

---

# UNIT 29 NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND WOMEN\*

---

## Structure

- 29.1 Introduction
- 29.2 Women Leaders of the National Movement
- 29.3 Mahila Samitis (Women Associations)
- 29.4 Mobilisation of Women in the Gandhian Phase
- 29.5 The Civil Disobedience Movement
- 29.6 The Quit India Movement
- 29.7 Women in Jail
- 29.8 Women in the Revolutionary and Left Movements
- 29.9 Summary
- 29.10 Exercises

---

## 29.1 INTRODUCTION

---

In this Unit, we will discuss the role of women in the national movement. Women's role in history is not easy to document. Much has been written about the invisibility of women in mainstream historical accounts. The task of filling in the gaps, of putting women into the narrative, has been an ongoing one for the past few decades. Autobiographies, personal diaries and other writings by women in journals have played a major role in this reconstruction. Any account of women's role in the Indian National Movement too, would have to rely heavily on such sources. For the rest, private papers, published and unpublished, archival records, newspapers also contain references to women's activities. They have to be carefully scrutinised to look for any mention of women's participation and occasionally they have yielded significant results.

---

## 29.2 WOMEN LEADERS OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

---

There is no doubt that women participated in the Indian anti-imperialist struggle in large numbers. If we were to recall the names of women leaders in our national movement, we will find that the list is a very long one. Starting with Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Mridula Sarabhai at the national level, we may go on to provincial level leaders like Annie Mascarene and A.V. Kuttimaluamma in Kerala, Durgabai Deshmukh in Madras Presidency, Rameshwari Nehru and Bi Amman in U.P., Satyawati Devi and Subhadra Joshi in Delhi, Hansa Mehta and Usha Mehta in Bombay and several others. In fact, such is the nature of our nationalist movement that it is very difficult to distinguish between regional level and all-India level leaders. Many women began at the local level and went on to become players in the nationalist

---

\* Resource Person: Dr. Visalakshi Menon

centre stage. Besides all these Indian women, there were also Irish women like Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins, who brought their own knowledge of the Irish experience of British exploitation to bear on India.

The growth of feminism in India and women's participation in the Indian Nationalist Movement were part of the same process. As Geraldine Heng, the Singaporean academic based in the US, has noted: "feminist movements in the Third World have almost always grown out of the same historical soil and at a similar moment, as nationalism." Moreover, as the first wave of feminism swept America and Europe, it had its impact on India too. Women in different parts of the world were asking for the vote for women, and this became the rallying cry in India as well. Irish women like Margaret Cousins helped the Indian women to demand representation in the limited constitutional reforms being provided as early as 1917. That was the year in which the Indian Women's Association was formed, primarily with the intention of sending a delegation to Edwin Montagu, the then Secretary of State for India. The delegation asked for votes for women in the new constitutional reforms which would finally take the shape of the 1919 Government of India Act, popularly known as the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.

But let us first go back to the beginning of the twentieth century – a very significant period, not just because of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal with its repercussions in other parts of the country, but also because it was the time when girls' schools and ladies' clubs mushroomed in different parts of the country. In Delhi, the Indraprastha Girls' School was set up at this time on the outskirts of the Jama Masjid, in the *haveli* of one of the businessmen of Chandni Chowk, Rai Balkrishan Das. In the UP, Sayyid Karamat Husain was busy setting up a whole network of girls' schools from Aligarh to Allahabad. There is a close relationship between women's increased access to education and their nationalist consciousness. As will be shown later, it was on the journey to school and back, or in the classroom, that many women had their first initiation into the nationalist movement. On the other hand there were several illiterate women who also participated in the movement. In the course of their activity, they closely interacted with educated fellow nationalists, and were able to access education in a whole variety of unconventional ways. Quite often it would be within the confines of the jail barracks. The relationship between education and empowerment was being understood by many women across the length and breadth of the country by the early twentieth century.

---

### 29.3 MAHILA SAMITIS (WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS)

---

The early twentieth century also witnessed the emergence of many city and town-based women's associations. Unlike the girls' schools mentioned above, these were initiated by women themselves. It was as if there was something in the air at that time which made women want to reach out to each other, to do activities together and to broaden their mental and physical horizons.

In the light of the Swadeshi agitation, women's associations like the Mahila Shilpa Samiti and the Lakshmir Bhandar were set up by the nieces of Rabindranath Tagore, Hironmoyee Devi and Sarla Devi. The Hitashini Sabha, a women's group, organised an exhibition of Swadeshi goods in 1907. Alongside with the

establishment of these women's organisations, women's journals like the *Bharat-Mahila* were also becoming extremely popular. Kumudini Mitra wrote in one of the issues that if the Indians rejected British goods in large quantities, then there would be a great upheaval in England and that would force the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, to revoke Partition.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, in her autobiography titled *Inner Recesses, Outer Spaces*, describes how, in her home town, Mangalore, her own mother Girijabai set up a Mahila Sabha around 1911 to bring women together to discuss their problems and seek ways of resolving them. Even earlier, she would visit homes and read out newspapers to women. Slowly, the activities of the Mahila Sabha expanded – women were encouraged to read books, journals and newspapers from Girijabai's own personal collection. Kamaladevi goes on to add: "the discussions were later lightened by music, vocal or instrumental. Later, outdoor games such as badminton were added..."

Two years before Girijabai set up her Mahila Sabha in Mangalore, Rameshwari Nehru, wife of a cousin of Jawaharlal Nehru, was creating a similar organisation in Allahabad. Known as the Prayag Mahila Samiti, it tried to draw the women of Allahabad out of their homes to discuss political issues. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, has this rather evocative description of one of the meetings of the Samiti in 1917. The issue that was being discussed was the plight of Indians in South Africa:

'The meeting itself was, I imagine, unique for the time. It took consistent and patient efforts for many days to persuade women to leave their homes for one afternoon and go out to hear other women speak. Outings at that time were confined to specific social occasions when one dressed up in one's best and could look forward to a good meal, and this new idea was not appreciated. South Africa was very far away – it was a pity Indians were being discriminated against, but what good could result by some women getting together and talking about it in Allahabad? A packed hall finally rewarded the efforts of the organisers and the meeting was hailed by the newspapers next morning as a great step forward in arousing the social conscience of the women of the Uttar Pradesh! My own part had been confined mostly to serving water and in trying to keep crying babies quiet, but I had a feeling of participation in the cause and felt happy.' (*The Scope of Happiness*, pp. 61-62.)

Rameshwari Nehru had also set up a women's journal at this time: the *Stree Darpan*, which was extremely popular with the Hindi reading public. It had an interesting mix of political coverage of national and international issues, short stories, poems and other prose pieces. By the 1930s, there were several other Hindi journals, such as *Madhuri*, which had also made an appearance. We have given just one example here: if we were to look at other parts of the country, such as Andhra Pradesh, Bengal and Maharashtra, we will see similar processes at work.

During the 1920s, the issue of votes for women was debated in the Provincial Legislative Councils and ultimately, by the mid-1920s, all the Legislative Councils, from the more progressive Madras Legislative Council to the more conservative UP Legislative Council, had given their assent to the idea of women's suffrage and women's representation. It is worth noting that the British

Government, when petitioned on the matter, had avoided taking a decision (possibly because in England, despite the spirited campaign launched by the Suffragettes, women still did not have the vote) They had suggested that the newly-constituted Legislative Councils, under the 1919 Government of India Act, which had an Indian majority for the first time, should debate the matter and arrive at a decision. Fortunately for the women, these councils voted in their favour.

---

## 29.4 MOBILISATION OF WOMEN IN THE GANDHIAN PHASE

---

While these developments facilitated the growth of the women's movement in India and their active involvement in public life, it was the new direction and focus given to the Indian National Movement by Mahatma Gandhi that enabled them to come out of their homes. Vina Majumdar, the doyen of women's studies in India, has referred to Gandhi's "revolutionary approach to women's role in society and their personal dignity as individuals". Madhu Kishwar, another well-known feminist scholar and activist, develops this theme further. She explains that it was in the course of the Gandhian movement that the single woman acquired a sense of dignity and came to be respected for her political work. Women like Mridula Sarabhai, who chose to remain unmarried, could actually make this choice in the context of the Gandhian movement, where giving up one's personal life for the cause and opting out of marriage were seen as noble deeds. Such women were not pitied because they had not found husbands. Their actions in the political sphere were appreciated. Mridula Sarabhai was a trusted lieutenant of Mahatma Gandhi and was often sent out by him to various places to assess the political situation and even control communal riots. Aparna Basu's biographical account of Mridula Sarabhai gives us insights into the life of this remarkable woman. Another example is that of Sucheta Kripalani, who actively participated in the movement and was a true Gandhian. In her 'Unfinished Autobiography', she wrote:

"I saw this [women being given political responsibilities] again and again during his historic tour in Noakhali. I remember once he decided to send young Abha out to work alone in a difficult village. I was myself afraid. I pleaded with Gandhiji that she was too young to go to work in such a village where there was intense bitterness between the Hindus and the Muslims. But he was firm in his decision and said: "Abha shall go. Nobody dare touch a hair on her head and she is bound to succeed in her mission." He proved to be correct."

Women were therefore, not mere add-ons to the Gandhian movement, but were an important part of it. In fact, when explaining his strategy of satyagraha and how it worked, Mahatma Gandhi had often expressed the view that he felt women would understand the method better. Satyagraha required a great deal of patience and forbearance, as well as moral courage. Gandhiji felt that most women in India had these qualities.

Women's participation in the first major Gandhian movement, the Khilafat and Non-cooperation Movement of 1920-22, was limited but there were some important developments. The Khilafat Movement in the U.P. was marked by the energetic efforts of Bi Amman, the mother of the Ali Brothers, Maulana Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali. Bi Amman was the popular name by which she

was known. Her actual name was Abadi Bano Begum. A courageous woman who did not allow patriarchy and the *pardah* to come in her way, she took to active politics around 1914, when her sons were in jail, because she felt that the cause must not suffer. Despite her age – she was over sixty by then – she toured the Punjab, Bombay, the U.P. and Bihar during the Khilafat Movement, addressing several meetings and collecting large sums of money for the Movement. She would throw aside her *pardah* and address the gathering, asking women to come forward and participate in the Movement in large numbers. Her presence played a major role in attracting women to the public meetings held on the Khilafat issue.

Another important development was that women went to jail for the first time in the Non-Cooperation Movement. This was bound to happen, though Mahatma Gandhi was at first not at all in favour of women going to jail. But when the wife and sister of Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das got arrested in Calcutta in 1921, Gandhiji had to revise his stand. He now began addressing women in different parts of the country, exhorting them to go to jail. “A yagna is incomplete without women taking part in it”, he told the women of Gujarat.

He drew them more actively into the mainstream of politics, asking them to attend the Ahmedabad session of the Indian National Congress, held at the end of 1921, in large numbers. The women of U.P. in particular responded to the appeal, setting forth from their distant homes, travelling third class to Ahmedabad, staying at Sabarmati Ashram and experiencing the rigours and austerities of Ashram life. Attending the Congress session, participating in the discussions and getting more deeply drawn into the spirit of non-co-operation were exhilarating experiences. Krishna Hutheesingh, the younger sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, has given us a rather vivid description of this journey in her autobiography titled “With No Regrets”. Besides her, her elder sister, Sarup (later Vijayalakshmi Pandit) and her sister-in-law Kamala Nehru, there were other women like Begum Mohammad Ali, Begum Hasrat Mohani, Mrs. A.M. Khwaja and Uma Nehru attending this session of the Congress. From Punjab came Sarladevi Chaudharani, the niece of Rabindranath Tagore and from Gujarat there was Anusuya Sarabhai.

When they returned after the Congress session, their lives had been transformed. The Non-Cooperation Movement was at its peak, most of the leaders had been arrested. The women took upon themselves the responsibility of keeping the movement alive by holding meetings, often in defiance of prohibitory orders, addressing large crowds, usually for the first time in their lives, and if need be, even going to jail.

What emerges, then, from the pattern of women’s participation in the politics of the 1920s is their being drawn into the movement, not in the first instance, but at one remove, i.e., after the arrest of their men folk. They were not cowed down by this punitive action of the Government. Instead, it strengthened their resolve to keep up the tempo of the movement and prevent it from dying out. The determined spirit of these women left the British authorities rather confused. What were they to do with these women? Should their actions be ignored or should they be arrested? If the latter course of action were to be adopted, would it cause further unrest? Very few women were arrested in the Khilafat- Non-cooperation Movement, and if they were, it was only for a very short period. Things were to change during the next mass movement, however.

In the course of the peasant movement in Awadh, which accompanied the Non-Co-operation Movement, women participated actively. Jaggi Devi, the wife of Baba Ramchandra, was an active figure. We also have some other names of peasant women who were part of the large crowds who gathered outside police stations to get their leaders released. The peasant historian, Kapil Kumar, in his article titled “Rural Women in Oudh 1917-1947” refers to women like Musammat Putta and Abhilakhi, who came into the peasant movement on their own and not at the initiative of their husbands. Sumitra Devi, on the other hand, had her husband and mother-in-law in the peasant movement.

---

## 29.5 THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

---

The Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-33 was undoubtedly a major landmark in women’s participation in political activity. We begin with the historic Dandi March of Mahatma Gandhi in March 1930. When he set out from his Sabarmati Ashram with his group of 78 volunteers, he declared that no women would be part of the Dandi March. This was extremely disappointing for women like Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay who has given us this account of what she felt: “As batches for the first Satyagrahis were to be selected, I asked that women be included. I was told that Gandhiji did not want them as he had other programmes reserved for them. I was flabbergasted.”

Kamaladevi rushed to Surat and then took a bus to Jambusar, where Gandhiji and his group of volunteers were expected to reach. She impressed upon Gandhiji the need to involve women in direct action during the Civil Disobedience Movement. After listening to her, Gandhiji finally held out a slip of paper on which he had written: “All may regard this as the words from me that all are free and those who are ready are expected to start mass civil disobedience regarding the Salt Law from April 6.” Kamaladevi took this as the green signal from Gandhi for women’s participation in mass direct action and this made it easier for the women’s sections of the Seva Dals (volunteer organisations of the Congress) to issue directions and organise participation of women volunteers in all the programmes of Civil Disobedience. Women’s meetings, processions, picketing of shops the making and selling of salt, all became generalised activities in all parts of the country. To quote Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay once again:

“The veil of centuries was torn asunder. Women, young and old, rich and poor came tumbling out in their hundreds and thousands, shaking off the traditional shackles that had held them so long.

“Voluntarily they went forward without a trace of fear or embarrassment. They stood at street corners with little packages of salt, crying out: “We have broken the Salt Law and we are free. Who will buy the salt of freedom? Don’t you want the salt of freedom? Their cries never went unheeded. Every passerby stopped, slipped a coin into their hands and held out proudly a tiny pinch of salt.” (Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, “The Struggle for Freedom” in *Women of India*, Publication Division, 1958, pp. 19-20.)

Quite often these activities took them to jail usually in rather unexpected ways. We have this rather delightful description from Munshi Premchand, the writer, of the arrest of his wife, Shivrani Devi, who was active in the Civil Disobedience Movement in Allahabad: “I saw her yesterday in prison and found her cheerful

as ever. She has left us all behind and I now appear smaller in my own eyes. She has gone up a hundred fold in my esteem. But until she comes and relieves me, I shall have to bear the burden of running the household.” (From Amrit Rai, *Premchand: A Life* (Translated from the Hindi by Harish Trivedi), New Delhi, 1982, pp. 260-61.)

These words capture the mood of many a household where the women had gone to jail – pride mixed with dismay at the inconveniences that had to be borne. Manmohini Sahgal Zutshi in her autobiography recounts the story of a woman who found herself in the Lahore Jail. She had been arrested in the course of a meeting and this had infuriated her husband who had threatened not to take her back when she was released from jail. Manmohini and her mother Lado Rani Zutshi, a well known Congress leader from Lahore, spoke to the husband who explained that what irked him was not the fact of his wife being in jail – in fact he was proud of her for that – he was upset because she had not sought his permission before going to jail!

This was a time when gender equations were undergoing change – women were making their choice of husbands, they were even choosing not to marry or to move away from husbands with whom there were compatibility issues. For example, the Bengali Sucheta Majumdar met and married Jivat Kripalani, a Sindhi who was a close follower of Mahatma Gandhi. They not only had to reckon with opposition from their own families but from Mahatma Gandhi himself, who was opposed to the idea of J.B. Kripalani, his right hand man, getting distracted with household responsibilities. The couple finally convinced Mahatma Gandhi that even though they would marry, they would devote their entire lives to nationalist work and would not raise children. They remained true to their resolve until the very end. Another example was that of Jayaprakash Narayan and his wife Prabhavati. In this case, the marriage was a traditional one, but once again they resolved not to raise children and spent their lives often away from each other, pursuing their own preferred forms of political activity. Prabhavati spent a great deal of her time in the Gandhian ashram at Sevagram, while Jayaprakash was drawn more and more towards Congress Socialism. A third example is that of the Delhi-based Congress leader, Asaf Ali and his wife Aruna Ganguly from Allahabad. Aruna was marrying out of religion, and like Sucheta, had chosen a man who was much older than her. These unconventional marriages gave women a great deal of space and it is not surprising that at least two of the women mentioned above: Sucheta Kripalani and Aruna Asaf Ali, became prominent leaders of the Congress. Both were extremely active in the underground campaign which sustained and gave a sense of direction to the Quit India Movement of 1942. As for women opting out of marriage due to incompatibility, we have Mahadevi Varma, the well-known poetess, who terminated an early marriage and went on to pursue a professional career even while being a staunch nationalist. The Communist leader, Hajra Begum, had been married to her cousin but soon found that she could not adjust to his ways. She left him and pursued her studies in England, in the course of which she met Z.A. Ahmed, whom she later married.

---

## 29.6 THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

---

If women came into their own in the 1930s, the 1942 Quit India Movement was one in which women’s participation was even more significant. Interestingly, women understood the complexities of this movement very well. Since the major

Congress leaders had been put in jail in a pre-emptive strike by the British government, they realised that what was needed now was to evade arrest and many of them successfully managed to do so until almost the end of the movement. Women also took the initiative in a wide variety of ways – from producing pamphlets, to circulating underground literature, to running a Congress radio. Usha Mehta, along with Vithalbhai Jhaveri, Babubhai Khakar and Rammanohar Lohia set up the Freedom Radio in Bombay which successfully broadcast from 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1942 until 12 November of the same year. This was how she explained the background to the setting up of the Congress Radio:

“The leaders had told us to do all we could. We had been given specific instructions regarding the programme. So each one had to exert his or her own brain to find out the programme that would be suitable, that would be appropriate for the type of struggle that had been launched. There were some friends who thought in terms of violent means also. And there were some sabotage cases in Bombay. Some friends wanted to prepare bombs. There were others who thought in terms of derailments. But our group of friends thought that as far as possible we would try to be non-violent. Not that every one believed in non-violence as a creed, but in their opinion, as we had accepted the Mahatma’s leadership, it was desirable for us to stick to non-violent means as far as possible. However, they did not like the methods which were ordinarily adopted, because they did not seem to be as effective as some of the other means. By studying the freedom movements of other countries, we found that, perhaps, a transmitter was the best way of spreading news regarding the movement, not merely in Bombay but all over India. At a time when the press was gagged and we had no control over the official transmitter (All-India Radio), we thought this would serve the purpose very well and, hence, we set out in search of a technical who could provide us with a transmitter.”

The broadcasts were usually of 20 minutes to half an hour duration and would end with the *Bande Mataram*. They were extremely popular and people used to wait for the broadcasts. Usha Mehta’s account of the ways in which they moved from place to place with their transmitters, often narrowly escaping detection, pre-empting the attempts by All India Radio to jam their frequency by jamming the AIR itself make fascinating reading.

In the Quit India Movement, there were women’s processions even in such unlikely places as Bannu in the North West Frontier Province. Girl students were active in Meerut, parts of Assam, Sagar and Wardha in Madhya Pradesh and different parts of the Madras Presidency.

There is an amusing incident of how the women of Mahila Ashram, Wardha, decided to embarrass the District Magistrate. Shortly after the beginning of the Quit India Movement, it was time for the Raksha Bandhan festival, when sisters usually tie *rakhis* around the wrists of their brothers. The Mahila Ashram women decided to call upon the District Magistrate and tie *rakhis* on him. The DM fully realised what the consequences of this action could be. It would mean that he would become their brother, and how could a brother arrest his own sisters? On the other hand, it would be extremely awkward for him to refuse their request. What was he to do? When the women arrived at his home, he sent his wife to receive them and ply them with food and *sharbat*. When the women asked for the DM they were told by the wife that he was getting ready. After they had waited for a long time they suspected that something was wrong. They realised

that the DM had managed to escape through the back door, even as the wife was entertaining the women.

---

## 29.7 WOMEN IN JAIL

---

Women went to jail in large numbers both during the course of the Quit India Movement and the previous Civil Disobedience Movement. As we have explained earlier, these arrests often threw their domestic lives into disarray. However, for the women themselves, the jail came to signify a new world, the routine of which was quite different from the daily domestic grind. Here, they learnt to spin, sing nationalist songs, educate themselves, learn new languages and interact with women whom they would otherwise never have met in their lives. Many of the middle-class women had their first insights into the lives of 'criminal women' who had been convicted for murder and other serious offences. They learnt to empathise with them and bond with them as women. The 'murders', they realised, had often been committed by way of resisting patriarchal oppression. A drunken husband had been clubbed to death by the wife who had silently endured years of violence and humiliation. Such women in turn reacted to the political prisoners with curiosity and a certain amount of envy. They realised that the political prisoners were there only for a short period of time and would return to their normal lives after a year or two. There would be families waiting to receive them while their own lives were blighted forever. Even if their terms ended, who would accept a woman murderer back into their homes?

---

## 29.8 WOMEN IN THE REVOLUTIONARY AND LEFT MOVEMENTS

---

Until now we have concentrated on the Gandhian movement and women's participation in it. As we know, our nationalist movement had several other ideological strains besides the Gandhian one. From the 1920s, under the auspices of the HRA which later renamed itself as the HSRA, a strong revolutionary tradition developed over large parts of Northern India. This revolutionary movement set itself up as a counter to the non-violent Gandhian movement, which, it felt, would not work in India. It believed that individual assassinations, especially of top officials of the British Government would be more effective because that would paralyse the British Government and make them leave India. These revolutionary groups worked underground and the harsh life that they led made it extremely difficult for women to be part of it. In fact, as women like Prakashvati, the wife of Yashpal, have explained, the men themselves discouraged women from joining their movement. Yet, in Bengal, there were women revolutionary groups who formed physical culture clubs and secretly read banned revolutionary literature. The Chittagong Armoury Raid of 19 April 1930. Greatly excited women like Pritilata Wadedar and Kalpana Dutt who became more actively involved in revolutionary activities.

The late 1920s and thereafter witnessed the emergence of a viable Left alternative within the Indian Nationalist Movement. Many women chose to join the Communist Party, because of its more radical programme which appealed especially to the youth and also because the newly emergent Soviet Russia was making remarkable progress through collectivisation of agriculture and the Five Year Plans. Hajra Begum from Rampur, a small princely state in UP, explained

that she was not at all attracted by the Gandhian programme. Her ideological affinity with Communism was further strengthened when she went to England to study and got an opportunity to visit the Soviet Union. The group of students whom she interacted with in London—Sajjad Zaheer, Z.A. Ahmed, K.M. Ashraf—were also similarly inclined. They all became the first Indian members of the CPGB: the Communist Party of Great Britain. They were instructed to return to India and work within the Indian National Congress (The Communist Party of India was under a ban at that time). Hajra Begum emerged as a labour leader, organising the railway coolies on Allahabad railway station. She was also a popular speaker at many student meetings during the 1930s.

In the course of the 1940s, the number of women who participated in the various subsidiary organisations of the Left, such as the Progressive Writers' Association and the Indian People's Theatre Association increased manifold. Rasheed Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Rekha Jain and others made their mark in literature, theatre and music. All these cultural forms were used to mobilise the workers and the peasantry in different parts of India. This, combined with the very active role that women played in the Quit India Movement, indicates the extent to which women were becoming the "movers of history" by the 1940s.

---

## 29.9 SUMMARY

---

Women's participation in the Indian Nationalist Movement can be traced back to the Swadeshi Movement. The early decades of the twentieth century saw women's lives being transformed through education, formation of women's associations and increasing participation in political activity. The story of women's participation in India's freedom struggle is the story of making bold choices, finding themselves on the streets, inside jails and in legislatures, all of which empowered them in a whole variety of ways. The non-violent movement that gained India her freedom not only took women along but was dependent for its success on the active participation of women. At the same time, there were several other strands in the anti-imperialist movement, such as that of the revolutionaries, communists and other left groups. While the revolutionary movement offered little scope for women's participation, increasingly in the 1930s and 1940s, many women were being drawn towards socialist and communist ideas.

---

## 29.10 EXERCISES

---

- 1) Why was Gandhian method of mass mobilisation effective in bringing out women to public life?
- 2) Discuss the relationship between feminism and growth of national consciousness among women.
- 3) What was the role of women in revolutionary and left movements in India?