclimatized to the new home. Not long after she settled in her new home Kastur noticed a change in the quiet, likeable boy she had married. In order to play the typical role of a dominant Indian husband, Mohandas was becoming very possessive and jealous.

It all started when he bought several little pamphlets at the bazaar, the sort of thing written in those days to educate young husbands about their conjugal rights and responsibilities. Aware that he had much to learn, Mohandas read the booklets from cover to cover. What impressed him was not the practical advice given, but the commendable exhortation that a husband must always be faithful to his wife. He found that idea compelling. And not just because it appealed to what he later described as his "innate passion for truth". Mohandas was in the throes of first love. He was "passionately fond" of Kastur; he could think of nothing else all day long. To be false to her was unthinkable. To him it was obvious that a wife, too, should pledge faithfulness; however his adolescent strategy for insuring mutual fidelity was both unsophisticated and unenlightened. He concluded it was the duty of the faithful husband to exert his authority over his wife and to make sure she kept her pledge.

One night Mohandas announced to Kastur that from now on he wanted to be kept fully informed about where she went and when, and about whom she met and why. In fact, he declared, she should not go out of the house without his consent. However, the notion of having to request permission from Mohandas for her every move sounded like oppression to Kastur. With her many household duties, she seldom had time to gallivant. She only accompanied other Gandhi women to call on friends or neighbours, or go with Putliba to the nearby temple for prayers. None of the other women went to their husbands for permission to go out, so why should she? My grandmother's spirit was always proud and free. Those who remembered her testified that Ba would never allow anyone to dictate to her – not even her husband. Yet her manner was naturally accommodating; never challenging. And

her instincts were essentially conservative. She had no inborn desire to flout tradition. This would change in the years to come.

On the night of their first confrontation, Kastur assured Mohandas she would always be a faithful wife. For her, any other course was unthinkable. She raised no objections to the restrictions he proposed. But she made no promise to observe them.

The next day without consulting Mohandas, Kastur arranged to go with Putliba to the temple for prayers. How could Mohandas object? She went to the temple again the following day and the next. The day after that Kastur went with her sisters-in-law to call on friends. By actions, not words, she was making it clear to Mohandas how much she objected to his high-handedness.

Mohandas reacted vigorously and attempted to impose even more restraints. They had their first quarrel. "Are you suggesting that I should obey you and not your mother", Kastur asked.The new husband had no answer.

"When she or other elders in the house ask me to go out with them am I to tell them that I cannot stir out of the house without my husband's permission". Finally, Mohandas acknowledged that Kastur was not the girl to brook such restraints. The orders were rescinded and normal life resumed. The young husband learned a hard truth about his wife. She obeyed as she chose. Unless he could convince her of the correctness of his decisions, she was prepared to quietly ignore them and go her own way. Their life together was not always a bed of roses. There were tumultuous times, like with any other couple, but they remained close and faithful to each other.

Since I lived with my parents and grew up in South Africa my recollection of grandmother is confined to the few months I spent with her when I was five years old. I do recall that life in Sewagram Ashram in Wardha, Central India, was simple and the food was almost tasteless – just boiled without any seasoning. There were no desserts either. However, grandmother sometimes flouted this rule with impunity because she knew I had a strong sweet tooth. She would quietly make some peanut brittles and keep them hidden in her room. Several times a day she would invite me to her room and slyly feed me the peanut brittle.

There were times in her early life when she refused to abide by grandfather's rules until she was convinced that it needed to be done. One of the rules that she found most difficult to accept was the cleaning of toilets. In ancient India, private homes had bucket toilets which had to be cleaned at least twice a day. Often in towns and villages these buckets, sometimes full to the brim, had to be carried several miles outside the town limits and emptied. The people who did this work were paid very little. Consequently, they did not have the facilities to clean themselves and wear clean clothes. They became known as untouchables and formed the basis of the caste system.

Grandfather saw the inhumanity of the system and the evil of caste prejudice that it supported and decided to break it by doing one's own dirty work. This was something very difficult for Kastur to understand. She had no education and, therefore, no exposure to changing times and thoughts. She was rooted in tradition and believed if a system existed for five thousand years it had to be good. Why was it now necessary to change it!

It took many months of almost daily arguments and personal examples of grandfather cleaning public toilets to convince her that there was some merit in the

new thinking. Then she whole-heartedly participated in the work and accepted "untouchables" as fellow humans.

On another occasion when women of a nearby Women's Ashram decided to visit Sewagram Ashram on October 2 to participate in grandfather's birthday celebrations they were told to bring their own food because Sewagram Ashram had no money to entertain guests. About a dozen women arrived at the ashram and at lunch time when the Ashram inmates gathered in the dining hall for lunch the guests sat under a tree to eat their box lunches. Grandmother saw them and wondered why they were not joining the community. She walked up to them and asked: "Why are you sitting here and not with us in the dining hall".

The leading lady explained: "Bapuji told us to bring our own food and not expect any hospitality from this ashram. So we thought we will sit separately and eat what we brought". "That old man doesn't know anything about hospitality". Kastur said with a smile. "Forget about him, come with me and we will eat together".

Perhaps the most heart-wrenching episode between the couple occurred in the Aga Khan Prison in Pune when both of them and a few other colleagues were incarcerated for demanding that the British leave India. All his life Mohandas rued the fact that his wife was illiterate. Prison was the only time he could tutor Kastur. He had bought her a black slate and some chalk to practice writing. Kastur knew that a slate and chalk were used by children in the kindergarten and she was an adult and wanted to be treated as such. "I am not going to write on this slate", she announced. "I need a proper notebook and a pen"."No", Mohandas said. "You will get a notebook when you can write without making mistakes. We can't afford to waste paper". She pushed the slate aside and walked away. A few days later she found a new notebook on Mohandas' table and she thought he had a change of mind. So, she took the book and a pen and started scribbling on the page. When Mohandas walked in he was aghast. "What are you doing with my notebook", he expressed his annoyance. "Did I not tell you to write on the slate?" Kastur flung the notebook on his table and walked out in a huff saying: "Keep your precious notebook and pen. I don't want it and I don't want your education". A week later she became seriously ill and subsequently died. She was cremated on the prison grounds and for the four-five hours it took for the flames to reduce her body to ashes Mohandas sat praying next to the pyre. Sixty years of an amazing journey had come to an end.

When I moved to India as an adult and took up a job as a journalist for *The Times of India* I was disturbed by the fact that history had ignored the important contribution that grandmother had made in many ways, not the least of which was, to maintain a happy relationship so that grandfather could flourish. There was not a single definitive biography of hers available in the market. I decided to research her life, mainly through oral history, and a few references made by grandfather in his writings. It took me almost ten years to write the biography titled *The Forgotten Woman – The Untold Story of Kastur, wife of Mahatma Gandhi.* It took me another fifteen years to find a publisher willing to look at the manuscript. It was only in the late 1990s that I met Dolores Cannon, owner of a small publishing house in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas, who eventually printed the book. Over the years I sold a few thousand copies by taking them with me on my lecture tours in the United States.

This is an excerpt from that book.

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Personal Reflections

by

Radha Behn Bhatt[*]

I was born into an ordinary hardworking farming family in a very remote Himalayan village. My father was in the army and so had seen much of India, and had also served in some middle-east countries. Thus his outlook on life was somewhat more open and progressive than the other people of our village. He gave us daughters the opportunity of getting an education and of finding our own ways to run our lives.

However, the society as a whole in which I was growing up during my childhood was not lagging behind in the old traditions regarding girls, their illiteracy or early marriage. As a teenager, I had to struggle against such circumstances. My father supported me to a great extent to continue my studies and saved me from a child marriage. I was able to continue my education in an Inter-College up to the eleventh standard, but had to leave halfway through the year because the pressure of prospective marriage suitors was too intense.

The families of prospective grooms according to our traditions started to visit my parents to seek to arrange a marriage to their sons when I was only fourteen years old. I was saved for three years for my father would repeatedly tell them, "I am happy with your family and your suitable son, but I will arrange this wedding only if my daughter will agree to it".

I never agreed to any one of these suitors because I did not want to get married, instead I wanted to do social service, especially for the women of our mountains. Even at that young age I could see the hard and restricted lives of the village women around me. Then I was studying in a school started by a leader and monk of the Arya Samaj. As students, we were listening to the lectures that were highlighting the prevalent illiteracy among the women and the lack of opportunities

[*] Radha Bhatt, affectionately known as Radha Behn, was born in the remote hill village of Dhurka on 16 October 1933. When she was 16, Radha joined Lakshmi Ashram and Sarala Behn, and it was from here that she began the journey that has led her to be recognised at the national and international level as a Gandhian worker. For twenty years she worked alongside Sarala Behn both in Lakshmi Ashram and in the rural communities. From those early days she was active in social movements, especially the anti-liquor struggles and then the Chipko movement for forest rights of the local communities. The eighties saw her actively involved in struggles against uncontrolled mining in these hills and the Tehri Dam, then under construction. Recent decades have seen her assume national level responsibilities, as secretary of the Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust, chairperson of Sarva Seva Sangh and also of the Gandhi Peace Foundation.

 ISSN 1824 - 4483

for them to play a useful role in society. The Arya Samaj was actively promoting education of the girl child. I feel that being exposed to these ideas strengthened my thoughts and assisted in clarifying my decision.

In the end my father grew a little tired of my stubbornness to do social service, for as an ex-army man he knew little or nothing about social service. He was wondering where I could go to pursue this, how I could initially get myself involved in social service. He asked his friends and one of them told him about a lady of the Congress Party or a lady freedom fighter who had started an ashram for girls. This was how Lakshmi Ashram and Sarala Behn came into my life.

It was the last day of 1950 when I arrived in Lakshmi Ashram and first set eyes on Sarala Behn. I liked her because she gave me a very warm welcome, and she was happy with a smiling face. However, she was very adamant on her principles, something that I experienced from the very first day.

Sarala Behn was highly esteemed in our state, as well as among Gandhian institutions and workers throughout the whole country. She was certainly a Western woman by birth, having grown up in London, but after coming to India her lifestyle became totally Indian, wearing Indian clothes, speaking, reading and writing in Hindi, and eating the same food as the local people ate. She dedicated her whole life to this country, something the Indian society admired very highly, and she was loved by the common people.

Lakshmi Ashram is situated high on a south facing slope overlooking the beautiful Kosi valley, and if one was to climb to the crest of the ridge then one looked north down to the Katyur valley and behind on the northern horizon to the high snow peaks. This view never fails to charm one, even today. The ashram campus is bounded on two sides by open pine forest where we teachers and girls would go to gather firewood or else accompany the grazing cows. I was very much attracted to these beautiful surroundings from the very beginning of my ashram life.

Lakshmi Ashram sought to follow Gandhi's thoughts on education, with the integrated develop of the child's personality, that is to say her head (intellect), hands and heart – an integrated balance of manual and intellectual activities, so that the girl was equally competent in both spheres of life. I was attracted by his teaching of no discrimination based on caste, colour or religious faith. I sought to apply these values in my own life, which was very easy in the surroundings of the ashram, however I also applied these values in my own family. I was happy that my parents accepted these values and put them into practice themselves. Then of course there was the ashram motto of self reliance, another one of Gandhi's teachings, that gave a strong support and foundation to my ideas about my own life. Besides these two values of non-discrimination and self reliance, simple living and high thinking, caring and protecting the environment, and considering women on par with men, are all followed by the Ashram.

Sarala Behn loved pets and domestic animals, such as dogs and cats, and cows, and was extremely fond of nature –trees and flowers, rivers and mountains. She loved to work in the garden and walk in the forest. She was not even scared of the wild animals found in the forest such as leopards. She was a vegetarian, though

using milk products, and the ashram community is also vegetarian in the same way. I was vegetarian since I was six or seven years old and am still vegetarian.

I know Vimala Behn very well. From the time that I joined the ashram life until now, she is my best friend. We had worked together in the ashram as teachers, also having responsibilities for caring for the younger girls, as well as working together for the hill farming women of the surrounding valleys. Then she married Sunderlal Bahuguna and started a small but similar educational ashram in the valley of the Bhilangana River in Garhwal. We still kept in contact with one another through letters, occasionally visiting one another or meeting up in meetings, conferences, social movements or protests. Even today we are contact with one another.

I learned very much from Sarala Behn for my life – the thoughts, the practice and the commitment. She was a very practical individual and always sought to implement the Gandhian principles with total honesty. I tried to learn from her, but sometimes I did not agree with her, when I felt that her decisions were a bit too harsh and I felt that they should be milder. I accompanied her on long *padyatras* (walking on foot) for the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement. We were together for the liquor prohibition movements and for a short time for the Chipko movement. She was 81 when she fell ill and I nursed her for 3½ months, and was with her at her very end as she died peacefully in her bed.

I fully agreed with her work for the mountain women, the Himalayan environment and other Gandhian activities, because serving the women had also been my dream project from my youth. By studying Gandhian thought and understanding the situation in India and abroad, I was convinced that the path which Gandhi had shown to the world is the only way to save humanity. The activities of Lakshmi Ashram, both within the campus and in the surrounding community were the practical models of that philosophy. At the beginning Sarala Behn had started the ashram with just five girls. When I joined the ashram in January 1951 there were 15-16 girls, while we were some 7-8 workers with different responsibilities such as caring for the cows, looking after the office, working in the nearby villages in the Kosi valley. Others were teachers, at the same time looking after the hostel and mess. The number of girls and teachers increased and the ideal number was considered to be around eighty.

Lakshmi Ashram is run by a registered body under the Societies Registration Act, called Kasturba Mahila Utthan Mandal, and its executive board takes care of the policies along with other rules and regulations. The secretary has always been the person mainly responsible for running the different activities. For the first twenty years Sarala Behn was the institution's secretary, and was the main guide for the activities of the ashram. Following her I assumed the responsibilities of the post of secretary for more than 22 years. Following me an ex-student of the ashram, Pushpa Joshi, held the responsibility for some fifteen years, and now Neema Vaishnava is the secretary. She too is a former student and worker of the ashram. Most of the workers who have responsibility for the various departments of the ashram are former students. Together they collectively run all the activities of the ashram harmoniously. Lakshmi Ashram was a kind of mother institution for the Gandhian workers in our state, and it still informally plays this role.

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Suggerimenti bibliografici

a cura di

Chiara Corazza

Quello che segue è un piccolo compendio di suggerimenti bibliografici per chi volesse avvicinarsi al tema "Donne e Gandhi". Rinunciando al desiderio di offrire un supporto esaustivo, si è scelto di appuntare i titoli più significativi. La scelta è, inoltre, ricaduta su quelle figure che non hanno trovato spazio sul presente numero, affinché questo modesto sunto possa costituire un'integrazione. La quasi totalità dei riferimenti bibliografici è edita in lingua inglese.

Il ruolo delle donne nel pensiero di Gandhi

Molti dei discorsi e delle lettere di Gandhi sulle donne sono raccolti nel volume Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Women and Social Justice*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmaedabhad 1954, e nelle raccolte dello stesso autore *To the women*, Anand T. Hingorani, Karaki 1941, *Gandhi on Women*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabhad 1988 e *The Role of Women*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 1964. Per un quadro generale, con i nomi delle donne più note, vicine al Mahatma, si faccia riferimento al libro di Eleanor Morton, *The Women in Gandhi's Life*, Mead and Co., New York 1953. Imprescindibile punto di riferimento per lo studio del ruolo della donna nel pensiero gandhiano è il saggio di Sujata Patel, *Construction and Reconstruction of Women in Gandhi*, in "Economic and Political Weekly", XXIII, 20, 1988, pp. 377-387, in traduzione italiana nel presente numero. Altro saggio importante sul tema è *Women and Gandhi*, in "Economic and Political Weekly", XX, 12, 1985 di Madu Kishwar. Si suggerisce, inoltre, la consultazione del sito ufficiale dell'associazione Gandhi Ashram, all'indirizzo http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org (ultimo accesso: 12/06/2018), che presenta una sezione dedicata alle donne, con vari articoli sul tema, e il database all'indirizzo https://www.mkgandhi.org (ultimo accesso: 12/06/2018), che raccoglie immagini, scritti di e su Gandhi, tra cui anche diverse riflessioni sulle donne.

Le donne e la disobbedienza civile in India

Sul ruolo delle donne nella disobbedienza civile si veda il volume di Anup Taneja, *Gandhi, Women, and the National Movement, 1920-47*, Har-Anand, New Delhi 2005 e il lavoro di Bharti Thakur, *Women in Gandhi's Mass Movements,* Deep & Deep, New Delhi 2006: si tratta delle ricerche più recenti, ma che non tolgono validità all'opera di Manmhoan Kaur, *The Role of Women in the Freedom*

 ISSN 1824 - 4483

Movement, 1897 – 1947, Sterling, New Delhi 1958; si suggerisce, inoltre, lo studio di Dr. Nirajan Ghosh, *The Role fo Women in the Freedom Movement in Bengal*, Frima, Calcutta 1988, con focus sul Bengala. Si veda infine il capitolo 5 *Women in the nationalist movement* del volume di Geraldine Forbes, *Women in modern India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004.

Sulle donne occidentali e Gandhi

Oltre al volume di Thomas Weber, *Going Native*, Roli Books, New Delhi 2011 e, dello stesso autore, *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi 2007, si veda anche il saggio di Barbara Ramusack, *Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1896-1945*, in Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel (edited by) *Western Women and Imperialism*, Indiana Universirty Press, Bloomington 1992, e lo scritto di Antoniette Burton, *The White Woman's Burden: British Feminists and 'The Indian Woman' 1865-1915*, in "Women's Study International Forum", XIII, 4, 1990, pp. 295-308, che, anche se non tratta propriamente di Gandhi offre un quadro più ampio sul ruolo delle donne occidentali in India. La tesi di Sharon MacDonald, *Neither Memsahibs nor Missionaries: Western Women who Supported the Indian Independence Movement*, University of New Brunswick, March 2010, è dedicata ad alcune donne occidentali che collaborarono con Gandhi, tra cui Mary Chesley, Mira Behn e Sarala Behn.

Annie Besant

Membro della Società Teosofica, attivista e sostenitrice delle donne e dell'autogoverno indiano, riconobbe l'importanza di Gandhi, ma fu nei suoi confronti anche molto critica. Di lei si ricorda la sua autobiografia: Annie Besant, *An Autobiography*, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar 1939 e le sue opera: *Ead.*, *The Future of Indian Politics: A Contribution to the Understanding of Present-Day Problems*, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar 1922, *Ead.*, *India, Bond or Free? A World Problem*, Putnam's, London 1926. Infine, si consiglia la lettura di Iychettira Madappa Muthanna, *Mother Besant and Mahatma Gandhi*, Thenpulam, Vellore 1986.

Margaret Cousin

Suffragista irlandese, fondò la All-India Women Conference (AIWC) nel 1927. Opere principali di Margaret Cousin sono: Margaret Cousin, *The Awakening of Asian Womanhood*, 1922 e Ead., *Indian womanhood today*, Kitabistan, Allahabad 1947; su Margaret Cousin si faccia riferimento al volume di S. Muthulakshmi Reddi, *Mrs. Margaret Cousin and Her Work in India*, Women's Indian Association, Madras 1956, e il saggio di Catherine Candy, *Relating Feminisms, Nationalisms and Imperialisms: Ireland, India and Margaret Cousins' Sexual Politics*, in "Women's History Review", III, 4, 1994, pp. 581-594.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

Riformatrice sociale indiana e combattente per la libertà, fu ricordata soprattutto per il suo contributo al movimento per l'indipendenza Indiana e per essere stata la forza trainante della rinascita dell'artigianato indiano e del teatro nell'India indipendente; contribuì ad elevare lo standard socio-economico delle donne indiane. Di Kamaladevi, si leggano le sue memorie, dal titolo *Inner Recesses/ Outer Spaces: Memoires,* Navrag, New Delhi 1986, e lo scritto *Indian Women's Battle for Freedom* Abhinav Publications, New Delhi 1983. Yusef Maharally ha pubblicato una raccolta di scritti e discorsi nel volume *At the Crossroads*, National Information and Publications Ltd., Bombay 1947.

Su Chattopadhyay si veda invece il volume di Jamila Brijbhushan, *Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya: Portrait of a Rebel*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1976 e il recente studio AA.VV., *A Passionate Life: Writings by and on Kamaladevi Chattopadyay*, Zubaan Books New Delhi 2017, suddiviso in una prima parte dedicata agli scritti autografi e una seconda che raccoglie le più recenti ricerche su Kamaladevi.

Mira Behn

Di Mira Behn, discepola occidentale di Gandhi (in origine Madaleine Slade), si veda la sua autobiografia, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Longmans London 1960; Mira Behn ha curato una raccolta di lettere di Gandhi a lei indirizzate, nel volume Mira Behn, *Bapu's Letters to Mira (1924-1948)*, Navajivan, Ahmedabhad 1949. Su di lei si veda Krishna Murti Gupta (a cura di) *Mira Behn: Gandhi's Daughter Disciple: Birth Centenary Volume*, a cura di Krishna Murti Gupta Himalaua Seva Sangh, New Delhi 1992: il volume raccoglie testi di e su Mira Behn. Thomas Weber ha scritto di Mira Behn in diversi suoi studi: si veda in particolare T. Weber, *Hugging the Trees: The Story of the Chipko Movement*, Penguin, New Delhi 1989, i già citati *Going Native* e *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor* e, in particolare, Tridip Shurud. Thomas Weber (edited by) *Beloved Bapu: The Gandhi – Mirabehn Correspondence*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi 2012. La nostra rivista ha inoltre pubblicato il saggio di Sara Mirtillo, *La storia vocazionale di Madeleine Slade*, "Deportate Esuli Profughe", XXXIII, I, 2017, pp. 32-55.

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Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile

Thomas Weber, *Going Native. Gandhi's Relationship with Western Women*, Roli Books Mumbai&Varanasi 2011, pp. 406.

Going Native è un imprescindibile punto di partenza per conoscere le donne occidentali che collaborarono con Gandhi. Thomas Weber, esperto studioso di Gandhi, ricorda come la scelta di affrontare questo tema sia iniziata dal momento in cui aveva rinvenuto una raccolta di lettere del Mahatma a Mary Barr nell'archivio del Gandhi Ashram di Candidasa a Bali. Da questa scoperta l'Autore ha ampliato la ricerca a tutte le donne occidentali che hanno collaborato con Gandhi.

Il rapporto di Gandhi con le donne occidentali è un tema che, negli studi gandhiani, è stato affrontato marginalmente: il libro di Thomas Weber, offre una ricerca storica dettagliata delle figure femminili che lo hanno ispirato, hanno lavorato con lui, lo hanno sostenuto nelle sue attività politiche in Sud Africa, o che hanno contribuito a modellare la sua immagine nel mondo. Alcune di queste donne hanno intrapreso un vero e proprio percorso di nativizzazione – da qui il titolo del libro – su cui l'analisi di Thomas Weber si è particolarmente soffermata. Alcune di queste donne sono diventate per Gandhi vere e proprie discepole, giunte in India alla ricerca di un maestro spirituale. Molte donne subirono il fascino della personalità di Gandhi e da questo punto di vista è possibile vedere Gandhi stesso in modo diverso. Per questo motivo *Going native* è un'opera che offre a studiosi e studiose non solamente un quadro completo delle donne occidentali che entrarono in contatto con Gandhi, ma anche una visione nuova della vita stessa del Mahatma, più intima. Ciò è stato reso possibile soprattutto grazie allo spoglio di lettere e carteggi, preferite ai diari o alle autobiografie, perché le prime costituiscono documenti più spontanei e immediati. Una ricerca, quella di Weber, che molto spesso è stata ostacolata dalla difficoltà di reperimento dei documenti, dal momento che, molto spesso, solo le lettere di Gandhi sono state preservate.

Il libro esordisce con una ricca introduzione dal titolo *Gandhi, the Feminine and the West*, che offre una analisi dettagliata dell'idea di donna nel pensiero gandhiano ed inquadra il tema più generale del libro, analizzando i discorsi e gli scritti di Gandhi sulle donne (Parte di questa introduzione è stata tradotta in italiano da Serena Tiepolato per il presente numero di DEP). Le successive sezioni analizzano il rapporto di Gandhi con le donne occidentali: con alcune di esse ebbe soltanto rapporti di corrispondenza; alcune donne furono strenue sostenitrici di Gandhi, altre furono critiche nei suoi confronti; alcune di esse diventarono fedeli discepole, altre ebbero con lui un rapporto di sincera amicizia.

Thomas Weber ricostruisce la storia delle donne attiviste con cui Gandhi entra in contatto in Sud Africa, Emily Hobhouse e Olive Schreiner; la storia della segretaria di Gandhi, Sonja Schlesin, che lo accompagnò nelle sue prime battaglie politiche degli anni '20; il complicato rapporto politico tra Gandhi e Annie Beasant; la collaborazione di Muriel Lester, che lo accompagnò nella sua campagna in Bihar, e di Agatha Harrison, che condivise con Gandhi la lotta per l'indipendenza dell'India; la figura di Maude Royden, che condivise con Gandhi

 ISSN 1824 - 4483

l'interesse per il pacifismo e la nonviolenza; l'esperienza di Ellen Hørup, che assieme ad altre donne danesi Anne Marie Petersen ed Esther Faering, entrò in contatto con il Mahatma – e di cui si parla più diffusamente nel saggio di Holger Terp, in questo numero. Gandhi non solo ha attratto a sé donne impegnate nel lavoro sociale o nell'attivismo, ma ha anche sollevato l'interesse di alcune femministe e pacifiste.

La terza sezione del libro, dal titolo *Western Women Interpreters*, tratta di donne che hanno intervistato Gandhi e/o hanno interpretato la sua figura per l'Occidente: Patricia Kendall, la controversa Catherine Mayo, Margaret Sander e la fotoreporter Margaret Bourke-White: quattro donne americane che non hanno avvicinato Gandhi con l'intenzione di diventarne discepole, né in qualità di curiose: il loro intento era di documentare la battaglia per l'indipendenza indiana, con risultati diversi: dal controverso libro della Mayo, *Mother India*, alla trasformazione di Gandhi in un'icona dell'età contemporanea.

La quarta parte, intitolata *Western Women Disciples: Going Native*, è il vero e proprio nucleo del libro, poiché analizza, nelle figure di Millie Graham Polak, Ester Faering, Anne Marie Petersen, Mirabehn, Nilla Graham Cook, Margaret Spiegel, Mary Barr, Pearl Madden, Margaret Jones, Antoniette Mirbel, Francisca Standenath, Helene Haussding, Marjorie Sykes e Catherine Mary Heileman (Sarala Behn), l'interesse a diventare, per Gandhi, delle vere e proprie discepole, con motivazioni e risultati diversi.

In conclusione, la relazione tra Gandhi e le donne occidentali ci dimostra quanto la sua figura fosse un punto di riferimento per le persone da tutto il mondo. Le varie esperienze di queste donne, nei loro successi e nei loro limiti, ci consentono di ricostruire una versione più genuina di questo importante capitolo della storia indiana. Al contempo, consentono di arricchire di ulteriori sfaccettature la già complessa personalità di Gandhi, che altrimenti ne risulterebbe sminuita o mitizzata. Queste amiche, critiche e discepole di Gandhi consentono una visione più ampia – di genere – della storia di Gandhi. L'autore conclude lasciando spazio ad ulteriori esplorazioni sulle relazioni e i contatti tra le donne occidentali che collaborarono con Gandhi. Una storia che attende di essere ancora scritta.

Chiara Corazza

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Sital Kalantry, *Women's Human Rights and Migration. Sex-Selective Abortion Laws in the United States and India*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2017, pp. 272.

Il volume affronta il tema dell'aborto selettivo sulla base del sesso del feto in due contesti geografici e culturali molto distanti tra loro, India e Stati Uniti, da parte di donne migranti di prima o seconda generazione dall'India agli Stati Uniti. Come è noto, il problema dell'aborto selettivo a danno dei feti di sesso femminile è una piaga che affligge l'India, o, meglio, talune regioni dell'India, come ben evidenzia l'autrice di questo volume. Di origine indiana, da anni negli Stati Uniti, Sital Kalantry in questo studio innovativo scardina molti preconcetti e pone degli interrogativi sui quali non è possibile dare delle risposte che si basino unicamente su di una visione "occidentale" dei diritti umani fondamentali. Nello specifico, essa elabora un approccio inedito, l'approccio femminista transnazionale, che consente di esaminare talune pratiche nel contesto nel quale esse sono messe in atto. Sulla base di questo approccio e di dati empirici, Kalantry si chiede se il divieto di alcune pratiche promuova i diritti delle donne o, al contrario, li violi. In prima battuta potrebbe sembrare una tesi forte ed antitetica all'universalismo dei diritti umani. Tuttavia, l'autrice, mostrando i dati della pratica del *sex-selective abortion* negli Stati Uniti da parte di donne immigrate dall'India, invita il lettore a riflettere sulle conseguenze della decontestualizzazione di talune pratiche. Cosa spinge una donna in India a praticare l'aborto selettivo a danno del feto di sesso femminile? E quali sono le ragioni che spingono una donna di origini indiane a chiedere le sia praticato un aborto selettivo negli Stati Uniti?

Nell'introduzione, l'autrice spiega le ragioni del suo studio: alcuni anni prima, le fu chiesto di commentare la proiezione di un film, "It's a girl: The three deadliest words", del regista Evan Grae Davis. La proiezione era stata sostenuta da numerose associazioni a tutela delle donne. Tuttavia, ci dice, "ero disturbata dalla storia limitata che era stata proposta con riferimento all'aborto selettivo in India" (p. ix). Kalantry spiega come un regista americano sia andato in India e Cina, abbia realizzato un film che descrive "la cultura" della "preferenza del maschio" e – questo punto ci pare chiave fin dall'inizio del volume – lo ha riportato negli Stati Uniti per sostenere la tesi secondo la quale gli Asiatici-Americani pratichino l'aborto selettivo e per fare lobby a favore di leggi che aggravano la situazione dei diritti riproduttivi di tutte le donne in America. Ed invero, le leggi che sono state proposte nei diversi Stati USA sono state sponsorizzate da politici e movimenti anti-abortisti.

Il libro di Kalantry è stato scritto a seguito di uno studio approfondito basato su dati empirici che sono riportati chiaramente nel volume. Nel primo capitolo, "Transnational legal feminist approach to cross-border practices", l'autrice fornisce il quadro giuridico e sociale di riferimento e risponde subito al primo quesito che un lettore vicino alla tutela dei diritti umani fondamentali si porrebbe: l'autrice vuole forse sostenere il relativismo culturale, ovvero che i diritti umani non possono prescindere dalla cultura e che talune pratiche vanno accettate in quanto provenienti da altri contesti culturali? La risposta è negativa. L'autrice si dichiara fin dalle prime

 ISSN 1824 - 4483

pagine a favore dell'universalismo dei diritti umani, ovvero di diritti di cui sono titolari tutti gli esseri umani a prescindere dal luogo in cui essi/esse vivono. Ne consegue che se una pratica viola i diritti umani in uno Stato, essa sarà idonea a violare i medesimi diritti umani anche in un altro Stato. L'universalismo da sempre è stato criticato come di "matrice occidentale". Il relativismo, tuttavia, è stato spesso invocato per negare proprio i diritti delle donne sulla base della "difesa culturale". L'autrice, respingendo il relativismo culturale, aderisce ad un "universalismo contestualizzato", che consente di comprendere se la medesima pratica, in due contesti diversi, sia discriminatoria o meno nei confronti delle donne e delle bambine. In altri termini, "I am asking whether a practice that is considered to be oppressive in one country context should be automatically deemed oppressive in another country context" (p. 37). Nell'elaborare il suo approccio transnazionale femminista, l'autrice invita ad un'analisi caso per caso, in quanto quando persone, pratiche e conoscenze si muovono attraverso i confini in modo fluido e rapidamente, è necessario considerare i molteplici contesti per predisporre appropriate regolamentazioni per siffatto tipo di pratiche cross-border.

Nel secondo capitolo, Kalantry entra nel merito della pratica di aborto selettivo, proponendo le prospettive etiche e giuridiche che stanno alla base dell'indagine. In India, ad esempio, l'attivismo femminista ha consentito l'adozione di una legge contro l'aborto selettivo del 1994. Sul piano etico, l'aborto selettivo potrebbe essere uno strumento per praticare l'eugenetica. In Europa, la Convenzione di Oviedo sui diritti umani e la biomedicina vieta la fertilizzazione in vitro con lo scopo di scegliere il sesso del nascituro, salvo laddove ciò sia necessario per evitare la trasmissione di talune malattie genetiche.

Nel terzo capitolo, l'autrice analizza l'approccio statunitense alla pratica, rilevando come i movimenti anti-abortisti siano stati i primi a sostenere il divieto della pratica di aborto selettivo, al punto da elaborare un modello di legislazione (p. 77). Nel capitolo successivo, l'autrice propone dei dati empirici, che si discostano dalle conclusioni raggiunte da famosi economisti statunitensi sulle cui indagini i movimenti contro l'aborto selettivo si erano basati. I dati demografici raccolti dall'autrice e dal suo team invece dimostrano come, al limite, un piccolo numero di Asiatici-Americani selezionano in base al sesso sia bambine che bambini per avere famiglie più bilanciate; ad esempio, alcuni selezionano in base al sesso in favore di un bambino se hanno avuto due bambine precedentemente, o viceversa. Le loro decisioni non sono dettate da misoginia. Nel capitolo quinto, l'autrice si sposta al paese di origine di queste pratiche, l'India, dove ha mostrato i complessi fattori sociali e storici che hanno portato ad alti tassi di aborto selettivo in alcune parti del paese. Le ragioni in India alla base dell'aborto selettivo sono discriminatorie nei confronti delle donne e delle bambine, in quanto riflettono ineguali strutture sociali che considerano la donna come inferiore: basti pensare alla dote, alle scarse opportunità economiche per le donne, al suicidio della vedova, etc. Tra le cause dell'aborto selettivo anche l'influenza dell'impero britannico. I colonizzatori britannici, che avevano proibito inizialmente l'infanticidio in India, ritirarono poi la legge nel 1906, adducendo ragioni culturali. Eppure anche in Inghilterra, dove tuttavia non era considerato una pratica culturale, l'infanticidio era diffuso. Anzi, va detto che più che essere inerente alla cultura indiana, l'infanticidio in India era causato da un insieme

di fattori, certo di strutture sociali, ma anche economici, inclusi i cambiamenti apportati dai colonizzatori. È, dunque, senz'altro corretto dire che vi sia una cultura della "preferenza del maschio", dovuta ad elementi sociali quali la dote, la cura degli anziani, l'eredità. È altresì vero che vi sono altresì ragioni economiche ed individuali che spingono le donne a scegliere l'aborto selettivo, quali ad esempio il desiderio delle madri di risparmiare le sofferenze di una vita da donna alle loro figlie in una società come quella indiana (p. 138).

Applicando l'approccio elaborato nei primi capitoli del volume, l'autrice sostiene nel sesto capitolo che il divieto di aborto selettivo, che costituisce un limite all'autonomia riproduttiva della donna, possa giustificarsi là dove si possa provare, come in India, che l'aborto selettivo è praticato da un ampio numero di donne e che incide negativamente su donne e bambine in quel paese. Pare dunque appropriato, ci dice l'autrice, prevedere simili divieti in India, perché l'aborto selettivo a favore del sesso maschile ha portato non solo ad un numero inferiore di bambine in alcune regioni, ma anche all'aumento di episodi di violenza nei confronti delle donne. Secondo i dati proposti da Kalantry, lo stesso non si potrebbe dire per gli Stati Uniti, dove il proliferare del divieto di aborto selettivo ha avuto come conseguenza quello di interferire sull'autonomia riproduttiva della donna.

L'autrice utilizza il suo approccio per riflettere su un'altra pratica, il velo islamico. Nel capitolo settimo, l'autrice riflette sulla decontestualizzazione del discorso del velo islamico (burqa e niqab che coprono integralmente il volto) in Francia. In questo paese, uno studio ha dimostrato che solo 1900 donne indossano il velo che copre integralmente il volto. La spiegazione preminente nei paesi a maggioranza islamica – il velo è una forma di oppressione nei confronti della donna – è estesa alle donne islamiche che vivono in Francia. Sul punto si potrebbe riflettere. L'autrice riporta invero interviste a donne che hanno dichiarato di indossare il velo per mostrare un senso di appartenenza verso la propria comunità, minoritaria nel paese di destinazione. Se le dichiarazioni di queste donne possono sembrare "imposte" dalla comunità, va anche detto che in molti casi si tende a considerare queste donne come deboli e vulnerabili e del tutto prive di *agency* (p. 179). A tale scopo, Kalantry analizza anche le sentenze sul velo islamico della Corte europea dei diritti umani, che ha applicato il medesimo approccio a due casi, il primo in Turchia il secondo in Francia, argomentando che il divieto del velo si giustifichi con la necessità del "living together" (*Sahin v. Turkey*[1], *SAS v. France*[2]). Un determinato divieto sarebbe dunque legittimo sia in Francia sia in Turchia. L'autrice avverte, tuttavia: non è chiaro che il divieto del velo islamico in Francia abbia gli stessi benefici che in un altro paese. Kalantry trascura tuttavia il fatto che il divieto in Francia riguardasse solo il velo integrale e che la Corte avrebbe potuto, invece di utilizzare l'argomentazione del divieto come necessario al "living together", optare per sostenere il divieto sulla base di ragioni di sicurezza nazionale (invero la legge francese riguardava tutto ciò che nasconde completamente il volto). Non solo, le due sentenze sono state adottate a distanza di nove anni, aspetto non del tutto tra-

[1] Sentenza 10 novembre 2005, Ricorso n. 44774/98.
[2] Sentenza 1 luglio 2014, Ricorso n. 43835/11.

scurabile, considerando che la Convenzione europea dei diritti umani è un "living instrument", che assorbe l'evoluzione storico e sociale nella protezione dei diritti.

Le considerazioni svolte dall'autrice ben potrebbero applicarsi ad altre pratiche, basti pensare alle mutilazioni genitali femminili, benché su queste ultime ci pare che permenga sia nel paese di origine sia nel paese di destinazione quell'idea di "controllo" della sessualità femminile che renderebbe la pratica discriminatoria nei confronti di donne e bambine. Nondimeno una riflessione sarebbe opportuna nel comparare la pratica delle mutilazioni con la chirurgia cosmetica ai genitali, quest'ultima non vietata nei nostri paesi europei, per la quale si dice che le donne "prestino il loro consenso". Ci si potrebbe invero chiedere quanto genuino ed informato sia il consenso di una ragazza appena maggiorenne nel voler modificare l'aspetto dei propri genitali.

In tal senso, il libro di Kalantry è un prezioso strumento per riflettere con occhio critico e privo di pregiudizi talune pratiche e per porre sempre e comunque al centro i diritti della donna, soprattutto il diritto alla sua autonomia riproduttiva.

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George A James., *Ecology is Permanent Economy: The Activism and Environmental Philosophy of Sunderlal Bahuguna*. SUNY, New York 2013, pp. 266.

This book is about "the first 'guru' of India's environmental consciousness" (12), acclaimed worldwide for his contributions to the forest conservation movement in the Western Himalayas called the Chipko (Hug the Tree Movement). Even as a grassroots activist, Sunderlal Bahuguna has attracted global attention primarily because of the methods he employed for raising environmental consciousness in India: prolonged fasts, extensive foot marches covering several thousand kilometers across hostile terrain, speeches at national and international events, articles in English in the national and international press, and catchy slogans one of which is enshrined as the title of this book. Yet, there exists little interest to understand his philosophy and its relevance to contemporary ecological concerns. Moreover, despite the accolades he has received for his crusade against the cutting of trees and building of a large dam at Tehri, Bahuguna is often misunderstood in his home country and labeled as an "anti-development junkie." Ecology is Permanent Economy fills a major gap in both Western and Indian understanding of Bahuguna and his philosophy.

Instead of a static conceptual analysis of Bahuguna's philosophy, the book actively surveys the intellectual and moral context of his life and works. The narrative accompaniment adds valuable information not only about Bahuguna but also about those who influenced him. We thus learn about the little-known contribution of a figure in Indian environmental history, Mira Behn (Madeleine Slade), the famous English associate of Gandhi. While the chapter on Mira Behn conflates her ideas wholly to that of Gandhi, it does provide a useful biographical sketch of her life. Here, we learn about a woman from the British gentry who had lived and worked with Gandhi for thirty-three long years, helped to improve and expand Gandhi's constructive program, and played a remarkable role in social and ecological sustainability in the Himalayan hills. While contact with the Indian freedom fighter Sri Dev Suman revealed to Bahuguna the essence of Gandhi's Satyagraha or nonviolent resistance against injustice, the real philosophical message of Gandhi's rural constructive program came through Mira Behn. It was through this association with Mira Behn that Bahuguna came to understand Gandhi's philosophy which he realized "was quite different from what he had known [before]" (58). Further, Mira Behn initiated Bahuguna to ecology, inspired him to work for the mountain villages, and developed his understanding of the "relationship between the life of the villages and the life of nature" (61). The second major influence on Bahuguna, particularly his activism, was Sarala Behn (Catherine Mary Heilemann), another British woman who dedicated her life to the education and empowerment of hill women of Uttarakhand. This influence came mainly through Bahuguna's wife to be, Vimla Nautiyal, one of Sarala Behn's first students at her educational center, Lakshmi Ashram. Nautiyal was instrumental in shaping and directing Bahuguna's course of life first by making him give up a career in politics and second, by founding an ashram in the remote hills, to work

 ISSN 1824 - 4483

towards the upliftment of people. The ashram eventually became the powerhouse of many of Bahuguna's future activism.

James's book addresses a question of paramount significance today. Abstract processes of global environmental thinking often tend to ignore subjectivity with the result that contributions of individuals in general and especially those of the South go overlooked. James' volume corrects this tendency. It highlights the role of biography depicting individual character, principles, and religion that provide practical and motivational lessons of living in global encounters of sustainability and ecological conservation. In this way, James' book not only emphasize the struggle for the environment in non-Western countries, but also how such struggles can contribute to the growth of an environmental ethic that can be lived and practiced. Moreover, the book provides a "better understanding of the significance of Indian environmental philosophy." Bahuguna's religious significance of nature does not pertain to any exclusive religious worldview or complicated metaphysics but brings out an intimate relationship between "the earth as our mother and human beings as her children, who should … recognize their dependence upon her bounty" (225). The essential part of his spirituality is not merely the ability to see divinity in "birds, beasts, trees, mountains, and rivers," but also to be able to translate that "seeing" into an active relationship with nature (219). Such philosophical-religious ideals evince an influence of Gandhi and a religious consciousness that originates in village India and which is a departure from Hinduism as an urban phenomenon. An Indian environmental ethic is thus not bound to readings of esoteric religious texts but is a dynamic and evolving worldview that represents a vision of a sustainable relationship between human beings and nature that is globally significant.

In this connection, James reveals the continued relevance of Gandhi's moral philosophy in inspiring and catalyzing social change and in sustainable development. James' analysis of Bahuguna's philosophy and activism underscores the practical and philosophical significance of the eleven vows of Gandhi and not just his nonviolence. For instance, the vow of swadeshi or self-reliance and asteya or vow not to misuse one's own resources and misappropriate what belongs to another becomes relevant to environmental ethics. Meeting Delhi's water needs by "exploiting resources at great distances, and at the cost of distant local economies" is a violation of the principle of swadeshi (211). Moreover, Delhi has polluted its own waters, that of the Yamuna, and has thus misappropriated water from the Ganga to meet its own needs. Today in the West, the plan to bring water to Southern California through diversion tunnels, draining the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and depriving the Winnemem Wintu peoples of their water rights is a similar case in point. This case illustrates the destruction of local self-reliance and the colossal misuse of resources in the moving of waters in California: cutting trees; killing beavers, delta smelt, and salmons; murdering wolves, damming rivers, depriving traditional water rights, all for growing almonds and pistachios in the desert for export.

While the book presents a broad-based and intimate study of the philosophy of Bahuguna, it has some limitations. The chapters on Chipko demand attention in this regard. I contend that if Bahuguna's activities in the Chipko Movement emerge

from and reflect his philosophy of nature as the author indicates, then a deeper analysis of Chipko could be a helpful guide to understand and appreciate Bahuguna's philosophy and activism. A philosophical biography needs to consider not merely the self-conscious responses of the person to external events and ideas that influenced him but also those which he is unaware of or which he inadvertently omits or insufficiently addresses. These hidden influences may emerge through careful analysis of events, which could reveal significant aspects of one's values, ideas, and motivations.

James follows the general trend and account of the Chipko narrative generated by Delhi academics such as Vandana Shiva, especially about women's role in the movement and its feminist mantle of romance with trees, which is historically questionable. Despite the impressive participation of women in Chipko, the fact remains that the motivators, organizers, and decision-makers in the movement were primarily men. In this regard one wonders, did the rural women generate the famous Chipko slogan (What do the forests bear?/soil water and pure air) extemporaneously and relayed it in chorus as a rebuttal to a forester's view that the forests bear resin, timber, and profit? Could the local rural women, though aware of the importance of forests as source of biomass, be familiar with the fundamental environmental processes and intangible values of forests, such as production of atmospheric oxygen through carbon sequestration? Who generated the slogan? Under what circumstances? A much more intellectually engaging historical analysis of Chipko events and source of Bahuguna's philosophy could have been made than merely reinstating the selective views of Bahuguna and other scholars about the protests in the forests of Henwal valley. In this regard, Bahuguna's rather interesting remark, "the Chipko Movement was an expression of the program of rural development for which Mira Behn and Sarala Behn had worked" (92) escapes scholarly critique.

Furthermore, Bahuguna's ecological turn, indicating his evolution from an activist who expressed his explicit support for the felling of trees for local forest-based industries by even fasting for the cause and organizing a ritual worship of local woodcutting machines to a conservationist supporting a ban on all felling is an interesting cognitive transformation that needs greater attention and analysis. James reiterates Bahuguna's version that there were no opposition between ecological and economic interests of the movement adding later that a realization that forests need to be protected first led Bahuguna and other activists to move "from an economic approach to an approach to conservation for a stable and permanent economy" (168). However, some prominent activists have pointed a time in the history of Chipko when tapping of forest wealth was not considered to be a sin or offense but that relationships between people and forests began to be defined in a new way. This poses several intriguing questions to the researcher: what made Bahuguna realize that "it makes no difference whether outside contractors were cutting down the forests or whether local forest contractors were doing the job"? (121). Equally so, what made Bahuguna shift from forest-based industries as a means to address local economic conditions of the hill people to tree farming with an emphasis on food, fodder, fuel, fertilizer, and fiber trees? Were these his own ideas? In other words, is "Ecology is Permanent Economy", an idea

that Bahuguna originated? Moreover, one wonders why did he revoke the Government of India Padma-Shree award after initially accepting it? James does not provide satisfactory answers to these questions. Interestingly, the award originally went to both Bahuguna and Sarala Behn, but the latter promptly refused to accept it on grounds that such accolades to particular individuals could spoil peer environment amongst workers.

Finally, the book elicits little scholarly comment on differences of opinion between Bahuguna and his Gandhian comrades. For instance, James observes that Bahuguna's Kashmir to Kohima foot-march for spreading the message of Chipko was not welcomed by many "arm-chair social workers" and others because of the hardships and hazards such journey entailed (149). This runs the danger of being a one-sided view of Bahuguna as it fails to see why in fact many of the local activists and his ardent followers did not welcome his ambitious march. Similarly, the discussion on the Anti-Tehri dam struggle exalts the nature of Bahuguna's individual satyagraha fasts for economic and environmental justice. Yet, there were Gandhians who raised legitimate concern over Bahuguna's choice of fast as a "mode of resistance". Such fasts were considered undemocratic and alienating, undermining the movement's organizational base.

Sunderlal Bahuguna is not the product of the influence of one person. While I do not deny the importance of other individuals in Bahuguna's life, it is surprising to note that there is no analysis of the influence of Sarala Behn. This points to a significant gap in the analysis of Bahuguna's philosophy and activism. For instance, the Stop Alcohol movement in the hills was a result of Sarala Behn's teachings and organizational efforts, Vinoba Bhave had little role to play in this initiative. Yet, James is emphatic about Bhave's influence on Bahuguna in this movement (77). Moreover, James argues that Bahuguna's "emerging emphasis upon ecology" in the Chipko Movement is indebted to E.F. Schumacher's book Small is Beautiful and to Richard St. Barbe Baker. This claim is not convincing since Sarala Behn through her writings, speeches, and letters had been emphasizing the role of ecology in village economy of Uttarakhand as well as popularizing the work of several Western scholars including Schumacher for more than two decades. Bahuguna himself acknowledges her as the "Mother of the Sarvodaya activists" and her influence even on the slogan that is the title of James's book. It is true that a biographer cannot include every detail, and here one sympathizes with James' omission. Yet, failing to examine the intellectual and moral stimulation that Bahuguna received from Sarala Behn, James neglects a crucial dimension of his thought and activities.

While the scope of the book may limit exploration of all the influences on Bahuguna's life, some deserve special mention and may guide future research on Bahuguna. For instance, James devotes a whole chapter on Bahuguna's marriage and the establishment of his ashram. Yet, he says relatively little about the impact of his wife, Vimla, on his philosophy and activism except that she was instrumental in his giving up of a prospective political career and his settling in the villages. On the contrary, it is well-known amongst Gandhian social workers of Uttarakhand that without Vimla Bahuguna's intellectual and moral support Sunderlal Bahuguna

could not have achieved what he has. It is unfortunate that we do not learn much about the incalculable influence of this other remarkable woman on Bahuguna.

Critical changes in Bahuguna's life certainly have to do with his religious thinking. One such change is clearly visible in the later phase of his life and activism when he became a follower of the Hindu spiritual leader, Swami Chidananda. James mentions Swami Chidananda as Bahuguna's spiritual guide (180), but he goes no further. This gap is especially prominent in the chapter on the Tehri dam and in his discussion of the religious roots of Bahuguna's spirituality. One here might expect some analysis of when and why this influence became significant and how it contributed to his activism.

Future research on Bahuguna and his environmentalism has to address these unanswered questions and omissions among the diverse intellectual and practical ideas and influences on his life. This would provide clearer insight into the concrete contexts in which Bahuguna's thought evolved and help construct a coherent and critical narrative. Human experiences in biographical research become persuasive when the nuances, tensions, inconsistencies, and ambiguities of human life are taken into account. This can come about not simply through an examination of Bahuguna's own words and published writings in English but through the opinion of other activists closely affiliated with Bahuguna and those who opposed him, as well as the extensive vernacular literature and texts, both published and unpublished.

Despite these considerations, James' Ecology is Permanent Economy has many gems to offer. James asserts that the book is not a biography yet the significant biographical details are helpful to understand Bahuguna's philosophy and activism to preserve the Himalayan ecology. These details show how personal experiences inspire philosophical insights and social action. It illuminates an important relationship between biography and philosophy. The book evidently clears misconceptions about Bahuguna and better equips the reader to understand his role and significance as a philosopher. Moreover, James' engaging, fluid narrative guides the reader to the events and concepts foundational to Bahuguna's thought and activism. Ecology is Permanent Economy is an original work on environmental activism, grassroots movements, and a new environmental philosophy that bears significance for both Indian and Western readers, particularly the younger generation and those who wish to see a better world.

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Anita Anand, *Sophia: Princess, Suffragette, Revolutionary*, Bloomsbury, New York 2015, pp. 416.

Anita Anand's *Sophia: Princess, Suffragette, Revolutionary* provides an opportunity to contemplate themes as royalty, imperialism and race relations. Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, born in Britain in 1876, came into the world under considerably changed circumstances from her very wealthy and powerful grandfather, Maharajah Ranjit Singh, ruler of the Sikh Kingdom in the Punjab. In a tale stranger than fiction, writer Anand takes considerable care in outlining the background of Ranjit Singh's life and death and the subsequent fallout from court intrigues in which only his youngest widow and son survived (all other wives partook of sati, burning on the funeral pyre with their departed husband and several potential heirs were subsequently murdered). With infant Duleep Singh placed on the throne and his mother Jindan appointed regent, the kingdom suffered considerable instability and, with much internal treachery, the British saw their opportunity to seize and take control of the Sikh Kingdom. Imprisoning widow Jindan, the British, who had promised protection of the young royal Duleep, played both conqueror and saviour. Duleep, placed under the care of a Scottish doctor and his wife and brought up speaking English, eventually converted to Christianity. Queen Victoria intrigued by the conversion of her exotic "subject" eventually arranged for Duleep to travel with his guardians to England. The young Maharajah became a favourite of the queen and the court, was provided with a large annual income and developed extravagant tastes. His overspending and penchant for dissolute pleasures eventually wore thin the early welcome that he received. The book's narrative spends a significant portion of its pages on following the ups and downs of Duleep's life and the subsequent impact of his actions on his family, taking time getting to the story of Sophia, the title character. Sophia had siblings and they all enjoyed great privilege growing up; however Sophia had the added claim to Victoria's affections and favours because of the queen being her godmother. The Singh presence added an exoticism to court life, yet in spite of the three attractive daughters becoming debutants at Buckingham Palace in 1894, Sophia and her two sisters would never manage to be fully integrated into British social life because of being women of colour. This reality is alluded to in the book; however, the fact of the Singhs' otherness is never fully analyzed. Their extravagant lifestyles and sense of entitlement as royals (albeit Indian royals) was only possible because of their being supported by the British crown, yet Sophia and her sisters display varying degrees of righteous anger and revolt against their benefactors. One sister ended up living most of her days in India and later Pakistan, supporting the growing native movement against the colonial regime. Another sister spent the better part of her life in Germany with the Singhs' former governess who became her life companion. After living the high life of a horsewoman and dog breeder and enjoying the latest Parisian fashions, Sophia embraced radical suffragette activity, but when the First World War came, she took on the nursing of soldiers and, like the WSPU suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst, reverted to a form of patriotic service to the nation. Alternately raging against the British

 ISSN 1824 - 4483

government and dependent upon the state to support her privileged lifestyle, Sophia seemed to only settle into a more contented way of being in her later years when she had the opportunity to "mother" a number of children, one of whom was the daughter of her housekeeper and others who were wartime evacuees under her care. The complicated relationship that existed for the Singh family who were both victims and beneficiaries of British imperialism highlights the insidious nature of colonial rule.

Anand's extensive research is admirable and the story of the Singh family is a remarkable tale. Nevertheless, Princess Sophia remains an ambiguous character, out from the shadows because of this biography but still remaining a shadowy figure.

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***Sarojini Naidu. Selected Poetry and Prose*, edited with an introduction and commentary by Makarand R. Paranjape, Rupa Publications, New Delhi 2012, pp. 232**

Il volume *Sarojini Naidu. Selected Poetry and Prose* è un vero e proprio punto di riferimento per chi volesse intraprendere una ricerca sulla poetessa del Mahatma. Sarojini Naidu, portavoce del Congresso nazionale indiano durante la lotta indiana per la libertà, ha affascinato le masse con i suoi discorsi densi di poesia, dedicati all'emancipazione femminile e all'unità interreligiosa tra indù e musulmani. Sarojini ha partecipato alla disobbedienza civile e ha preso ha preso parte a diverse azioni di *Satyagraha* e proteste di non cooperazione. Sarojini è stata uno dei membri fondatori della Conferenza delle donne indiane (All-India Women's Conference). Non si è mai considerata femminista e spesso ha preso apertamente le distanze dal femminismo occidentale. Ella è nota per le sue numerose poesie dedicate all'India del passato; meno noti sono i suoi discorsi, anch'essi vibranti di poesia e densi di lirismo. Il libro curato da Makarand Paranjape, poeta e studioso di letteratura inglese e indiana, è frutto di ricerche sui manoscritti, le lettere e altri documenti di Sarojini Naidu, conservati presso il "Sarojini Naidu Memorial Trust" ad Hyderabad, la città natale della poetessa. Il volume si apre con una introduzione molto ricca, che offre al lettore un quadro biografico di Sarojini Naidu. Nata nel 1879 in una famiglia di "intellettuali illuminati", Sarojini Naidu ha sin da subito dimostrato un dono di poetessa. Il padre, Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya, è stato promotore dell'istruzione femminile ed egli stesso ha aperto una scuola per ragazze a Hyderabad. Studiò all'estero presso il Girton College a Cambridge. Al suo ritorno in India, nel 1898, si sposò con un uomo di casta inferiore, Govindarajulu Naidu, un medico. In Inghilterra Sarojini aveva incontrato Edmund Gosse, poeta che la aiuterà a pubblicare la sua prima raccolta, *The Golden Threshold* (1905), ma che, come analizza Paranjape, influenzerà l'artificiosità della poesia di Sarojini, composta per un pubblico inglese e che quindi offre un'immagine di un'India edulcorata e romantica, distaccata dalla realtà drammatica di nazione colonizzata. Sarojini pubblicherà altre raccolte poetiche (*The Bird of Time*, *The Broken Wing*) negli anni successivi, ma in ciascuna di queste raccolte l'India appare sospesa in una atmosfera sognante, lungi dall'infuriare dei dibattiti politici del Congresso indiano, cui, nel frattempo, Sarojini ha preso parte, e delle lotte politiche guidate da Gandhi. Sarojini Naidu conobbe il Mahatma nel 1914, data che viene considerata una cesura importante nella vita della poetessa, la quale rivolgerà i suoi sforzi e la sua abilità oratoria alla causa dell'indipendenza indiana. Numerosi sono i discorsi che Sarojini Naidu pronuncerà sui temi a lei più cari, quali la pace interreligiosa tra indù e musulmani, il diritto di voto delle donne e il diritto all'istruzione. Sarojini Naidu viaggerà spesso tra l'India e l'Inghilterra, ma anche in Sud Africa e in America, con il ruolo di portavoce delle donne indiane. Il suo viaggio in America, in particolare, avvenuto tra il 1928 e il 1929, è finalizzato a smontare l'immagine denigratoria dell'India data dall'opera della giornalista americana Catherine Mayo, *Mother India*. Sarojini Naidu partecipa alla marcia del sale di Gandhi e a numerose altre proteste non violente: la sua presenza in prima fila sarà da esempio per

 ISSN 1824 - 4483

innumerevoli donne che si uniranno alle lotte per l'indipendenza. Alla nascita del nuovo stato indiano, Sarojini ricopre la carica di Governatrice delle Province Unite (attuale Uttar Pradesh). Muore il 2 marzo 1949, lasciando alla figlia, Padmaja Naidu, una raccolta di poesie inedite che saranno poi pubblicate nel volume *Feather of a Dawn*.

L'introduzione di Paranjape si sviluppa in una analisi accurata dell'opera di Sarojini. L'autore sostiene che la sua poesia sia il risultato artificioso di un imprintig poetico dato dal suo "padrino" Edmund Gosse, il quale rimproverò Sarojini di cantare nella sua poesia la natura e gli scorci di campagna inglese, chiedendole di essere una "genuina poetessa del Deccan". Eppure questa richiesta, secondo Paranjape, ha cristallizzato l'opera lirica di Sarojini Naidu in una poesia finta, carica di immagini caricaturali di un India pensata per un pubblico occidentale animato dal gusto per l'esotico. Il popolo indiano e, in particolare, le donne sono delle figure piatte, stereotipate, che rinforzano e non criticano lo status quo. Questo aspetto della poesia di Naidu è interpretato da Paranjape come un fallimento della poetessa. Senza nulla togliere alla bellezza di alcune poesie, come la ben nota *Palanquin Bearers*, secondo Paranjape la creazione poetica di Sarojini non può non essere vista in antitesi alla sua vita politica; al contrario, più rivoluzionari e, al contempo, densi di lirismo, sono i suoi discorsi politici in favore dell'indipendenza e dell'emancipazione femminile. L'analisi dunque si estende alla prosa di Sarojini Naidu, che viene presentata come una produzione matura, inserita nel dibattito politico, coerente con la vita dell'autrice, ma anche, dal punto di vista artistico, più riuscita di alcune sue poesie.

Paranjape si inserisce in una tradizione interpretativa che tende a separare l'opera poetica dalla vita dell'autrice. Nella seconda parte del volume sono presentate alcune delle poesie di Sarojini, dalle composizioni giovanili (*Mehir Muneer*), alle raccolte più note (*Golden Threshold, Bird of Time, Broken Wing*) alle opere postume (*Feather of a Dawn*), selezionate da Paranjape. Molte di esse offrono dei ritratti femminili in un'India sospesa nel tempo: donne vedove, donne che osservano il purdah, ma anche tante giovani amanti, donne che entrano in dialogo con la natura e vivide immagini della ricca, lussureggiante natura indiana. La sezione dedicata alla prosa offre sia brani di prosa poetica che vedono come protagoniste delle figure femminili tratteggiate in atmosfere sognanti, alla trascrizione di discorsi che Sarojini ha tenuto durante la sua lunga battaglia politica in favore delle donne. Si ricordano, in particolare, *Women's education and the Unity of India*, pronunciato nel 1908, *Indian Women and the Franchise*, discorso pronunciato in favore del diritto di voto delle donne, ma anche il *Presidential Address*, pronunciato in occasione dell'edizione del Congresso in cui Sarojini è stata nominata presidente nel 1935. Questi tre scritti offrono un quadro del pensiero di Sarojini Naidu sul ruolo delle donne indiane.

L'opera di Paranjape, in definitiva, è un utile compendio del pensiero e degli scritti di Sarojini Naidu, che va collocato, nel dibattito sull'opera della poetessa, nel filone interpretativo della poesia in discontinuità rispetto alla prosa e alla vita politica dell'autrice.

Chiara Corazza