The Interactions Between and Influences of British Feminist Groups and Indian Feminist Nationalists: 1918-1938

By

Theodore Courtney Rogers

B.A., History and Psychology, Southern Methodist University, 1983

MBA, Corporate Finance, The University of Dallas, 1990

M.A., Biblical Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1997


M.A., Modern European History, Georgia State University, 2007

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This thesis entitled:
The Interactions Between and Influences of British Feminist Groups and Indian Feminist Nationalists: 1918-1938
Written by Theodore Courtney Rogers
Has been approved by the Department of History

Susan Kent, Committee Chair _________________________________

Dr. Mithi Mukherjee __________________________________________

Dr. David Gross _____________________________________________

Dr. Lucy Chester ____________________________________________

Dr. Katherine Eggert _________________________________________

Date: _______________

The final copy of this these has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
Abstract

Rogers, Theodore Courtney (PhD., History)

The Interactions Between and Influences of British Feminist Groups and Indian Feminist Nationalists: 1918-1938

Thesis directed by A&S Professor of Distinction Susan K. Kent

What were the causal factors of the rise of Indian feminist nationalists in the interwar era and what was their impact on nationalist politics in India, politics in Britain, and global politics during that time? Through an analysis of the personal papers and correspondence of Interwar British and Indian feminists and feminist organizations, I trace the development of Indian interwar feminist nationalist ideology and its impact on Indian nationalism, British politics, and global politics. I demonstrate that Indian feminist nationalists not only developed their own nationalist ideology centered on the idea of their moral superiority to the British government, but that they also, through their unity which transcended class, linguistic, religious, and caste barriers, motivated British feminists to help them achieve leadership rolls in global politics through inclusion in leadership rolls in the League of Nations.
To Glenda, who makes beauty and wonder happen. Your love and courage are my inspiration, and I love you more than life.
Acknowledgments

On my first full day of almost three months of research in India, I awoke at 5:45 AM to go for a four-mile run. Jet lagged, I wanted my circadian rhythm to adjust as quickly as possible to the twelve-hour time change. With the sun just cresting, my New Delhi neighborhood sprang to life. I headed down the street alongside the park, where a group of about 30 Sikh men had gathered in a circle, in what I later learned was a “laughing club.” One by one, each man led the group by clapping rhythmically, then beginning a chorus of laughter. As the light of dawn spilled over the rooftops and sprinkled into the park, I began to see, and simultaneously hear, Hindus seated at various benches, starting their morning prayers and meditations. By the time the morning light lapped fully across the park, groups had gathered in different areas within the confines for yoga. Turning the corner, I passed a group of tuktuks parked in a line, and quickly discovered that each contained a vicious dog, left by the owner overnight to guard his vehicle, his livelihood. The first dog’s jaws snapped just inches from my left arm as I passed. Needless to say, I jumped quickly to the side. Down the street, amidst the debris in the gutter, were Christian evangelistic tracts in front of a small Church. Rounding the next corner, the minarets of the Moslem Temple, now bathed in sunlight, broadcasted the morning call to prayer. Finally, back at the corner where I had rented my flat, the laundryman/tailor prayed over the sewing machine he had set up in front of his home, before attaching the belt—made from an old shoestring—from the foot treadle to the flywheel. As I struggled to make sense of what I’d seen in under an hour, I remembered the title of the Fodor’s tourist guide for India—Essential India. How, my mind reeled,
could anyone essentialize India? In one run I’d seen more diversity than one typically sees in an entire day in Central Park!

India changed me. It was not an “other,” by which we all define ourselves; it became a vast milieu of others that I did not define myself against, but instead incorporated into my life. The diversity is unimaginable to those who have not spent considerable time there. Many, including Salman Rushdie in his book *Midnight’s Children*, have marveled that it can remain in any way a cohesive unit, even predicting, like decades of British government officials, that it will fracture into a billion separate pieces. Yet, with almost 20% of the world’s population within its borders, India continues, due to the brave and indefatigable efforts of individuals such as the women I write about in the pages of this dissertation. I write about them in the humble knowledge that I cannot do them justice, for I cannot put to words the depth of their travails as they sought, through acts of peace, a greater unity and a national independence.

This has been one of the most significant projects in my life. As such, I could not have done it alone. I needed, and received, the generous help of many, many others to accomplish this work. It is a better piece due to their contributions. What is good in these pages, I believe, is because of them. The errors and omissions I lay full claim to as my own. So, I beg of you, please read these acknowledgments, as they tell of many generous heroes, giants upon whose shoulders I have had the privilege of standing.

First, I must thank Susan Kent. Susan had the great courage to take on the challenge of advising a 48-year-old graduate student. She has performed in that role with passion, wisdom, compassion, and a seemingly infinite amount of patience. Recognizing the outside stresses in my life, Susan very wisely directed me toward the path of writing
about the incredible people in the pages that follow. Many times, the work of the historian is the writing of trauma. Susan realized that, given the outside traumas of my own over the past several years, I needed to focus on a brighter subject. She was correct, for writing about such women of incredible strength and perspicuity helped me to rediscover my own strength. Though it was never intentional, I know I have been a pain, to say the least, many, many times, but Susan has kept on pushing me forward in the pursuit of excellence. She has also written on my behalf countless times, and I am grateful to CU and the Center for British and Irish Studies for the many grants I have received that made this dissertation possible. This project would not exist without Susan. I cannot repay her, except in providing the same sage advice to the students I hope to teach in the future.

I firmly believe that the rest of my dissertation committee, too, is comprised of the best scholars possible, and I am awed with gratitude at their willingness to oversee this project. My Outside Reader, Katherine Eggert, Professor in the Department of English, and Director of the Center for British and Irish Studies, brought to bear a wealth of knowledge regarding issues of gender and sexuality, with which this project deals, extensively. She has also done very interesting work on the topic of agnatology, which, though not as extensively dealt with in this dissertation as I anticipated, still informs a portion of it. Lucy Chester informed this project with her expertise on the topic of Indian independence from Britain. Throughout this process, she has always had encouraging words, terrific advice, and nearly instant responses to any of my queries. She also informed me of the single best place in old Delhi to find an amazing kebab. I look forward to keeping up with her work, especially on the politics around drawing the Indi-
Pakistani border. I had the privilege of assisting David Gross for a semester in his Western Civilization class; I am grateful for his encouragement and help in honing my teaching skills. I am also appreciative of his incredible flexibility in putting together an entire graduate course for a small number of us on the topic of fascism and National Socialism. That course provided me with the background needed to produce an article about British fascism, published by the University of Ireland, Lymerick, which also would not have been possible without the generous help of Susan Kent. Mithi Muckherjee, too, has greatly informed my knowledge of modern India. Always generous with her time, Mithi provided sage advice on this project, from its very inception to where it stands now. Beyond the immense help she has given to me academically, she also took significant time to prepare me for my months in India, including referring me to several of her friends in Delhi should a need arise. To each of these people, a simple “thank you” is not enough. They have poured themselves into my training and supported this project with interest and passion, and in so doing have changed my life for the better.

Foundationally, four scholars shaped my early career. James “Doc” Breeden, my academic advisor in my undergrad years at SMU, strongly urged me to pursue graduate studies. I did so, but in theology first, much to his chagrin, as opposed to history. Still we have remained good friends. Tom Constable, one of the most gifted theologians alive, took me under his wing at Dallas Theological Seminary. In 1984, he started to encourage me to pursue doctoral work. Then, life happened, and I had to suspend those plans. I finished, finally, at DTS years later, with a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies and a Master of Arts in Education. Tom remained my advisor, became my mentor, and is among my closest friends. He and his wife Mary have visited us at least once a year since
we left Texas twenty years ago. They are family to us, offering support at every juncture of my life. Ian Fletcher, who specializes in the Edwardian era of British history, advised me as a student for my Master of Arts in History at Georgia State University. Jared Poley, a CU Boulder Alumni, took an interest in my work while I was there, and helped significantly in my master’s thesis, which was later published in book form by Verlag Academic. I owe both of these individuals a huge debt. Jared, too, strongly suggested that I look at CU Boulder as my next place to study, as he particularly liked Susan Kent and her work as a scholar and educator.

Once at CU, the path started well, but then again, life happened three years into the process. Within two days, my wife received a diagnosis of breast cancer, while doctors confirmed a central retinal vein occlusion in my right eye that almost resulted in removal of the eye. Lori Jensen, my wife’s oncologist, and Richard Fox, her surgeon, did a brilliant job of caring for Glenda, who is now six years cancer free. Richard Hoveland, my retinal surgeon, not only saved my eye, but also did what he stated was impossible: four years of monthly injections of Avastin into my right eye later, he saved my eyesight. To add more fun to the mix, at the midpoint of my eye treatment, I snapped the distal bicep tendon in my right arm. Tim Pater, orthopedic surgeon, performed the four-hour surgery that restored to me the use of my arm. In the midst of all of this, both Glenda and I became primary caregivers and attorneys-in-fact for parents diagnosed with terminal illnesses. A host of medical and legal professionals helped through those difficulties. Again, more debts of help and kindness that I cannot repay.

Friends helped me through the tough times. Upon initiation of her radiation treatment, over 60 friends came to our 900 square foot home to bolster Glenda’s spirits
with a “sing along with Momma Mia party.” Patrick and Carla Joyce, too, rallied to our sides. Carla, who has a deep fear of flying, boarded a plane to fly two thirds of the way across the country to be with Glenda on the last days of her radiation treatments, when Glenda’s skin began to blister and crack with third-degree burns. Patrick remained a source of incredible encouragement and wisdom through that time. They both remain as close as can be to us, and even offered to let us live with them, gratis, when Glenda’s medical issues required our return to the lower elevation of Atlanta. Fred and Noel Joy, too, became points of light, encouragement, and stability for both Glenda and me through the past seven years with their wisdom, good humor, and deep affection.

Fellow History students Amy Lotman, Abby Lageman, Sarah Gavison, Nik Georgacarakos, Steve Dike-Wilhelm, and Marty Babicz provided encouragement, house-sat and took care of our dogs when we had to be out of town to care for dying parents, brought over meals when we just couldn’t make our own, and lashed me to the mast when I thought I couldn’t resist the siren song of outside influences calling me to quit. We have shared not only the intellectual adventure of classwork together, but also significant peaks and valleys in life. I am a significantly better man because of their presence in my life.

Unfortunately, there have been those champions I’ve lost during this time as well. Rick Gumina, brilliant professor of statistics at Colorado State University and dear friend, died three years ago, just weeks after completing a grueling triathlon. We had enjoyed dinner together with him and his wife two days prior but, after riding his bike to work, which he did every day, sun, rain, or snow, his aorta burst as he was locking his bike to the rack. His death was nearly instantaneous. A kind, generous, good man, he was as
close to me as a brother. Rick, not a day has passed since then that I have not thought of you, each memory a good one. My mother, too, died November 16, 2015, after a three-year fight with cancer. Though her passing was a mercy, she wanted to see my PhD work come to fruition. Selfishly I wish she could have, but again, she is now in a better place, and free of the agonizing pain.

Back to the positive side, I am also grateful for the heroic women who are the focus of this work. In India, Muthulakshmi Reddi, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sarojini Naidu, and a host of others forged a unity around ideals larger than themselves and were able to reach across cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, and economic divides in unprecedented ways. In Britain were their counterparts—a host of feminists, actually—but two names stand out among them, namely Agatha Harrison and Grace Lankester, whose courage, honor, and great sacrifices made sure that the voices of the Indian feminist nationalists were not ignored. In fact, each worked to advance the Indian feminist cause in the international arena with great effect. Why, one may right ask, would a fifty-year-old male choose to write about these individuals? First, because they are the definition of heroism. I would not have known that, though, if it had not been for the gentle nudging from my advisor, Susan Kent, who informed me that one cannot truly understand interwar Britain without understanding India at that time. She directed me to focus on the women of India, rather than the women of Britain, to, in her words, “Not make the British women the heroes of someone else’s story.” Again, sage advice.

To come to know these amazing individuals I would be writing about required months of archival work overseas. The good people of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library had the best-kept pieces of personal correspondence from those involved in the
three main interwar Indian women’s groups I could find. The Director of the NMML, Mahesh Rangarajan, not only ensured that I received excellent treatment by all staff members while I was there, but he also invited me to tea in his office weekly during the several months I was there. He is a great man and a phenomenal scholar, with a deep respect for the history of his country. In Britain, the staff at the British Library operated with an efficiency that was truly amazing. The Women’s Library in the London School of Economics extended every courtesy and rallied to my aid as they learned of my topic. Every staff member there was friendly, courteous, efficient, and well versed in their archive’s resources. Finally, the Society of Friends archive in London proved to be a delight to work in with its rich holdings and expert staff. I felt among friends there, especially when they offered me my own room for “prayer and meditation” when they found out I was an Evangelical Free Church Pastor and took to referring to me in good humor as the “Fellow Dissenter!”

Back at CU, Thea Lindquist, History Librarian par excellence, always had an open door and gave me valuable ideas on how to find archival sources. Scott Miller, Graduate Secretary, smoothed the path through administrative details and used his office to help me, and countless other graduate students, keep a grasp on sanity during the rough parts. Tim Weston became a close friend, at all times willing to lend an ear and ready with wise advice. John Willis, too, became a close friend, and proffered much helpful guidance for my archival work in India. He also came to my rescue when he read on Facebook that I had passed out in the street in New Delhi (where it was 125 degrees in the shade and the heat got the best of me as I was carrying a 30-pound backpack from the metro station one mile back to my flat). He informed me of the electrolyte replacement
drink Nimbu Pani sold by street vendors on almost all corners. This became a regular part of my diet, and I had no further health problems due to the heat. John also provided very constructive feedback on early drafts of my first few chapters. David Spires and his wife, Teresa, also became fast friends. David volunteered to help with the Rocky Mountain Interdisciplinary History Conference two years in a row. He also gave helpful advice on several of my chapters, often over a cold beer or three. Last of all, I must acknowledge that the Thanksgiving dinner over which I laughed the hardest in my life was due in good measure to David and Teresa’s excellent sense of humor.

My family has been a tremendous source of help and strength through the past several years. Throughout his life, my father, Ted Rogers Sr., has modeled how vision, purpose, and tenacity form a kind of holy trinity in accomplishing works of meaning. Founding and managing partner of American Industrial Partners, Chairman Emeritus of the New York City Ballet, Board member of the Theater for a New Audience, and Board of Visitors and Governors for Saint John’s College, my father has invested his life in projects of deep and lasting meaning. In so doing, he has made life better for tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of people. He understood the risks involved in pursuing this degree far better than I did at the beginning, and yet he has lent his support throughout. I could not have done this without him. Though I cannot repay him, I will honor him by trying to live my life with as great of a sense of purpose, vision, and tenacity for the sake of humanity as he has done. I pray I can accomplish a portion of what he has.

Throughout these acknowledgments, I have mentioned the courage of the women that I write about in the pages to come. Perhaps I admire that quality so much because I
am married to a woman of courage easily equal to theirs. Glenda has been my love, my
inspiration, my source of hope, and an ever-present source of strength for thirty-three
years of marriage. In my fifty-five years of life, and my travels though fifty-four
countries, I have never met a person of greater courage, integrity, kindness, brilliance,
and beauty. I have seen her literally risk her life repeatedly overseas in her quest to
provide humanitarian aid to those in need. As well, she is an accomplished author and
internationally published photographer. She is light, she is air to me, and I love her more
than life.

Finally, to my God. My words are now failing, so I will borrow those of Christina
Rossetti in her poem “A Better Resurrection,” as my prayer:

I have no wit, no words, no tears;
My heart within me like a stone
Is numbed too much for hopes or fears;
Look right, look left, I dwell alone;
I lift mine eyes, but dimmed with grief
No everlasting hills I see;
My life is in the falling leaf:
O Jesus, quicken me.

My life is like a faded leaf;
My harvest dwindled to a husk;
Truly my life is void and brief
And tedious in the barren dusk;
My life is like a frozen thing,
No bud nor greenness can I see:
Yet rise it shall—the sap of Spring;
O Jesus, rise in me.

My life is like a broken bowl,
A Broken bowl that cannot hold
One drop of water for my soul
Or cordial in the searching cold;
Cast in the fire the perished thing,
Melt and remould it till it be
A royal cup for Him my King:
O Jesus, drink of me.
The Grace of God, too, I cannot repay, but that is the nature of χάρις, Grace—unmerited favor. And I am grateful for having received so much Grace from oh so many. Thank you all.

No, one cannot essentialize India, but it is essential, as Susan Kent noted, for understanding modern Britain. And as world events continue to unfold, it will become ever more vital in understanding not only world history, but the world of the present and the future. Courage, honor, and sacrifice, are where we find them, and I found them modeled in the lives of the people I document and celebrate in the upcoming chapters.

Ted Rogers,
April 15, 2016.
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Introduction

The Interactions Between and Influences of British Feminist Groups and Indian Feminist Nationalists: 1918-1938

INTRODUCTION

Ideologies of empire among British women changed dramatically in the first third of the twentieth century, as did the relationships between feminists in Britain and in India. As Antoinette Burton has noted, British feminists in the Edwardian era emphasized their role as proponents of empire in their arguments for greater participation in government. They argued that by virtue of supporting empire, they demonstrated political beliefs similar to their male counterparts, and thus deserved equal political rights. With the advent of women’s suffrage in Britain (limited in 1918, then universal in 1928), British feminist groups’ ideologies toward empire began to change, which caused a shift over time in how they viewed Indian independence and women’s issues in India.

In my dissertation, I argue that interwar Indian and British feminists, while interacting with each other significantly, often articulated different feminist agendas, and pursued different routes to obtain their goals. I demonstrate this by investigating Indian and British feminists’ interactions and correspondence with regard to six key events: the Child Marriage Restraint Act, or Sarda Act (passed in 1929, amended in the Child Marriage Restraint Act VIII of 1938, and amended again in the Child Marriage Restraint

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Act VXIX of 1938; Gandhi’s Salt March; the Round Table Conferences of 1930-1932; Katherine Mayo’s publication of *Mother India*; Eleanor Rathbone’s publication of *Child Marriage: The Indian Minotaur*; and the Government of India Act of 1935. The twenty-year period (1919-1938) of the study allows for analysis of three questions: what changes in interactions and alliances took place between British and Indian feminists during the interwar period? How or why did the interactions and alliances between these feminists occur, and in what variations? Last of all, what were the changing tactics used by the different participants? The resulting analyses offers interrelated answers demonstrating that Indian feminist nationalists exerted greater influence on British feminists than previously known.

By demonstrating the influence of Indian feminists on their British counterparts, I show how they changed British feminist thinking, British government policy, and world politics via the League of Nations. As well, I show that Indian feminists resorted to indigenous ideas of feminist agency to significantly influence the nature of the Indian nationalist movement. In addition, I show that the Indian feminists developed their own pro-independence discourse centered on the issue of child marriage during the interwar period.

Both Mrinalini Sinha and Harold Smith have noted that the use of the singular “feminism” is too confining, in that it assumes a universal feminism applicable to all women, regardless of class, race, or nationality. Most interwar British feminists, imbued

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with imperial ideology, advocated an idea of a singular, transnational feminism as it related to empire. Thus they attempted, in Gramsci’s words, to “take over hegemony within the directive grouping,” an attempt he accurately predicted could “well be unsuccessful.”

I show, however, that interwar Indian feminists rejected a universal Western feminist ideology in favor of their own, with their identities aligned with the nationalist movement, where their Eastern feminist ideologies found a home. In relation to many British feminists, then, they behaved in a counterhegemonic manner, rejecting the paternalism exhibited by some British feminists as an extension of empire. In other words, Indian feminists did not see men as their primary oppressor, but instead saw colonial rule as the yoke they needed to escape.

I also argue that the response of British feminists to the needs and ideologies of Indian feminists differed greatly. Eleanor Rathbone attempted to listen to the key Indian women activists and nationalists, but she could not overcome her British patriotism and her commitment to imperial ideology to fully support the agendas of Indian women. Other women, such as Agatha Harrison, Margaret Cousins, and Margery Corbett Ashby, went much further; they actively sought not only to learn the ideologies of Indian women activists, but also to communicate them back to the feminist groups in Britain. Specifically, I explore how these British feminists (Rathbone, Harrison, Cousins, Ashby and others) interacted with key Indian women activists, such as Amrit Kaur, Radhabai


Subbarayan, Hamid Ali, and Muthulakshmi Reddi, and then conveyed these interactions back to Britain. In so doing, I demonstrate how differing knowledge and power structures shaped ideas of feminist activity across the British empire in the interwar period. This informs how the negotiations across these intellectual frontiers on the issues of the Sarda Act, the Salt March, the Round Table discussions, the publication of *Mother India*, the publication *Child Marriage: The Indian Minotaur*, and the Government of India Act of 1935 changed feminist thought and national politics not just in India but also in the metropole. This inquiry is of crucial importance to our understanding of the political interactions of British feminists and feminist groups in the interwar era, for scholars have not yet researched how ideas of, and connections with, empire helped establish both unity and discord among these feminists.

I focus my analysis on the three main Indian women’s groups during the interwar era, namely the Women’s Indian Association (WIA), the National Council of Women in India (NCWI), and the All India Women’s Conference (AIWC). These three Indian women’s groups recognized Gandhi as the leader, or, at least the figurehead, of the nationalist movement. While there certainly were other central and very powerful leaders in the Indian nationalist movement such as Subhas Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru, and other feminists groups that closely interacted with them and supported their political perspectives, these leaders are outside the scope of this dissertation. I also recognize that Marxism was a powerful ideology at this time in India and many feminists, both individually and as groups, worked as members of Marxist and socialist groups. While these groups played a very significant role in the Indian nationalist movement, they also

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fall outside the scope of this study. A majority of the women I study in this dissertation were Hindu by birth, although there were also Muslim women in these groups. They were all secular liberal nationalists in their ideology.

The following issues complicate my investigation of British and Indian feminism during the interwar era. First, an increasing number of politicians in Britain at this time understood that empire had become too costly to maintain. Second, after the Amritsar Massacre, Indian nationalists abandoned their desire for dominion status in favor of full independence. Third, upper-class subalterns (all of the Indian feminists mentioned in this study were educated, upper-class individuals) often experienced significant ideological identification with those who ruled them. My research however shows that, though Indian feminists sought the support of British feminists, they also recognized the significant ideological gulf between them. Fourth, the strategy of British feminists changed over the course of the interwar era: instead of acting to sway public opinion, they adopted a new strategy—directly petitioning Parliament. Although Indian feminists shared the strategy of lobbying government officials for what they desired, they also, with more effect, sought to influence public opinion, both domestically and abroad.

How, then, did British and Indian feminists interact with each other during key events of this time period, and how did each group influence the petitions of the other? In the historiography section of this introduction, I detail the research already done on the interactions between feminists of this time, demonstrating that the communications which took place, and how these interactions affected feminists in India and in Britain, remains an open field for research. By investigating how these connections occurred, I show how
transnational feminism between Britain and India worked to change ideas of gender roles in governance and society in the interwar era.

**HISTORIOGRAPHY**

In the historiography section of this introduction I probe the existing scholarship on the influence of British and Indian feminists in both imperial and smaller, metropolitan contexts. These works can be divided into several subsets. The first group of monographs explores Indian feminists’ involvement in Indian nationalism. The second focuses on British women and imperialism. The third set explores ideas of British and Indian transnational feminism. The final subset examines the ideologies of British feminists at home. The historiography review begins with an analysis of the works that focus on Indian feminists nationalists and their role in the Indian nationalistic movement.

**Indian Feminists and Activists and Indian Nationalism**

In *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women’s Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990*, Radha Kumar tracks women’s involvement in reform activity over a period of two hundred years, focusing on the changing goals of feminist reformers over the period and analyzing the intellectual underpinnings for the feminist push for equal rights and suffrage. She then traces how feminist ideas changed in India from the late 1920’s through the early 1930’s, when Gandhian feminism became the norm. In this new form of feminism, Kumar attributes to Gandhi a feminization of the politics of liberation. With this, she states, Indian feminists embraced the Gandhian

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6 Kumar, *Doing*, 67.
7 Kumar, *Doing*, 2.
ideal of self-help as a central part of their ideology. Thus, Indian interwar feminists subordinated their goals to nationalistic goals. I demonstrate, however, that Indian feminist nationalists played an active and agentive role in the process of the feminization of the nationalist movement, and even persuaded Gandhi on important occasions such as the Salt March to alter his views on how women could and should participate in the anticolonial work. Kumar’s work mentions neither women’s involvement in influencing the Government of India Act of 1935 nor their response to Kathryn Mayo’s publication of Mother India. She also does not address the interaction between Indian feminist nationalist groups and their British counterparts, a central focus of this dissertation.

Whereas Kumar outlines how Indian women participated in the nationalist movement, Geraldine Forbes contributes a theoretical argument that demonstrates how feminist ideologies did not disappear during the interwar fight for independence. Forbes claims that Indian feminists retained their goals of women’s rights and suffrage in India, but that they were willing to briefly put them aside while they worked toward national independence. Forbes notes that the nationalist program never fully integrated feminist demands for equality with men and states that Gandhi did not shepherd women into public life so much as he gave them a blueprint for action. Again, in my work I demonstrate the greater agency of Indian feminists in developing their own nationalist discourse and actions.

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8 Kumar, Doing, 67.
9 Kumar, Doing, 5.
10 Kumar, Doing, 66, 71-72.
Finally, Partha Chatterjee’s *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* suggests a framework for understanding why Indian feminists, who had been active in pursuing suffrage and equal rights in the late nineteenth century, reoriented their goals to ones of nationalism in the twentieth century. Chatterjee begins by describing how Indian nationalists divided social institutions and behaviors into two domains: one material, the other, spiritual. According to Chatterjee, Indian nationalists, while acknowledging Western superiority in the material realm of economics, technology, weaponry, and the like, claimed for themselves superiority in the spiritual realm. The nationalist movement gave voice to the proper place of women in society, but stated that this place would remain in the sphere of the spiritual, where the East maintained superiority, as opposed to the Western-dominated sphere of the material.

Although the monographs about Indian feminists and activists during the interwar period develop a significant theoretical basis for why Indian women redirected feminist goals to the nationalist cause, they do little to identify the specific strategies Indian feminists used to pursue their goals. Moreover, they say very little about the interactions between British and Indian feminists. Thus, as Radha Kumar points out, this topic requires further research, which my dissertation aims to fulfill.

**British Women and Imperialism**


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14 Chatterjee, *Fragments*, 120.
Complicity and Resistance informs my dissertation. This work focuses on five British women--Mary Carpenter, Annette Akroyd Beveredge, Margaret Noble, Margaret Gillespie Cousins, and Eleanor Rathbone--who traveled to India out of concern for Indian women. Although several of the women addressed in the study are outside the period of my project, Margaret Cousins and Eleanor Rathbone were active in India in the interwar era. Cousins co-founded the Women’s Indian Association with Dorothy Jinarajadasa in 1917. Then, in 1926, she helped found the All India Women’s Conference. Ramusack writes of Rathbone’s work to raise the minimum age for Indian women’s marriage, as well as her push for Indian women to have greater involvement in the government of India. Ramusack concludes by stating that all three labels (cultural missionary, maternal imperialist, and feminist ally) are equally valid descriptors of each of the women about whom she writes. Germane to this project, the author notes that the assumption of matriarchal authority by women such as Rathbone towards Indian women, who had both extensive education and more political experience in India, incited significant resentment. Although Ramusack describes British women’s influence on Indian women, she does not address how Indian women influenced their British counterparts—an omission that I address in this dissertation.

Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1885-1915, a monograph by Antoinette Burton, develops a theoretical base for

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16 Ramusack, “Cultural,” 126.
18 Ramusack, “Cultural,” 133.
understanding how empire shaped British feminists leading up to the period covered by this project. It, too, indicates that my project has an audience and will add to a substantial, scholarly topic. Burton stresses that most British feminists, at least through the Edwardian era, supported the idea of empire and used this as a core argument for the extension of female suffrage in Britain.\(^{19}\) British feminists capitalized on the idea of empire to legitimate a global women’s civilizing movement, not a movement merely to procure female suffrage in Britain.\(^{20}\) In so doing, they assumed an authority over women across the empire, but particularly in India.\(^{21}\) This perceived responsibility for women in India, then, became a key argument for female suffrage in Britain.\(^{22}\) Burton asserts that empire was so much a part of the metanarrative of any British feminist that everyone produced a colonized female “Other” in the person of the Indian woman, an “Other” over whom they had a right and duty to provide leadership.\(^{23}\) Thus, even an individual like Annie Besant moved to India assuming, by virtue of her experience in the metropole, that she had the right to shoulder a leadership role in the fight for Indian independence.

Although Burton does focus on the influence of British feminists on Indian feminists, clear gaps in the scholarship exist: exactly how the Indian feminists’ interactions with their British counterparts influenced British feminist thinking and political action, as well as the character of interactions between different British feminists. I demonstrate in these pages that Indian feminists influenced British feminists to such an extent that some

\(^{19}\) Burton, *Burdens*, 3.
\(^{21}\) Burton, *Burdens*, 98.
\(^{22}\) Burton, *Burdens*, 172.
British feminists asked them to take a leadership role in the League of Nations in order to lead the way to world peace.

Transnational Feminism

Geraldine Forbes’ article, “The Indian Women’s Movement: A Struggle for Women’s Rights or National Liberation?” in The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan, portrays the issues of child marriage, purdah, and legal reform as the central issues around which Indian feminists rallied.24 Forbes emphasizes that while Indian women’s groups rallied around the three key issues above, they focused on two essential purposes: first, they sought to help women gain status and dignity by advocating for the removal of customs such as purdah. Second, they promoted measures to allow for “recognition of the distinctive features of womanhood,” as they related to issues of family.25 Forbes has noted that the Indian feminist groups demanded universal adult suffrage and promoted women’s issues, though they subordinated these efforts to nationalism.26 My research, however, shows that Indian feminists did not subordinate their goals, but instead embedded them within the nationalist movement. Forbes’ article suggests that there was direct contact between Indian women’s organizations and British politicians and feminists in order to influence both social and political issues in India. Although this point is just an aside for Forbes, I demonstrate the success of the Indian feminists’ efforts to influence their British counterparts to petition the government on their behalf.

Susan Pedersen’s *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* outlines the life and motivations of the famous feminist and Member of Parliament. Although most of Pedersen’s excellent biography does not inform my dissertation, chapter thirteen, titled “The Difference Empire Makes,” offers crucial research.27 The image of the abuse of women and children portrayed by Kathryn Mayo in her 1927 publication *Mother India* motivated Rathbone’s successful 1929 run for Parliament.28 Though she corresponded regularly with several influential female Indian nationalists, Rathbone did not take to heart their plea for universal adult suffrage. Instead, she took the pragmatic approach, petitioning for the inclusion of expanded, but not universal, female suffrage in the 1935 Government of India Act.29 Rathbone’s correspondence with members of Indian women’s groups suggests that broader transnational correspondence took place between feminist groups in Britain and Indian nationalist women’s organizations, a point that I found to be true and expand upon in my research.

The most relevant book published to date on the transnational interactions of women’s groups in India and Britain is Mrinalini Sinha’s *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*. The foil for Sinha’s work is the 1927 publication of Kathryn Mayo’s muckraking book, *Mother India*, in which the author sensationalized the plight of women in India, with particular attention to child marriage (*bal vivaha*). Mayo absolved the British colonial government of responsibility for the hardships facing Indian women by laying the blame on Hinduism.30 Her essentialist argument claimed that the

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29 Pedersen, *Rathbone*, 255.
Hindu characteristics of Indian culture rendered India incapable of self-rule.\textsuperscript{31} Although
*Mother India* created a great stir in Britain and the United States, as well as in India,
Sinha argues that the 1929 passage of the Sarda Act (also known as the Restraint of Child Marriage Act) dissolved the premise of Mayo’s argument by revealing that the British colonial government was the key obstacle to social reform in India.\textsuperscript{32} Moreover, Sinha argues, the collective voice of Indian women advocating for the Sarda Act created a new political constituency of women that transcended the divisive colonial constitution of separate community identities.\textsuperscript{33} This new, transcendent, Indian feminine identity proved to be so compelling that the Simon commission itself argued that the Indian women’s movement was key to social progress in India.\textsuperscript{34}

Sinha’s work supports my dissertation project by offering scholarship on how issues of transnational feminism echoed not just within the Atlantic world, but also between the Atlantic and India. Sinha demonstrates that notable women in India and Britain, such as Eleanor Rathbone and Muthulakshmi Reddi, interacted, collaborated, and often disagreed on feminist issues in India. Sinha also indicates that women’s organizations in India specifically petitioned British women’s groups to come to their support by lobbying the British government for a female representative in the Round Table discussions.\textsuperscript{35} Importantly, my dissertation adds to the critical conversation an in-depth exploration of these dialogues, which demonstrate how metropolitan feminists

\textsuperscript{31} Sinha, *Specters*, 5.
\textsuperscript{33} Sinha, *Specters*, 195.
\textsuperscript{34} Sinha, *Specters*, 197.
\textsuperscript{35} Sinha, *Specters*, 207.
influenced Indian women nationalists, and how Indian women nationalists influenced British feminist groups.

Expanding on this theme of transnational feminism, *Feminisms and Internationalism* (edited by Mrinalini Sinha, Donna Guy, and Angela Woollacott) develops the theory that claims of a “universal sisterhood” or “global feminism” are false, in that they assume a universal experience of similar oppression(s) and experience(s) among women around the world. The authors also clarify that nationalist and internationalist feminisms need not be polar opposites, as they may share goals and motivations.

Writing broadly about issues of interwar commonwealth feminisms, Angela Woollacott echoes points made by Susan Pedersen, noting that the October 1929 conference “Women in India,” chaired by Eleanor Rathbone, failed to include Indian women, but did open the door for women’s groups in Britain to seek connections with Indian feminists and feminist groups in Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. Woollacott writes that, despite this interaction, race remained a significant issue, because the enfranchised (white) female citizens of the dominions assumed superiority over and responsibility for their colonized sisters of color in India. It follows that the extent to which Indian feminist groups successfully influenced British feminist groups remains a

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37 Sinha et al., *Feminisms*, 7.
lacuna in the body of inquiry on this topic. My research fills this gap, demonstrating that purposeful interaction, initiated by Indian feminists to the British, not only existed, but was highly productive. In fact British feminists eventually lauded the leadership of Indian feminists in the field of international politics.

**British Feminists and Feminist Groups**

Echoing Sinha et al, Harold Smith emphasizes in *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* that to use the singular “feminism” is an oversimplification that implies universal feminist agreement on a single platform of feminist ideology and goals. Smith argues that once feminists achieved universal adult suffrage in Britain, the divisions in objectives and philosophies among them became more apparent.\(^{40}\) Specifically, the author points to the bifurcation between “equality” feminists, who sought complete equality between the sexes, and “new” feminists, who acknowledged differences between the sexes but attempted to maximize women’s rights, especially in traditionally female-specific issues, such as motherhood.\(^{41}\)

Though focused on interwar British feminists at home, Brian Harrison’s *Prudent Revolutionaries: Portraits of British Feminists Between the Wars* offers observations of how key feminist leaders interacted with ideas of Indian independence and women’s suffrage in India. Harrison’s thesis is that, unlike British women activists in the Edwardian era, “enfranchised women could not spurn parliamentary methods, and


between the wars political prudence seemed essential to feminist success.” Harrison also touches, briefly, on how figures such as Eleanor Rathbone and Ray Strachey maintained differing views on female suffrage in India. Whereas Strachey supported the vote for all adult women in India, Rathbone, as previously noted, argued not for universal Indian women’s suffrage, but for the maximum representation she felt politically possible in the 1935 India Bill. Finally, Harrison draws attention to the diplomatic nature of Margery Corbett Ashby in promoting feminist ideals. This reinforces Ashby as a significant person of interest for the purpose of my study, as we will see later.

Finally, like Harrison’s work, Krista Cowman’s *Women in British Politics, c. 1689-1979* focuses even more exclusively on British feminists and feminist organizations. For this project Cowman’s work expands our understanding of Margery Corbett Ashby’s role in promoting discussion and the transfer of knowledge between women’s organizations. Like Harold Smith, Cowman points to the significant separation between the equality feminists, such as Lady Rhondda, founder of the Six Point Group, and new feminists, such as Eleanor Rathbone, who was affiliated with the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship. Thus, it is clear that significant differences existed between British feminists and feminist groups during the interwar era, and that many of these disagreements centered on ideas of empire, India, and Indian feminists. In my dissertation I identify how Indian feminist groups influenced British feminist groups, how these British organizations interacted with one another, and how they then petitioned

44 Harrison, *Prudent*, 122.
45 Harrison, *Prudent*, 185.
46 See definitions of “equality” feminists and “new” feminists, on page 20.
Parliament for change. Furthermore, I identify which British feminist groups were the most open to dialogue with Indian feminists, how this dialogue took place and was encouraged, and what it concerned.

CHAPTER OUTLINES

Chapter 1 – From The Great War To The Evolution of British and Indian Feminism, 1914-1926

This chapter details the political issues in Britain and India during the interwar era that are important for understanding how a transnational feminist dialogue could develop across the British Empire. After describing the interwar political climate in general, I expand on the issues pertinent to British and Indian feminists. In particular, I investigate the effects of the Amritsar massacre on Indian feminists and key nationalists. I substantiate how the massacre began breaking down cultural ideas of separate spheres for men and women in India, which then allowed Indian feminists to take on a greater public role in the independence movement. Amritsar also changed the thinking of leaders, both male and female, prompting them to move from the pursuit of dominion status to that of full independence from Britain. I also show how the conservative backlash in Britain following the Great War led British feminists, already fractured ideologically, to move from an aggressive stance to a defensive one in the interwar era.

Chapter 2 – Child Marriage, Mother India, and the Das Bill: Contrasts in Agency

In this chapter I argue that the issue of child marriage, and the Indian feminists’ actions surrounding it, helped them forge relationships with some British feminists, develop their own nationalistic ideology, and acquire the skills needed for effective international political action. I then trace responses by both Indian women’s groups and British women’s groups to several pivotal events: the 1927 publication of Mother India
by Katherine Mayo, the Sarda Act, and Eleanor Rathbone’s Women in India Conference, along with the responses of Indian feminists to Rathbone’s publication of *Child Marriage: The Indian Minotaur*. The chapter culminates with a discussion of key Indo-European feminist voices on the aforementioned issues and events, including the formation of cross-cultural feminist alliances. I also begin my argument that Indian feminist nationalists did not wait for others to give them entrées to political discourse, but that they developed these themselves. In addition, I introduce a theme carried through the next chapter: how Indian feminist nationalists influenced Gandhi in significant ways and often compelled him to rethink his ideas regarding the place for women in the independence movement.

**Chapter 3 – The Salt March to the Round Table(s)**

This chapter examines the interactions between British and Indian feminist groups regarding the 1930 Salt March and the June 1930 Simon Commission Report. It also traces the rise of Indian feminist involvement through the three Round Table discussions. I pay special attention to the increase in organized correspondence, including the development of groups focused on organizing communiqués and fomenting systematized communications between British feminists and Indian feminist nationalists. I also continue to build the argument that Indian feminists significantly contributed to Gandhi’s sensitivity to feminist concerns in the course of the Independence movement.

**Chapter 4 – Closing Ranks on the 1935 Government of India Act, 1930-1937**

This chapter considers the conflicts between British and Indian feminists regarding women’s suffrage in India from the advent of the Simon Commission through the Government of India Act, 1935. Here, I scrutinize the correspondence between the
British and Indian feminists and analyze its effects on ideas and tactics among British feminists. Finally, I examine why and how Eleanor Rathbone’s tactics regarding Indian women shifted in the mid-1930’s. In particular, I address how, after a series of disappointments interacting with Indian feminists, she chose to bypass feminist groups in India, and instead clandestinely gave her revised Child Marriage Restraint bill to the male Labour Party leader N. M. Joshi. I also demonstrate here how the political involvement of the Indian feminists, with their ability to reach across class, linguistic, religious, and geographical barriers, brought them not just the admiration of British feminists, but also inclusion and leadership roles within the League of Nations.

Conclusion

Here I recapitulate the interactions between British and Indian feminists around the issues of the Sarda Act, the Salt March, the Round Table discussions, and the Government of India Act, what shape these interactions took, and how the groups influenced each other’s thinking as well as government policies. I conclude with particular emphasis on how Indian feminists changed the perceptions of British feminists around these key events, including which groups and individuals forged alliances or remained at odds, as well as the reasons for and momentous effects of these dynamics. I also show how, by the time of India’s independence, the constituent assembly came to engage with Indian feminists and incorporated their goals from the interwar period in the new Indian constitution.
Chapter 1
From The Great War To The Evolution of British and Indian Feminism, 1914-1926

Introduction

In the years following the Great War, many Indian nationalists radically changed their ideas about imperialism, colonization, dominion status, and independence. Indian feminists facilitated this dramatic alteration. Ideologies of empire also changed significantly among British women in the first third of the twentieth century, due in part to the evolving relationship between feminists in Britain and feminists in India.\(^{47}\) As Antoinette Burton has noted, British feminists in the Edwardian era had emphasized their role as proponents of empire in their argument for increasing their rights for greater participation in government.\(^{48}\) They argued that by virtue of supporting empire they demonstrated similar political beliefs and activism as their male counterparts. This was an important tactic that “married” them ideologically to the paternalistic status quo. With the success of their campaign and the advent of British women’s suffrage (limited in 1918, universal in 1928), British feminist group ideologies pertaining to empire, Indian independence, and women’s suffrage in India began to change.

While before the Great War, several British women activists familiar with India, such as Mary Carpenter, Annette Akroyd Beverage, and Margaret Noble, actively supported Indian nationalists seeking dominion status, though not full independence from

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the British empire, each saw colonial government as important for improving conditions for women in India. Thus, by appealing to the colonial government, each reinforced British imperial power.\textsuperscript{49} With the advent of limited, then full adult suffrage however, interwar British feminists focused less on influencing public opinion, and instead worked to sway parliament.\textsuperscript{50} With this change to a petitionary political strategy, British feminists began to look more broadly at the issue of empire. With elite Indian feminist nationalists conducting much of their dialogue in English, by the 1920’s, when British feminists such as Margaret Cousins and Eleanor Rathbone became active in Indian affairs, Indian feminists were able to hold significant, though sometimes faltering, influence upon their British counterparts.\textsuperscript{51} Indian feminist nationalists often persuaded their British counterparts to support their nationalist cause.

This is not to say that interwar Indian feminists and British feminists held identical ideologies. Much to the ire of many British feminists of that era, Indian feminists enveloped their feminism into the nationalist agenda to bolster a sense of Indian preeminence over the British government in India. Indian nationalists developed this sense of supremacy by dividing social institutions and behaviors into two domains: one material, the other spiritual.\textsuperscript{52} In order to develop a strong sense of nationalist ascendancy, Indian nationalists, male and female alike, acknowledged Western

\textsuperscript{51} Ramusack, “Cultural,” 129.
superiority in the material realm of economics, technology, weaponry, and the like, but claimed superiority in the spiritual realm, which they saw as an essentializing marker of Indian cultural identity. Indian nationalism gave voice to the identity of women in society, but this identity was in the sphere of the spiritual, where the East maintained superiority. In its day-to-day iterations, this material-spiritual dichotomy expressed itself in the ideas of ghar and babir, or, “home” and “world.” Interwar Indian feminist nationalists asserted that while the West succeeded in materially, or worldly, conquering the East, it failed to conquer the inner, essentialist spiritual identity of India. This spiritual distinctiveness, in turn, exercised itself within the home, where women created a transcendent space removed from the colonial political contest.  

In this chapter I trace how the strengthened presence of Indian feminists within the nationalist movement seeking full independence from Britain as opposed to dominion status developed out of the trauma inflicted by the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, in Amritsar. The April 13, 1919 massacre marked the turning point that invigorated many in the nationalist movement in India to move beyond seeking dominion status, and to pursue instead full independence from Britain. While scholars have rightly noted that the event changed Gandhi’s thinking, as well as that of many others in the Indian National Congress, I add to that argument that this incident re-defined the nationalist pursuit for men and women. Indian feminists who had championed Britain’s rule in India, such as Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Sarojini Naidu, and others, as I will demonstrate, removed their support from the British government, and sought full independence from Britain in an organized manner alongside men. It unleashed an unprecedented rise of women’s activity

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53 Chatterjee, Fragments, 6, 120, 117, 121.
in public life. As Kamlesh Mohan has noted, “In that moment of personal and national tragedy, the traditional image of women as: “Andar baithi lakh di Bahar gayi kakh di” (the one who stays indoors is worth a lakh, but the one who steps out is worth a straw) was discarded.” These new and emboldened Indian feminists joined the ranks of male nationalists to fight for full Indian independence. While the massacre and the British government’s response to it acted as change agents in Indian nationalism and feminism, it was the government’s actions in Britain that influenced changes in British feminist tactics in the metropole. These different events, then, worked together to open the way for a new transnational feminism to arise between British and Indian feminists.

India, Britain, and the Changes Caused by Great War, 1900-1918

At the turn of the century, Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, described South Asia’s importance to Britain when he stated, “We could lose all our (white settlement) dominions and still survive, but if we lost India, our sun would sink to its setting.” Prior to the Great War, the British government saw India as crucial for the empire’s well-being and for the United Kingdom’s very survival. Almost 50 percent of all British subjects were Hindu at that time. Before the Great War, the British government had every reason to assume it held unchallenged world dominance. Beyond the fact that it held the largest empire in the world, in 1914 Britain had experienced almost 150 years of population

55 As quoted in Barbara D Metcalf and Thomas R Metcalf, A Concise History of Modern India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 131. Born in 1859, George Nathenial Curzon was a conservative British statesman. Curzon became Viceroy of India in 1899, a position he maintained until 1905. He later went on to become Foreign Secretary from 1919 to 1924.
increase, economic growth, and urbanization. The population in Britain in the nineteenth century had increased four-fold. By comparison, the population of France increased only by approximately 40 percent during the same period. Between 1900 and 1913, the national income of Britain increased 20 percent.\textsuperscript{56} Britain had the largest navy in the world and some of the best military technology of the time.\textsuperscript{57} London dominated as the banking center to the world and was creditor to most of Europe and much of South America. Britain enjoyed the largest empire, world military might, and held prominence in the global economy. When the South African war of 1899-1902 put Britain’s diplomatic isolation on display, the British government moved to change its situation and entered into strategic alliances with France and Russia in 1907.

The pre-war relationship between Britain and India had been positive for the United Kingdom. The favorable balance of trade that Britain had with India from 1900 to 1914 allowed Britain to cover its exchange deficit with other nations. By 1913, India was the chief market for British textiles, iron, steel, and machinery. India also served as the center of Britain's imperial system in the early twentieth century, in part by providing a significant amount of the indentured labor used in Britain's colonies.\textsuperscript{58}

When the government of Britain declared war on Germany in 1914, the declaration included the entire empire; thus, India was also at war. International conflict the scope of World War One that pitted empires against empires heightened all of the

\textsuperscript{57} In 1883 Sir Hiram Stevens Maxim invented the Maxim gun—the first recoil operated machine gun.
\textsuperscript{58} Metcalf and Metcalf, \textit{Concise}, 125, 126.
participants’ ideas of their own national and racial identities.\textsuperscript{59} India made extraordinary sacrifices to help Britain and its allies attain victory. The British military recruited almost 2,000,000 soldiers from India, many through coercion. Fully 1,100,000 of those recruited came from Punjab, the district in which Amritsar lay, the city where a catalytic event would occur that would heighten Indian nationalistic fervor.\textsuperscript{60} The Indians conscripted into the British army served in the Middle East and on the front lines in France. The repressive Defense of India Act, enacted in March 1915, which significantly abrogated civil rights, further fanned the flames of Indian discontent and Indian nationalistic thought grew substantially.\textsuperscript{61} As well, India bore the brunt of the financial burden for the Indian soldiers fighting on behalf of the British, with taxes that funded the war effort increasing 10 to 15 percent per year from 1916 through 1918.\textsuperscript{62} In a letter to the British Women’s Organization Liaison Office, Mrs. Hamid Ali noted that while Britain spent 12 percent of its revenues on its army, India spent 25 percent of its revenues to bring its troops into the war.\textsuperscript{63} The war placed other stresses on the population of India, with grain prices almost doubling and the price of imported goods tripling.\textsuperscript{64} Although the Germans and Turks hinted at providing financial aid for an Indian rebellion, no serious


\textsuperscript{62} Metcalf and Metcalf, \textit{Concise}, 163.

\textsuperscript{63} Mrs. Hamid Ali to President and Chairperson, British Liaison Office, AIWC File 37, NMML. Letter undated. Born in 1888, Shareefa Hamid Ali referred to herself by her married title. Active in the nationalist movement, she would go on to become president of the All India Women’s Association from 1939 to 1940.

\textsuperscript{64} Metcalf and Metcalf, \textit{Concise}, 163.
revolutionary activity took place within the country. However, the wartime conscription, inflation, abrogation of civil liberties, and taxation created resentment in the Indian populace.

By the end of the war, three quarters of a million British men had died in combat. Another two hundred thousand from across the British Empire died in that conflict, a third of them Indian.65 Compounding the dreadfulness of the war, at the advent of peace, an additional two hundred fifty thousand British people died of the flu pandemic that struck in the summer and fall of 1918. The war also increased racism and xenophobia in the United Kingdom.66 Demobilization brought threats of violence, and the British government had difficulty maintaining peace domestically. Great Britain had once dominated world markets, but the turmoil of the war had disrupted this dominance.67 Even intimacy was not the same; 20 percent of the British soldiers returning from war brought venereal disease, prompting one conservative politician to blame the “Cult of the Clitoris,” and homosexuality for undermining the war effort.68

In summary, before the Great War, Britain held a sense of world dominance due to its military strength, its position as creditor to much of the world, and as an exporter of manufactured goods. The Great War significantly reduced the economic benefits Britain had gained from its South Asia empire. The war years, though, proved a boon for India’s domestic iron, steel, and cotton industries, significantly supplanting the need for British

66 Robb, Culture, 5.
imported goods. Additionally, the international conflict that pitted empires against empires had heightened all participants’ ideas of their own national and racial identities. This heightened awareness was true for Britain and India. Britain’s post-war difficulties affected its colonial rule most stringently in South Asia and Ireland. The British government, for example, viewed members of the British educated Indian National Congress (INC) as enemies of the state, instead of as, as A.J.P. Taylor has noted, “brown skinned Britons,” a status INC members believed they had attained through their education and interactions with the government and industry. As I will discuss more fully, the trauma Britain faced after the Great War, compounded by wartime financial stress, caused the British government to act in a particularly hostile manner toward its empire in South Asia. Britain’s failed attempts to ameliorate the effects of its hostilities after the fact significantly damaged any chance for India to remain within the orbit of Britain, even in dominion status.

Despite the upheaval caused by the Great War, at its end the relationship of empire remained salvageable. While Gandhi and other nationalists desired home rule, they still saw Dominion status as a viable option. The massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, however, moved even moderates to seek full independence from Britain. In order to understand the significance of the events leading up to the massacre, it is important at this point to understand the actions of Indian feminists before 1919.

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69 Metcalf and Metcalf, *Concise*, 163.
71 Taylor, *English*, 152.
Twentieth Century Indian Feminist Nationalism Prior to 1919

Indian women, though not yet unified on a national level, were active in politics before and during the Great War. An example of this activity was the response to the British government’s partition of Bengal in 1905 when Indian women entered the official boycott of British goods, known as the *Swadeshi* movement, with 500 women reported as participating in a *Swadeshi* protest in August, 1905, and *zenana* bound women (*zenana* refers to that part of a South Asian house reserved for women) pooled resources to purchase spinning wheels in order to make thread to weave into cloth. The movement led to a significant decline of British imported goods into India, especially cloth. The government lifted the partition of Bengal in 1911. Still, women in India continued to organize and push for nationalist and feminist reforms.

In December 1914, Annie Besant, a theosophist and feminist originally of Irish descent but living in Madras, joined the INC. In 1916, Besant founded the All India Home Rule league, with the goal of Indian home rule within the British empire. In 1917, the INC elected her as its president. Also in 1917, before the advent of partial women’s suffrage in Britain, poet, feminist, and long INC member, Sarojini Naidu, led a delegation of prominent Indian women to meet with Indian Secretary of State Edwin Montagu to demand suffrage for adult Indian women. Also, as we will see in more detail in the next

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74 Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women’s Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990*, (New Delhi, Zubaan, 1993), 41
75 The Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, originally sought to increase the participation of educated Indians in the government of the country, and later became a key organization in India’s pursuit of independence.
76 Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 92. Edwin Montagu (1879-1924) was a liberal British politician who served as Secretary of State for India from 1917 to 1922.
chapter, the W.I.A. began agitating immediately upon its founding to end child marriage in India.

**Jallianwala Bagh: April 13, 1919**

As in the case of recruitment for the British armed forces, the Punjab bore the brunt of the hardships faced by India during the war. By 1918, the people of Lyallpur, Karnal, and Pathankor experienced food riots. Additionally, the imposition of a special income tax further strained the urban population.\(^{77}\) The war and subsequent influenza pandemic strained every sinew in the Punjab. Still, the talk by Wilson and the Allies at the end-of-war Versailles negotiations that the aim of the war had been “national self-determination for all” rallied the hopes of Indian nationalists.\(^{78}\) As we will see, the British government, manifesting aggression from its post-war insecurity, soon dashed these hopes for Indian national self-determination, as the British government feared the retribution of the returning highly trained Indian soldiers now adept in military tactics and the use of weapons.\(^{79}\)

At the end of the war, the Government of India prolonged many of the most repressive parts of the Defense of India Act in the form of the new and highly despised Rowlatt Acts. These acts, among other things, allowed the government to detain individuals without trial, and put greater restrictions on the press, which was one of the major tools of the nationalist movement.


Still, many Indian feminists, INC members, and even Gandhi believed that it remained in India’s best interest to seek dominion status instead of full independence from Britain. Their thinking changed on April 13, 1919, when, in a massacre of civilians by General Reginald Dyer, intended by him to serve as an object lesson across India, removed any belief by moderate Indian nationalists, male and female, that dominion style relations with Britain remained a possibility.

Some scholarship and most popular representations relate that in the Punjab city of Amritsar, things were peaceful, indeed, that even at Jallianwala Bagh, the sight of the upcoming massacre, the crowds were passive. Metcalf and Metcalf described the gathering at the Jallianwala Bagh enclosure as “peaceable.” Richard Attenborough’s 1982 movie, *Gandhi*, portrays the crowds in the park garden in an almost picnic-like setting. The fact is, however, that tensions on both sides were much higher than most scholarship and popular understandings convey. General Dyer entered the Bagh with a cohort of Gurkha troops on April 13, the day of Baisakhi, the main Sikh festival.

According to Muthulakshmi Reddy’s papers, instead of a peaceful crowd, she proudly notes that the attendees of the gathering, including women, jeered “*Inquilab Zindabad*” (Long Live the Revolution) in defiance of Dyer and his troops, while some waved the INC flag as a provocation. Dyer, who considered Amritsar an enemy territory and its

80 Metcalf and Metcalf, 168.
81 Reginald Edward Harry Dyer (1864-1927) held the temporary rank of Brigadier General when he was brigade commander in Jalandhar, a city close to Amritsar, in Punjab.
82 S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Speeches and Writings, Volume I (Part I), NMML. Muthulakshmi Reddi was born in the princely state of Pudukottai in 1866. She was the first female student in India admitted to a male college. Reddi went on to become one of the first female doctors in India, was active in issues of nationalism and feminist causes,
inhabitants as nothing more than rebels who must be defeated, viewed this as mutiny and
gave the order to his troops to fire on the unarmed civilians.\textsuperscript{83} One thousand six hundred
and fifty rounds of ammunition later, with hundreds killed and thousands wounded, Dyer
and his troops left. Many have often stated that Dyer proclaimed martial law in Amritsar
before the massacre; this, however, was not the case. Yes, the British government had
proclaimed martial law in some areas of the Punjab by April 13, but they did not
announce it in Amritsar until April 15. Authorities in Amritsar backdated the
announcement of martial law to include the period of the massacre.\textsuperscript{84} Therefore, any
claim martial law was in place at the time of the massacre was \textit{de facto}, and not \textit{de jure}.
The civil authorities remained in charge in Amritsar at the time of the atrocity despite
later representations by the British to the contrary. Jawaharlal Nehru referred to the
British action at the Bagh as a “trap of death from which there was no escape.”\textsuperscript{85} Nehru
went on to compare the massacre to the period of the Terror of the French Revolution,
writing that the only motivation for the massacre was an attempt to “terrorize and coerce
the people (of India).”\textsuperscript{86} Indian politicians believed that the goal of General Dyer had
simply been to invoke terror.

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and was the first woman legislator in India, being nominated to the Madras legislature in
1926. \\
\textsuperscript{83} Collett, \textit{Butcher}, 249. \\
\textsuperscript{84} Susan Kingsley Kent, \textit{Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma in Britain, 1918-1931}, (New
York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 71. \\
\textsuperscript{85} Jawaharlal Nehru, \textit{Glimpses of World History: Being Further Letters to His Daughter,}
\textit{Written in Prison, and Containing a Rambling Account of History for Young People},
(New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004), 830. It is important to note that there are two
“Nehru’s” working for Indian independence at this time. The first is Motilal Nehru,
(1861-1931). Motilal, a lawyer, served as president of the INC twice, first in 1919, and
then in 1928. Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), Motilal’s son, worked closely with his
father in their push for Indian independence, and became India’s first prime minister.
\textsuperscript{86} Nehru, \textit{Glimpses}, 419.
\end{flushright}
Given the brutality of the attack, Dyer’s move to enforce the curfew immediately afterward, and the British government’s lack of an immediate conciliatory response toward India regarding the massacre, there was no hope to persuade Indian nationalists to acquiesce to dominion status instead of seeking outright independence. Instead, Dyer’s actions and the government’s response to the massacre inspired the rise of nationalists seeking full independence from Britain, and as we will see, helped draw Indian feminists into the nationalist trajectory.

The government immediately enacted censorship in an attempt to keep the people throughout India of learning of the massacre and other unrest in Punjab, but the suppression was ineffective. Most of the British in India supported Dyer’s actions, while almost all of the Indian-owned press condemned the deed.87 As the non-Anglophone papers began to publish the lurid details of the massacre and its aftermath, the British government realized it needed to take action and organized an investigation led by liberal Scottish solicitor, Lord Hunter, who began his inquiry on October 19, 1919. An investigative committee of the INC, however, had begun preparing its enquiry into the massacre on October 16th, with this committee consisting of Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das, and Swami Shraddhanand.88

87 Collett, Butcher, 300.
88 C. R. Das (1870-1925) was an Indian politician and the founder of the Swaraj (home rule) Party in Bengal. Swami Shraddhanand (1856-1926) was an Indian educator who was active in the INC and known for his resistance to the Rowlatt Acts. A Muslim fanatic assassinated him in 1926. At this time, the INC did not recognize Gandhi as the leader of the Indian independence movement. His work on the INC enquiry into the massacre boosted his stature within the movement substantially.
Once the government lifted the order banning him from the Punjab, Gandhi also joined the INC investigating committee.\textsuperscript{89} Gandhi was as a loyal citizen of the British Empire who had sought dominion status for India before the massacre and his involvement with the INC investigation. Faced with the facts of the massacre and the government’s response, Gandhi stated, “I came across tales of government’s tyranny and the arbitrary despotism of its officers such as I was hardly prepared for, and they filled me with deep pain.”\textsuperscript{90} Gandhi’s emotional response to the massacre reflected his new passion to seek India’s full independence from Britain.

The Hunter Commission presented its report to the government of India on March 8, 1920. Although the report condemned Dyer’s actions, it upheld the need for martial law in Punjab.\textsuperscript{91} In an attempt to diminish the government’s responsibility in the matter, the report added further insult by stating that Gandhi’s satyagraha (the literal translation of satyagraha is “truth force,” though Gandhi used the term to refer to various acts of non-violent protests, including, but not limited to, \textit{hartals}) caused the civil unrest in Punjab, and thus the need for military action.\textsuperscript{92} Though Secretary of State for India, Montagu, went further than the Hunter commission in his condemnation of Dyer, the political damage caused by the massacre remained irreversible. Gandhi blasted the Hunter Commission report as “page after page of thinly disguised official whitewash,” and he demanded the immediate impeachment of the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, Sir

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\textsuperscript{89} Collett, Butcher, 332. \\
\textsuperscript{90} Gandhi, as quoted in Collett, \textit{Butcher}, 332. \\
\end{flushleft}
Michael Francis O’Dwyer, and his officers. O’Dwyer, on the other hand, held the line of the official report and blamed Gandhi for the massacre. An incensed Motilal Nehru called for a Special Congress, and noted the need to “raise a veritable hell for the rascals,” showing the depth of the resentment of the government’s response to the massacre and the INC’s desire for retribution.

Britain’s reactions to the massacre reflected the sense of fear, trauma, and aggression that permeated the United Kingdom after the war. An odd sense of ambivalence existed among many politicians, as if the government was too drained or too burdened to face significant issues of empire. In Parliament, only a small majority of the House of Commons condemned Dyer’s actions, while a solid majority in the House of Lords supported him. Most letters to the press supported Dyer, and even the Oxford Union could barely find a majority in favor of the government’s decision to force Dyer into retirement. Popular notions of a potential Indian rebellion echoed fears from the 1857 Indian war for independence, which included stories of the rape of white women. Still, reports of the massacre horrified some British feminists. Eleanor Rathbone referred to Amritsar as a “horror of which most progressive Englishmen are deeply ashamed.”

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93 Gandhi, as quoted in Brown, Power, 244. The British government appointed Sir Michael O’Dwyer (1864-1940) as Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab in 1912, a position he retained through 1919. O’Dwyer never denounced Dyer’s role in the massacre.
94 Motilal Nehru, as quoted in Brown, Power, 244.
95 Kent, Aftershocks, 5.
96 Taylor, English, 153.
98 Kent, Aftershocks, 76-78.
Still, her patriotism led her to resent instances when Indian politicians spoke of the massacre.¹⁰⁰

Winston Churchill’s July 8, 1920 address to the House of Commons was indicative of the British ambivalence toward Amritsar. Churchill passionately declared that the character of British rule depended on a prohibition against “frightfulness.”¹⁰¹ He pleaded that Dyer’s actions did nothing to “save India,” and that, instead, what Britain wanted with India was “cooperation and good will.”¹⁰² Having delivered crippling indictments on Dyer’s judgment, character, and behavior, Churchill turned to the issue of punishment for the general. While one might have expected Churchill to call for a full court martial of Dyer due to moral failure, Churchill suddenly changed tack, saying of him,

General Dyer may have done wrong, but at any rate he has his rights, and I do not see how in the face of such virtual condonation as is set out in page 20 of this document, it would have been possible, or could have been considered right, to take disciplinary action against him.¹⁰³

Churchill’s address exemplified the ambivalence of Britons on the affair of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. While willing to admit that it was tragic and perhaps even a sinister premeditated crime on a martial scale not perpetrated in modern times by British forces, Churchill’s response indicated the massacre was still not severe enough to merit punishing the white British general who committed the crime.

While the Hunter Commission condemned Dyer’s actions, Sir Michael O’Dwyer, Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, supported Dyer’s actions. His response, along with the

¹⁰⁰ Pedersen, Rathbone, 323.
¹⁰² Churchill, India, 24, 27.
¹⁰³ Churchill, India, 20.
lack of criminal proceedings against Dyer, infuriated many in India. Combined with the ineffective responses of the government in India and the British government, the massacre turned the feelings of Indian politics strongly against Britain. Whereas many Indian nationalists before Jallianwala Bagh happily pursued dominion status, now the goal, as stated by the INC in 1920, was full independence.¹⁰⁴ From prison, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to his daughter of the incident: “what amazed and angered India even more (than the massacre) was the contemptuous justification of the deed many months afterwards by General Dyer.”¹⁰⁵ He went on, writing

…the general attitude of the British ruling class was displayed in a debate in the House of Lords in which praise was showered on him (Dyer). All this fanned the flames of wrath in India, and a great bitterness arose all of the country over the Punjab wrongs.¹⁰⁶

The British response to the massacre affected the INC leadership as much, and possibly more, than the injustice of the massacre itself. The pretense of a civilizing mission and of just governance by the British in India evaporated. Beyond those already fighting for independence, the massacre turned even political moderates in India against Britain, which added to the success of the first Congress endorsed Gandhian satyagraha.¹⁰⁷

In December of 1919, the INC chose to hold its national conference in Amritsar. In a letter to his daughter about the outcomes of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Jawaharlal Nehru noted of this conference, “it was evident that the Congress had changed. There was now a mass character about it and a new, and for some of the old

¹⁰⁵ Nehru, Glimpses, 831.
¹⁰⁶ Nehru, Glimpses, 831.
¹⁰⁷ Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, Daughters of Independence: Gender, Caste, and Class in India, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986), 33.
Congressmen, a disturbing vitality." The Jallianwala Bagh massacre thus proved to be a defining point for the nationalist movement for decades to come, galvanizing Indian nationalist politics, and providing the leadership with a revitalized sense of passion and purpose. Indian feminists, already active in Indian politics, disgusted by the lackluster British response to the massacre and further attracted by the non-violent methods of Gandhi’s satyagraha, also brought new ideas and methodologies to the fight for Indian independence.

The Rise of Indian Feminist Nationalists

As previously described, while Indian women had been involved in politics before the massacre, the events at Jallianwala Bagh proved to be transformational. The story of Rattan Devi demonstrates this turning point for many Indian feminists. Having heard of the massacre, and knowing her husband had been in the Bagh, she defied the curfew to try to find him. Finding his dead body, and not strong enough to carry him, Devi spent the night with her dead husband’s head in her lap. She credited the incident as being the defining moment in driving her out of the zenana (women’s quarters) and into public life. Like Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu had also been a supporter of the British Empire, had seen herself as a loyal British citizen, and had practiced petitionary politics to seek reforms. As already mentioned, Naidu led a 1917 deputation to visit Montagu, the Secretary of State, to petition for equal rights and suffrage for women in India. With the

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108 Nehru, Glimpses, 831.
109 Kamlesh Mohan, “The Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy: A Catalyst of Indian Consciousness,” Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, eds. V. N. Datta and S. Settar, (Delhi: Pragati Publications, 2000), 65. Rattan Devi was an Indian nationalist who gave her account of the massacre to the INC subcommittee performing its enquiry into the events at Jallianwala Bagh.
passage of the coercive Rowlatt Acts, Naidu was among the first to join Gandhi’s satyagraha, delivering speeches in Madras and Ahmedabad and calling on her followers to resist “this hideous nightmare.”\textsuperscript{110} With the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, Naidu broke with her previous loyalty to the British Empire and returned the Kaisar-e-Hind medal, which the British government had awarded her for her work in the Ambulance Corps during the war.\textsuperscript{111} She travelled to Britain in July 1919 as a member of the deputation sent by the Home Rule League. While in Britain, she made a speech at Kingsway Hall entitled “The Agony and Shame of the Punjab.” In the address, she bitterly lectured her British audience on the atrocities of Dyer’s actions by stating, “You deserve no Empire. You have today lost your soul.”\textsuperscript{112} While in London she wrote back to Gandhi,

\begin{quote}
Last week there was another meeting about the Punjab. But no one cares about the Punjab in England - no one cares anything about anything Indian in England. The only salvation for India lies within herself - and it's all illusion of the saddest to expect help from without. Indeed I for one do not want help from any quarter. We must work out our own salvation in our own way according to our own vision and need. There is no place for foreigners in our inner life. I realize it more and more clearly and every hour. And the great world-federation has no place for us unless and until we are self-evolved and able to make our special inimitable contribution to the cause of world-brotherhood.\textsuperscript{113}
\end{quote}

Naidu completely rejected British born solutions to governance in India. The combination of the harsh Rowlatt Acts, the massacre, the British response to the massacre, and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[110] Sarojini Naidu, as quoted in V. S. Naravane, \textit{Sarojini Naidu: Her life, Work and Poetry}, (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Limited, 1996), 36. Noted for her poetry, Naidu was a political activist, helping to establish the Women’s Indian Association in 1917. She was also the first Indian woman to become president of the Indian National Congress, and the first woman to become governor of an Indian state.
\item[111] Naravane, \textit{Sarojini Naidu}, 36.
\item[112] Sarojini Naidu, as quoted in Naravane, \textit{Sarojini Naidu}, 37.
\end{footnotes}
Britain’s ambivalence toward the Punjab drove Naidu resolutely against any form of continued British rule in India.\textsuperscript{114}

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was a Christian from a princely family who desired to meet Gandhi. She had learned of Gandhi from a guest at her father’s house who had recently returned from South Africa. The guest stated that Gandhi’s upcoming return to India in 1915 would “bring about a revolution in Indian politics.”\textsuperscript{115} The massacre had repulsed Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. As noted by biographer Indra Gupta, Kaur’s political stance became strongly anti-British after the massacre and she sought Gandhi out when he was at Jullundur.\textsuperscript{116} She met Gandhi briefly in Lucknow shortly after his arrival. In contrast to the violence of the massacre, it was Gandhi’s sense of justice combined with his stance on non-violence that drew her to him.\textsuperscript{117} She asked to join him at his Ashram. Gandhi asked if she had her parents’ consent, to which she replied no. Gandhi then asked her to wait, but to still join him in his work while remaining with her parents.\textsuperscript{118} To show her determination to work for Indian independence, the princess Kaur began spinning \textit{khadi} (the traditional homespun white cloth worn by the poorer members of Indian society), and working with \textit{Harijans} (the caste usually referred to as \textit{untouchables}) at


\textsuperscript{115} Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, \textit{Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: A Biography of Her Vision and Ideas}, Verinder Grover, Ranjana Arora, eds. (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1998), 272. Amrit Kaur was born to a princely family in the Punjab. She was educated at Oxford, and was the co-founder of the All India Women’s Conference.

\textsuperscript{116} Indra Gupta, \textit{India’s 50 Most Illustrious Women}, (New Delhi: Icon Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2003), 88.


\textsuperscript{118} Kaur, \textit{A Biography}, 273.
Simla. Later, Kaur would go on to serve as Gandhi’s personal secretary for sixteen years.

Indignation and hatred over the massacre echoed throughout the Indian feminist population. Manmohini Zutshi Sahgal recalled how her mother single-handedly organized and ran a stall in the Congress at the 1919 national INC meeting in Amritsar in order to raise funds for the victims of the massacre and martial law. Such direct political involvement became divisive in her family because her uncle was a government official in Amritsar who disapproved. Sudha Mazumdar also expressed her feelings about the massacre in her memoirs. She recorded that as censorship failed and news of Jallianwala Bagh ignited throughout India, “a mighty wave of horror and indignation swept the country.” The anger over the massacre swept not just through the educated upper class feminists, but resonated within middle class feminists as well. The depiction of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre as a polarizing influence for Indian feminists against British rule is an understatement. The incident re-defined the Indian independence movement for men and women and unleashed an unprecedented rise of women’s activity.

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119 Gupta, Women, 88.
120 Manmohini Zutshi Sahgal, An Indian Freedom Fighter Recalls Her Life, ed. Geraldine Forbes, (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 15. Sahgal was a member of the Nehru family, growing up in Jawaharlal Nehru’s family home. She, her mother, and her sisters, were all activists working with the INC, and all served time in jail as revolutionaries.
121 Sahgal, Fighter, 15.
122 Shudha Mazumdar, Memoirs of an India Woman, ed. Geraldine Forbes, (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1989), 135. Mazumdar was a middle class woman not highly involved in politics, but who, as the events of the freedom movement unfolded, was able to put purdah behind her, and even attend INC meetings to listen to Gandhi speak. I am including her statements here as a foil to demonstrate that even for those not on the cutting edge of the Indian nationalist movement, nor per se highly involved in the feminist cause, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre served as a breaking point in Indian ideas of remaining part of the British Empire.
in public life. These emboldened Indian feminists took their place alongside and in leadership roles with the male nationalists in the fight for full Indian independence. An immediate example of this new contribution within the public sphere of the nationalist movement was the fervent response of Indian women in the Punjab to Gandhi’s solicitations for funds to support the families of the Jallianwala Bagh and martial law victims. Women began donating their jewelry, which was significant because jewelry was not merely a form of adornment in India; it was also a very real form of security for women in a time of contingency.  

The Formation of Indian Feminist Groups, 1917-1927

The majority, but not all, of the national Indian women’s organizations emerged out of the post-war period during which the British government responded violently. All of them, however, came into existence in times of Indian national trauma. In 1917, just two years after Gandhi’s return to India and before his ascension as the clear leader of the Indian independence movement, Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Malati Patwarddhan, Ammu Swaminathan, Mrs. Dadabhoy, and Mrs. Ambujamal founded the Women’s Indian Association (WIA) at what was the height of Besant’s Home Rule Movement. As Geraldine Forbes has noted, the organization’s name bespoke the desire of its founders to be inclusive of both women of Indian and European descent. National in scope, the WIA sought to include women of all classes, religions, and ethnicities.  

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125 Geraldine Forbes, Women in Modern India, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 73. Margaret Cousins (1878-1954) was an Irish born suffragist and Theosophist.
and castes, and clearly stated that the colonial government hampered its efforts to help women.\textsuperscript{126} The cornerstones of its founding were religion, education, politics, and philanthropy, and each local branch was given the freedom to prioritize these areas as they saw fit.\textsuperscript{127} Throughout the interwar era, the WIA remained closely tied to the Theosophical Society. It also published the influential monthly magazine, \textit{Stri Dharma}, which roughly translates to “The Duties of Womanhood.”

During the Great War, women in Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras established networks to link their various organizations.\textsuperscript{128} In 1925, these women’s organizations formalized the links into the National Council of Women in India (NCWI). The goal of this new association was to promote and coordinate the work among various women’s organizations throughout the country.\textsuperscript{129} That same year, the International Council of Women (ICW), a group formed in 1888 to advance the political, social, and economic rights of women, learned of the founding of the NCWI. The ICW extended an offer to the NCWI to become their national branch in India. The NCWI accepted the invitation,

who moved to India in 1915. Dorothy Jinarajadasa was a prominent worker in the Theosophical society, and served as a justice of the peace in Madras. Malati Patwarddhan would become co-editor of the W.I.A.’s magazine, \textit{Stri Dharma}, in 1918. Ammu Swaminathan (1874-1978) was a social worker and political activist who would later sit on India’s Constituent Assembly. Unfortunately, biographical information on Mrs. Dadabhoy does not exist. Mrs. Ambujamal, daughter of noted lawyer and INC leader S. Srinivasa Iyengar, joined Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement in 1920, and went on to form the Women’s Swadeshi League (a group that encouraged domestic production of goods and the boycott of British products) in 1928.\textsuperscript{126} Geraldine Forbes, “The Indian Women’s Movement: A Struggle for Women’s Rights, of National Liberation?” \textit{The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan}, ed. Gail Minault, (Delhi, South Asia Books, 1981), 50.
\textsuperscript{127} Forbes, \textit{Modern}, 73.
\textsuperscript{128} Forbes, \textit{Modern}, 75.
\textsuperscript{129} Aruna Asaf Ali, \textit{Resurgence of Indian Women}, (New Delhi, Radiant Publishers, 1991), 78.
which provided almost instant international status. The organization selected the wife of a moneyed industrialist, Lady Tata, as one of its key leaders and adopted a philanthropic style copied from that of upper-class English women’s groups. Membership dues were high, and many of the women engaged in the organization were wealthy, which gave the organization an elitist air that suppressed any chance of widespread national appeal.

In 1925, one of the founders of the WIA, Margaret Cousins, wrote a letter to several Indian women’s organizations and to individual Indian feminists asking them to come together to discuss issues concerning the education of Indian women. The result was the formation of the All India Women’s Conference (AIWC) in 1927, which became the most successful and influential of all the Indian women’s organizations. The group acknowledged the need to promote education and sought political solutions to social issues that hampered female literacy. The organization took a view of history stating that the unhealthy social conditions impeding women were the result of foreign invasions, and that prior to these invasions there existed a golden age of women’s equality. This view of history tended to offend Muslim women, in that it appeared to them to lay the blame of women’s problems in India on the Muslim Mughal rule of India that preceded Britain’s Raj. Like the WIA, the AIWC worked to cross issues of class and caste, thus giving it a broad national appeal.

130 Forbes, Modern, 75.
131 Forbes, Modern, 76, 77.
132 Kumar, Doing, 68.
133 Forbes, Modern, 79.
134 Forbes, Modern, 80.
The Changing Strategies of British Feminists

The massacre at Amritsar and the British response to it radically changed the goals of those in India seeking independence. However, it did not have the same effect in Britain, except to act as a marker for Britain’s change in attitude toward its empire. Though the postwar sense of aggression worked out on its empire had little effect on British culture at home. The Great War that fundamentally changed British culture and society. Before the war, British feminists actively sought to influence public opinion directly and to break the notion of separate spheres for men and women.\(^\text{135}\) Close to the war’s end, and immediately after the war, a rapid succession of events favorable to feminist causes seemed to give British feminists a reason for celebration. Parliament passed the Representation of the People Act in 1918, which extended the vote to women over 30. The Eligibility of Women Act also passed, which allowed women to participate in Parliament. The government also amended the ‘Bastardy’ laws of 1872, doubling the amount a father paid in child support for an illegitimate child. A short time later, Parliament enacted the Sex Disqualification Removal Act, which opened all branches of the legal profession to women. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1923 abolished the double standard of divorce. Finally, in 1925, women became eligible to sit for the competitive examinations for civil service.\(^\text{136}\) However, a meaner spirit took the luster from these achievements. The disruption of the war provoked a desire throughout British society to return to a pre-1914 social order, whether that social order was real or imagined.\(^\text{137}\) True, with partial franchise came an understanding among feminists that they now could avail


\(^{137}\) Taylor, *English*, 139.
themselves of the parliamentary methods newly open to them as their new method of choice to seek change.\textsuperscript{138} To take best advantage of their hard-won suffrage, many feminists sought to build skills in parliamentary method and politics.\textsuperscript{139}

Before the war, British feminists maintained greater unity of purpose, and had sought to end the idea of gendered separate spheres. With the advent of war, women entered the workforce in large numbers, muddling long-held gender role ideals, which caused many of the men on the frontlines of the fighting to harbor great resentment. This resentment was part of the reason there was a strong desire to return to a utopian pre-1914 Britain, a desire that proved so great that society sought to firmly reestablish the idea of gender difference to help re-establish the order of the bygone era.\textsuperscript{140} The pressure was so intense that those who had previously sung the accolades of the heroic women doing their share for the war effort by filling the munitions jobs now attributed to them motivations as those of a giddy school girl.\textsuperscript{141} Thus, for many, feminist desires for the right to participate in the public sphere threatened a desire to return to a non-existent utopian past.

Fractures in British feminism began to appear even with the anticipation of limited franchise. Equality feminists, such as Ray Strachey and Lady Rhondda, believed that feminists needed to keep their focus on achieving absolute parity with men.\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{139} Harrison, \textit{Prudent}, 1.
\textsuperscript{140} Kent, \textit{Peace}, 99.
\textsuperscript{141} Kent, \textit{Peace}, 100.
\textsuperscript{142} Pedersen, \textit{Rathbone}, 178. Ray Strachey (1887-1940) was a liberal feminist politician and writer, who had worked extensively for women’s suffrage. Lady Rhondda (1883-1958) had been an active suffragist, and worked with the Women’s Suffrage and Political Union before the war.
Others, known as new feminists, such as Eleanor Rathbone and Kathleen Courtney, believed that feminists should acknowledge the sexual differences between the sexes and focus on reforms related to those.\textsuperscript{143} Fractures existed within the new feminists as to which social reforms to prioritize.\textsuperscript{144} Organized post war British feminists did not regain their pre-war momentum, and by the late 1920’s, they became ineffectual.\textsuperscript{145} Feminists who had been on the offensive to directly influence public opinion before the war, regardless of whether they aligned with new feminists or equality feminists, by virtue of changing social mores, now had to defend their stance through increasingly ineffectual petitionary politics.\textsuperscript{146}

Feminists acknowledged that the war caused societal-wide change in Britain and globally. Lady Rhondda noted how “The war formed for most of my generation the bridge that separated us from our youth. And for many of us cut off those last rays of morning sun earlier than need normally have happened.”\textsuperscript{147} Lady Rhondda bemoaned the too rapid maturation and loss of innocence caused by the conflict. She went on to describe a dream she had immediately after the war:

I dreamt that a great grief has just the same effect on a person as if some magic wand should sweep across a cornfield, leaving it standing, looking

\textsuperscript{143} Harold Smith, “British Feminism in the 1920’s,” in \textit{British Feminism in the Twentieth Century}, ed. Harold L. Smith, (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 48. Eleanor Rathbone (1872-1946) was a long-term campaigner for women’s rights. During the war she organized the Town Hall Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Families Organization to help support the wives and children of military men. Kathleen Courtney (1878-1974) also a long-term feminist, turned after the war to focus on international issues, thus becoming involved with the League of Nations.

\textsuperscript{144} Angela V. John, \textit{Turning the Tide: The Life of Lady Rhonda}, (Cardigan, Parthian Press, 2013), 379-380.

\textsuperscript{145} Kent, \textit{Peace}, 4.

\textsuperscript{146} Kent, \textit{Peace}, 114.

\textsuperscript{147} The Viscountess Rhondda, \textit{This Was My World}, (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1933), 240-241.
exactly as it had before but having taken, in that passage, all the grain out of the ears. So in my dream, I thought, a great grief does. Everything looks the same afterwards as before, but the grain has all gone. There is no kernel, no substance, no reality behind the façade of the usual round of things. I set that dream down here because it seems to me an apt enough simile for what happened to the world after the war. Normal life had, apparently, resumed its usual tenor; actually there was no longer any grain to the corn.\footnote{Rhondda, \textit{World}, 293.}

Lady Rhondda’s dream provided her understanding of how the war changed British society: it had robbed it of its substance. Yes, life went on, but the new life was an empty facsimile.

Beyond understanding the social affects of the war on Britain, the Viscountess, too, had the depth of understanding to realize that the postwar methods of feminists faltered in comparison to those of the pre war militant feminists in influencing society, noting

But even so that fight of ours was only ostensibly concerned with changing the law. The vote was really a symbol. And the militant fight itself did more to change the status of women—because it did more to alter our own opinion of ourselves—than ever the vote did. In actual fact, in those years we were changing the attitude of a country—nay, of the world…\footnote{Rhondda, \textit{World}, 299.}

Brian Harrison correctly has noted the majority of British feminists now turned to parliamentary and petitionary methods in order to achieve change, still there clearly existed those, such as Lady Rhondda, who recognized that the direct influence of public opinion served as a more substantive change agent.\footnote{Harrison, \textit{Prudent}, 1, 7.} Rhondda argued for the power of “Changing, not laws, but a point of view, that is really worthwhile… ‘He who moulds public sentiment,’ declared Abraham Lincoln, ‘goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or
pronounces decisions.” Lady Rhondda understood that to change the mechanics of the political system without changing the public mindset would accomplish little.

**Post War British Feminist Groups**

Lady Rhondda’s chosen methodologies to shape public sentiment after the war involved the co-founding of the Six Point Group (SPG) in 1921, a forceful feminist organization that was a bit *too* strident for some. She also co-founded the weekly magazine *Time and Tide* in 1920. The majority of the members comprising the SPG had been suffragettes, and they viewed themselves as the true descendants of the prewar Women’s Social and Political Union, which was the leading militant organization campaigning for women’s suffrage. As an equality feminist organization, the SPG attracted some of the most talented young feminists, as well as those with a left leaning political stance. The original six points of focus for the organization were (1) effective legislation on child assault, (2) legal protection for unmarried mothers and their children, (3) legal protection for widowed mothers, (4) equal guardianship rights for married parents, (5) equal pay for male and female teachers, and (6) equal opportunities for men and women in civil service. When the group achieved one of the six goals, they replaced that goal with a new objective. Lady Rhondda believed that the vote would not bring equality for females unless major changes in the consciousness of British women also took place. With the publication of *Time and Tide*, she sought to highlight the feminist

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153 Smith, “Feminism,” 50.
154 Smith, “Feminism,” 50.
viewpoint of the day’s political issues.\textsuperscript{156} She saw her role as publisher as being of greater importance than her work as founder of the SPG.\textsuperscript{157} Though Lady Rhondda showed some incredible insight into the issues of trauma in post-war Britain, it is also of interest that she mentioned nothing in her autobiography of the events in Amritsar. In fact, there was no mention of India; thus, at war’s end, Lady Rhondda was overly introspective regarding the Metropole, and cavalier concerning the broader issues of Empire.

The advent of limited suffrage brought changes to the tactics and focus of many other feminists. Numerous feminists turned their attention to issues of pacifism as well as international work.\textsuperscript{158} In 1919, for example, the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) broadened its scope to become the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC). Even before the advent of limited suffrage, non-militant members of the NUWSS had broken off to form the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom in 1915. Eleanor Rathbone, the champion of new feminism, officiated as president of the NUSEC for a number of years. Immediately after the war, NUSEC remained firmly committed to empire. In an April 25, 1919, article in The Common Cause, which was the news magazine published by NUSEC, Millicent Fawcett wrote an article titled “The Position of Women in India.” Though the title only mentions women, the first three quarters of the article focused on a male political organization called the Servants of India Society. Fawcett recounted the work of the organization’s president, Mr. G. K. Devadhar, and the focus of the organization, noting:

They base their society on the permanent connection of British rule with the Indian Empire. So far from belittling or under-rating the work of Great

\textsuperscript{156} Smith, “Feminism,” 50.
\textsuperscript{157} Rhondda, World, 300.
\textsuperscript{158} Harrison, Prudent, 7.
Britain in India, they recognize fully and generously its immense value. They maintain that to lead the country to its full stature is the joint responsibility of the British government and the Indian people. Says Mr. Devadhar, ‘The great Indian Continent is throbbing with a new impulse along with the whole world. It is now left for you in England to decide how to shape this spiritual force, how to direct it into a channel that would be productive for both countries, which would be productive of lasting good to both countries…brought together by a process of divine dispensation.’

This passage illustrates that NUSEC remained a strong supporter of empire in 1919. It also demonstrates the organization’s paternalistic attitude toward India. When Devadhar finally addressed the issue of women in India in the article, it was his opinion that women’s advancement in the subcontinent depended on the work of men. A subset of Devadhar’s organization worked to help with educational issues for Indian women, a fact illustrated by Millicent Fawcett:

> Already Indian women have been trained to become teachers, nurses, surgeons, midwives, etc., and it is now planned to bring to this country each year one or more of these trained women for further study in this country…The N.U.S.E.C. will watch their progress with sympathy and goodwill.

Again, this passage demonstrated the paternalistic attitude of the members of NUSEC toward India and India’s women. While NUSEC applauded the male backed education of women in India, it failed to show an understanding of the work Indian women were already doing. The NUSEC organization also failed in its ability to recognize that women could organize themselves, a fact noted in the 1920 article “The English Woman in Amritsar:”

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160 Fawcett, “Position,” 14. Millicent Fawcett (1847-1929) was a pioneer of women’s suffrage, though she distanced herself from the more militant side of the WSPU, and became the leader of the NUWSS.
Political action is so new to Indian women that they have much to learn from their British partners, and both together have to learn what is possible under the newly created political state in India. Organizations of women to watch women’s interests are non-existent. The whole field lies fallow and untouched… To become an organizer of women’s political activities in India would be a liberal education for the organizer.\textsuperscript{161}

Again, this passage illustrates the paternalistic attitude of many British women toward their Indian counterparts immediately following the war. Also evident was the ignorance of NUSEC leadership about the already advanced political action and organization of their Indian sisters. Common Cause failed to address the issue of the Amritsar massacre for more than a year after the event.

Common Cause changed its name to The Woman’s Leader, which took over as the publication organ of NUSEC. Still, the members of NUSEC behaved with the same ambivalence shown by British government toward the Amritsar massacre. In their first mention of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre on July 16, 1920, The Woman’s Leader condemned Dyer’s actions describing it as a use of terror, writing

We have seen the outcome of this doctrine of necessity—and of the policy of using terror to produce a “moral effect”—and through the years of agony which began in 1914, when Germany was “forced” to invade Belgium and to produce a “moral effect” on her population, we have gradually struggled on to a different conception of the relation of nations and races to each other. At least, some of us have.\textsuperscript{162}

The author directly compared Dyer’s actions to German war crimes, showing a deep sense of disdain. However, just over a month later, this sense of indignation reversed itself, as The Woman’s Leader published an article titled “English Women and Amritsar” in which they wrote of the

\textsuperscript{161} “The English Woman In Amritsar,” The Woman’s Leader and Common Cause, August 27, 1920, 659.
\textsuperscript{162} “Amritsar,” The Woman’s Leader and Common Cause, July 16, 1920, 534.
...horrors of what might occur in the future if the sacrifice of General Dyer is allowed to stand as an example to other soldiers if they venture to meet attempts at murder, arson, and other unmentionable crimes with adequate force. The present judgment of this man, who did more last year than anyone to suppress the rebellion at its start, will naturally tend to make other soldiers faced with similar responsibility act with hesitation.\textsuperscript{163}

Here, then is a clear contradiction to the previous condemnation of Dyer, demonstrating that British ambivalence about the massacre extended beyond the government into one of the most important feminist groups in the country.

Not all British women’s groups were ambivalent about Amritsar. The Women’s Freedom League (WFL), founded in 1907, supported a platform after the war focusing on equal pay, equal suffrage, and equal opportunity for women.\textsuperscript{164} The WFL also attempted to link feminism with the Labour movement and trade unionism among women workers.\textsuperscript{165} Interestingly, for the purpose of this dissertation, the WFL was one of the few women’s groups in Britain that protested the Amritsar massacre, staging a demonstration organized by Margaret Hodge in Central Hall, London, in July, 1920.\textsuperscript{166} In this protest, the WFL called for not only the immediate recall of the Viceroy of India, but also for the immediate enfranchisement of Indian women.\textsuperscript{167}

\textsuperscript{163} Sipahl, “English Women and Amritsar,” \textit{The Woman’s Leader and Common Cause}, August 27, 1920, 658. Note: Though the byline gives the author’s name as “Sipahl,” the magazine presents the name in quotation marks, suggesting the author was using a pseudonym.

\textsuperscript{164} Smith, “Feminism,” 49.

\textsuperscript{165} Smith, “Feminism,” 49.


\textsuperscript{167} Angella Woollacott, \textit{To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity}, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 124. Margaret Hodge (1858-
Though the British Commonwealth League (BCL), founded in 1925, was headquartered in London, it was significantly influenced by Australian feminists, and was the product of postwar internationalist fervor linked to the League of Nations. The motto of the BCL was to “Secure the equality of liberties, status and opportunities between men and women in the British Commonwealth of Nations.” Though originally representing the white settler dominions, the BCL would become a significant player in reaching out to the Indian feminist nationalists. The BCL had a constitutional mandate to spread the organizational leadership to include the dominions, which included India even though India never received dominion status.

Like the SPG, the Open Door Council (ODC) was an equality feminist organization that shared a substantial membership base with the SPG. The ODC, however, had a significantly more narrow focus. Founded by Elizabeth Abbot and Chrystal Macmillan after a meeting of the International Women’s Suffrage Alliance, the organization had but one aim: to campaign against protective legislation that applied to women but not to men. In their eyes, such legislation was a holdover practice from a bygone era when society did not consider women to be citizens, reflecting a misogynist belief in the delicacy of women. The ODC members found themselves often at odds with other women’s groups that did not oppose all protective legislation. Both the SPG

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168 Woollacott, “Commonwealth,” 82.
169 As quoted in Woollacott, “Commonwealth,” 84.
170 Woollacott, “Commonwealth,” 82.
171 Cowman, _Women_, 155.
172 Cowman, _Women_, 155.
173 Cowman, _Women_, 155.
and the ODC worked with Equal Rights International, a group that aimed to engender a treaty for equal rights for women through the League of Nations.¹⁷⁴

Conclusion

Though Britain and its empire won the Great War, they were left, as Lady Rhondda said, a society where there was “no longer any grain to the corn.”¹⁷⁵ In India, the British government worked through its fear from the trauma of the war on its subjects in the forms of the wildly unpopular Rowlatt Acts, the brutal Amritsar Massacre, and other oppressive actions. Three main women’s groups emerged in India during the time of duress caused by the consequences of the Great War, the ruthless aggression of the British government against its subjects in South Asia, and the lack of a response to Dyer’s horrific actions. The groups that took shape and found their places within the leadership of the Indian nationalist movement were the Women’s Indian Association, the National Council of Women in India, and the All India Women’s Conference.

Additionally, with the trauma of the Great War and the reactionary popular response at war’s end that provoked a societal desire throughout Britain to return to a fictional pre-1914 social order, British feminists re-invented themselves along new, less effective lines.¹⁷⁶ With partial franchise came a sense of obligation among many feminists that they now should regale themselves of the parliamentary methods newly open to them as their primary vehicle for change.¹⁷⁷ As such, many feminists sought to build skills in

¹⁷⁴ Cowman, Women, 156.
¹⁷⁵ Rhondda, World, 293.
¹⁷⁶ Taylor, English, 139.
¹⁷⁷ Harrison, Prudent, 1.
parliamentary methods and politics.\textsuperscript{178} Others turned their attention to concerns of pacifism or international work.\textsuperscript{179} The fire for equality that had burned in the British feminism before the war never regained its strength; by 1920, many of the groups had become ineffectual and British feminist militancy was gone.\textsuperscript{180} Conversely, post-war events heightened Indian feminists’ drive for full independence from Britain and pushed them into ever more public roles. Interestingly, as we will see with the development of issues in India on child marriage, Gandhi’s Salt March, the Round Table discussions in London, and the Government of India Act, it would be the subaltern voices of Indian feminist nationalists who would help breathe life back into British organized feminism.

\textsuperscript{178} Harrison, \textit{Prudent}, 1.
\textsuperscript{179} Harrison, \textit{Prudent}, 7.
\textsuperscript{180} Kent, \textit{Peace}, 4.
Chapter 2
Child Marriage, Mother India, and the Das Bill: Contrasts in Agency

Introduction

In 1860, the British government in India legislated the age of consent for a girl, whether in the confines of marriage or not, to be 10 years of age.\textsuperscript{181} After the marital rape of an 11-year-old girl, Phulmoni Dasi, by her 30-year-old husband resulted in her death; the British government in India raised the age of consent in 1891 to 12 years of age. Indian feminists rejected the lackadaisical attitude of the government regarding child welfare and women’s issues. As a medical doctor, Muthulakshmi Reddi saw the horrors of child marriage. She described numerous times the traumas she treated suffered by girls “made to live with their husbands before even the first menses appears.” The horrors of child marriage as recorded by Muthulakshmi Reddi, created anger over age of consent legislation. This, and organized resistance to Devadasi fueled action by Indian feminists and others to bring pressure on the British government in India for change regarding age of consent and child marriage.\textsuperscript{182} For example, educated Hindu men fought against child marriage beginning in the mid 19th century, and Indian feminists had organized resistance to child marriage prior to World War I. At their third meeting in 1887, the INC formed

\textsuperscript{182} Untitled document, Muthulakshmi Reddi papers, File #8, Part II, NMML. \textit{Devadasi} was the practice in pre-colonial times where parents dedicated a daughter for life to the service of the temple. In this service, the daughter then learned classical Indian arts, including, but not limited to, music and dancing. The girl would then typically be married to a wealthy temple patron, but not assume the duties of housewife, but instead continue her studies and duties at the temple. With the advent of the colonial era, when kings who were the patrons of the temples and the arts lost their power, Devadasis morphed into what Gandhi referred to as “a euphemism for prostitutes.” (M. K. Gandhi, \textit{Women and Social Injustice}, (Ahmedabad-14: Shantilal H. Sha Navajivan Press, 1942), 141.).
the National Social Congress as an auxiliary to provide a platform to focus on social issues. Many of the women who took part in the National Social Congress did not think that the men in the group took women’s issues seriously; thus, they formed the Bharata Mahila Parishad, or Ladies Social Congress, in 1905. During its first meeting, the Ladies Social Congress focused much of its energy on the issues of child marriage and child welfare.\textsuperscript{183} Though Reddi noted that child marriage in India was so common by the twentieth century that it was a “custom,” she rejected Hindu responsibility for its start. Instead, she blamed the Mughal Muslim invaders, and claimed there existed a golden age for women before their rule, writing “We know also during the Vedic period and the Puranic period of our history no early marriage was practiced ‘Swyamwara’ or marriage by choice was in vogue.”\textsuperscript{184} Still, few feminists in Britain knew of the issue of child marriage in India, and the work by Indian feminists to eradicate the custom in the early twentieth century. The beginning of an understanding of the distress of child marriage in India would come with the 1927 publication by American journalist Katherine Mayo of her pro British rule book, Mother India, though understanding of how much work Indian feminists had already done would come later.\textsuperscript{185}

\textsuperscript{184} Muthulakshmi Reddi address, “The Birth of a Girl in a Hindu Household,” S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Subject File #8, Part I, NMML. The Vedic era in India was from 1500-500 BC. The Mughal invasion began when Babur, the second son of Genghis Khan, invaded India from what is now Afghanistan through they Khyber Pass. With his victory in the 1526 AD battle at Panipat, Babur ruled a large swath of Northern India.
\textsuperscript{185} Katherine Mayo (1867-1940) was an author and historian. A proud member of the Society of Mayflower descendants, and unapologetic racist, Mayo defined her life mission as the defense of white, Anglo Saxon protestant racial and moral superiority. Life magazine published her first work in 1892. G.P. Putnam’s Son’s published her first book calling for social reform, Justice for All, in 1917. Theodore Roosevelt wrote the introduction to this volume, which influenced the establishment of the New York State
The arguments in this chapter are fourfold. First, Indian feminist involvement in changing legislation against child marriage helped them build skills and abilities necessary to effectively influence the politics of the British empire and gained for them an entre into world political affairs. Second, that Mayo’s book, *Mother India*, ignited the interactions between British and Indian feminists. While this communication began amidst confusion on both sides regarding the motivation and work of their sister groups, clarification of goals, and the forging of key alliances among transnational feminists became the intent in both metropole feminist groups as well as those in India. Third, as Indian feminist political involvement grew, so did their awareness of the moral failure of the British government in India, which led to the use of the child marriage issue as one of the key arguments for full Indian independence. The final goal of this chapter is to begin building the argument which will continue through the next chapter that, though Gandhi did feminize the independence movement, scholars to date have failed to recognize that it was the work of the interwar feminist nationalists that forced him to do so to the degree he did. Ashis Nandy has noted that Gandhi held the opinion that the “essence of femininity is superior to that of masculinity.” That is, Gandhi valued the traits he saw as peaceful and feminine over the more aggressive, often violent traits of masculinity. I demonstrate here, however, that Gandhi did not lead in the feminization of the independence movement as regards focusing on the implementation of issues core to

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Police. *Mother India*, published in 1927, found a wide audience across three continents, with copies translated into German, French, Italian, Danish, Dutch, Swedish, and Hebrew, as well as several Indian languages. Given the breadth of editions published, it is impossible to know how many volumes have gone to press, but by 1955, the original American publisher, Harcourt Brace and Company, reported to have sold 395,678 copies of the book.

Indian feminists and the inclusion of Indian women within the same sphere as men, so much as the Indian feminists shaped him regarding these issues.

**Indian Agitation Against Child Marriage, 1850-1927**

Due to male dominance across the British Empire, and *purdah* (the practice of some, but not all Indian communities of keeping women in seclusion) in India, Indian feminist political involvement in the issue of child marriage occurred unevenly. As noted in the previous chapter, it was not until after the Great War, and more specifically after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, that Indian society became more comfortable with women leaving the private sphere of *purdah* and entering public life. Thus, as Indian men responded to the British idea that a society is judged by how it treats its women, the first voice against child marriage came in 1850, from Pandit Isvara Chandra Viyasagar, who urged Hindus not to marry their daughters until age 11, and their sons until age 18.\(^{187}\) The first Indian war for independence in 1857 slowed the pace of social reform initiated by Indians, and the issue of child marriage lay dormant until the 1880s when Behramji M. Malabari revived the subject. Malabari published a series of notes advocating for the use of propaganda and governmental reform to attack the problem of child marriage. Using data from the 1881 census, Malabari showed the deleterious effects that child marriage

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had both on the bride and on the progeny of the union. When his actions failed to garner support in India, he turned his focus to lobbying efforts in London, writing a series of articles in *The Times*, which caught the attention of British feminists, such as Millicent Garret Fawcett, and feminist groups, such as the National Indian Association in Aid of Social Progress and Female Education. Malabari’s work, combined with feminist pressure in London, the support of Indian male social reformers, and the report of the lethal marital rape of Phulmoni Dasi, all led to the British government in India changing the age of consent for sexual intercourse from 10 to 12 in 1891. The amendment somewhat addressed the rising concerns for social reform. Enforcement, however, was problematic because girls forced into early sexual relations typically had no advocate to plead their case.

In 1903, the Indian Princely state of Baroda excited the attention of educated Indians by proposing legislation to ban child marriage, raising the minimum age of marriage to 14 for girls, and 18 for boys. Other princely states followed including Kashmir, Bharatpur, and Mysore. Shortly after Hari Singh’s 1925 ascension to the throne as maharaja of Kashmir, Muthulakshmi Reddi wrote in praise of the princely states that enacted laws against child marriage. She also questioned why “Native states have given the lead. Why not British India?” She remarked that the legislation in these states

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188 Ramusack, “Women’s Organizations,” 200. Behramji M. Malabari (1853-1912) was an Indian poet, nationalist, and social reformer. Though a nationalist, Malabari distanced himself from the I.N.C. in order to avoid British backlash against his work on the advocacy of the status of women in India.  
190 “Child Marriage in India,” *The Queenslander*, (Brisbane, Qld: 1866-1939), 12 September 1903: 45.
“commands wide sympathy and support from all quarters, from high and low. The enlightened manhood and womanhood of the country have been long demanding for this most urgent reform.”191 In this address, Reddi defined what had happened. First, she held up the princely states as examples of progressive legislation, and second, she was able to use their progressive thinking to shame the British government in India for its lack of action. Altogether, Reddi’s words spurred an increase of popular support in India for legislation against child marriage.

Organized women in India first took direct leadership in the fight against child marriage in 1905, with the initial meeting of the Bharata Mahila Parishad (Ladies Social Council) during which members placed the issues of child marriage and child welfare high on its inaugural agenda.192 Still, the Ladies Social Council, however, remained an auxiliary of the male dominated National Social Conference. It was not until the second decade of the twentieth century that women in India took a leadership role against child marriage while not subordinate to men, when in the early 1910’s, Annie Besant used statistics from the 1911 census to criticize child marriage for lowering the vitality of, and decreasing the mental and physical health of the Indian population. World War I bolstered Besant’s claims, because of worry over the physical condition of sons born to mothers who were too young. After the war and the formation of the League of Nations (LON), the League reinvigorated talk globally over the issue of female age of consent.

191 Muthulakshmi Reddi address, “The Birth of a Girl in a Hindu Household,” S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Subject File #8, Part I, NMML. Hari Singh (1895-1961) was the last Maharaja of Kashmir. Singh served as page of honour to Lord Curzon in the 1903 Grand Delhi Durbar, which celebrated the succession of King Edward VII as emperor of India. A progressive, he not only championed child marriage reform, but also made primary education compulsory.
The LON’s focus on the issue of age of consent fueled arguments about child marriage in India as the LON held a conference on the traffic in women for immoral purposes in 1921. This conference recommended raising the age of consent for single women to 21. An Indian representative on the council lobbied to change the age of consent to 16, and have it apply within marriage. As part of their inquiry, the LON began regular compilation of data on the age of consent in different countries, obliging the British government in India to supply the information, placing it under international scrutiny. While most of the rest of the world focused on age of consent issues outside of marriage, the LON inquiry acted as a catalyst for further debate on child marriage in India, increasing pressure on the government to take action. Reddi expressed this in a 1921 letter of protest she wrote for the WIA to the British government in India that reads,

To the Government I will address the following words. There is no use of boasting that you have abolished Sati. No doubt it is a good thing, and we thank you for it. But if you stop merely with that and allow the horrors arising from the abuse of the principle upon which Sati started, you have simply lowered a high ideal of life...children, even babies are being married, reason being not love but cash and custom. And marriage itself is entered into by misguided or interested guardians. It is better to kill a child than allow her to suffer under a custom which even under best circumstances does not give her freedom, which truncates her life, cutting off all opportunity for self culture or self expression, and a custom at its worst when the girl becomes a widow, a custom which makes her the most inauspicious creature in life...

In this early example of the petitionary political strategy of the WIA, the author berated the British government in India for not taking social reform regarding women past the issue of Sati. She clearly stated that death would be preferable to child marriage, and

194 Sinha, Specters, 155.
195 S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Subject File # 7, Efforts on the Part of Women’s Indian Association to lend maximum support to the Harbilas Sarda’s Bill on the age of marriage for girls and boys. NMML.
early widowhood of a child bride created a sub-human existence, as cultural mores against remarriage for child widows turned them into virtual slaves in their own families. The issue of early widowhood became a recurring theme in Indian feminists’ fight against child marriage. Again Reddi wrote, “The saddest consequence of all is the presence of a large number of child widows in our midst whose lot in a Hindu family is most deplorable.” She provided startling statistics, noting that almost 20,400 Indian girls between 0 - 5 years of age were married, with over 1,300 of these widowed. For those between the ages 5 - 10, almost 123,500 girls were married, with over 6,000 widowed, and for those 10 - 15 years of age, over 537,000 girls were married, and almost 24,000 had already lost their husbands. In addition to the issues surrounding child widowhood, Reddi had other complaints against child marriage. First, she wrote about a “child of ten having been forced to live with a husband who was well over 40, a huge figure, even before the girl attained her puberty.” The depiction was described as a common occurrence, and most resulting pregnancies occurred when the child mother was 13 or 14. With the burdens of caring for infants and a home, few girls had the opportunity to attend, let alone finish, school. Second, Reddi argued against the mistreatment of child wives by their husbands. She recounted the case of a man who burned his child bride to death for failing to “satisfy the animal passions of the husband.” Finally, Reddi described the overwhelming pressure of child marriage, with the accompanying financial burdens of the wedding and dowry. From the moment of a female child’s birth, that child was

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196 Muthulakshmi Reddi address, “The Birth of a Girl in a Hindu Household,” S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Subject File #8, Part I, NMML.
considered by the whole family to be such a worrisome responsibility that many young girls chose to take their own lives.  

As feminists in India organized in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} decades of the twentieth century, work by Indians to halt child marriage continued. In 1924, Hari Singh Gour introduced a bill to raise the age of consent in India. The WIA supported his efforts, and they organized several public meetings and directed a letter writing campaign to the government to back the bill. The newly formed NCWI added its support to Gour’s proposed legislation in 1925. The British government, however, maintained its policy of non-interference in issues of marital practice, and they labeled efforts to raise the age of consent, such as Gour’s bill, as radical and divisive. The home member of the government of India, Sir William Vincent, went so far as to state that official support for the legislation would only be available if the bill excluded marital relations from its scope. Without official endorsement from the government, Gour’s bill failed. Members of the WIA responded to the defeat of Gour’s bill in an untitled document published by Oxford Press in Delhi: “The Central Government under the plea of religious neutrality would not legislate for our social amelioration and social reconstruction, nor do the Government members register their votes in favor of such measures.” Continuing the document reads:

\begin{quote}
It passes our comprehension why the present day British statesmen coming to rule us in India should practice the reverse policy and thus retard the progress of social reform by preventing the passage of such
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197 Muthulakshmi Reddi address, “The Birth of a Girl in a Hindu Household,” S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Subject File #8, Part I, NMML. 
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198 Sinha, Specters, 157. Hari Singh Gour (1870-1949) was a Cambridge educated lawyer, social reformer, and poet. Gour was a supporter of women’s rights in India, especially focusing on the abolition of Purdah.
\end{flushright}
social reform measures as have been brought forward by Indians themselves to ameliorate the women’s conditions in this country. In their response, the WIA also linked the issues of age of consent and child marriage to a call for national self-determination for the first time:

Here again there is full justification for our demand for provincial and national autonomy. Freedom and responsibility bring out the best in the individual and the race… autonomy means moral and material prosperity, an opportunity for a fuller and freer life and a greater self-development, a higher world status, more honour and respect.

Through their published response, the WIA was able to claim moral high ground over the British government in India, and they also pointed out that the British government impeded any proactive Indian legislation regarding child marriage. Thus, the WIA successfully linked issues of age of consent and child marriage to the issue of national self-determination and independence as a self-governing nation. In union with the WIA, Gour went on to propose amendments to further raise the age of consent, but the British government in India remained hostile. Not only did organized Indian feminists petition the government in support of Gour’s continued efforts to raise the age of consent, the issue also provided significant impetus for women in India to reach across to their sisters in London. At a National Council of Women in Great Britain meeting in 1925, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, one of the founders of the WIA, complained bitterly about the government of India’s role in defeating Gour’s bill. As well, the members of the WIA contacted the British Federation of University Women and urged British women to petition Parliament to compel the government of India to stop its resistance to reform measures. While asking

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199 Untitled document, S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, File # 8, Part II, NMML.
200 Untitled document, S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, File # 8, Part II, NMML
201 Sinha, Specters, 157-158. Dorothy Jinarajadasa was an Irish feminist married to the noted theosophist Curuppumullage Jinarajadasa. She was a co-founder of the Women’s Indian Association.
British women to petition Parliament, at the same time, members of the WIA continued to appeal to the government of India, sending a petition to the Legislative Assembly on June 14, 1927, stating:

We the undersigned humbly beg the state that it is now time that the age limit in the Age of Consent Act should be raised. We cordially support the Bill which Sir Harrison Gour has brought before the Legislative Assembly. We earnestly request you that efforts should be made to raise further and further that limit in order to ameliorate the condition of women and to develop their physical and intellectual capacities. It is our firm belief that girls are not capable of entering married life before the age of 16. Again it is not desirable that they should be enticed to a life of immorality, by persons taking advantage of their innocence before they are 16 years old. With the help of the daily advancing public opinion of the country we have full faith that our request will have your hearty support.  

Their petition not only illustrates the attempts of the WIA to influence the government of India, it also alludes to their successes at directly swaying popular opinion. On February 6, 1927, Muthulakshmi Reddi recorded that not only had the WIA passed a resolution in support of Gour; it also invested the funds to send a telegram to the government to that effect.

Hence, even before Mayo’s publication of *Mother India*, and before the Sarda Act that attempted to limit child marriage, it is clear Indian feminists had developed an effective strategy of both petitioning the government and influencing popular opinion. Moreover, they had successfully linked the issue of child marriage to a new nationalist agenda, using the moral failure of the British government of India as justification for full national autonomy. In addition, though not yet showing the full potential of a true

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202 S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Subject File # 7, Efforts on the Part of Women’s Indian Association to lend maximum support to the Harbilas Sarda’s Bill on the age of marriage for girls and boys, NMML.

203 Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Correspondence, Cousins, M.E., NMML.
transnational feminism, Indian feminists found the courage to reach out to British feminists to engage their help.

In early October 1929, the Indian legislature passed a bill authored by Harbilas Sarda attempting to raise the age of marriage for girls to 14. The bill was a watered down version of Gour’s 1924 attempt, and it did not go into effect until April of the following year. Still, all three national women’s organizations (WIA, NCWI, and AIWC) in India existed by the time debate about the bill began, and all strongly supported the legislation. As Mrinalini Sinha correctly has noted, a remarkable sense of unity existed between the organizations engendering the building of a collective idea of political identity mobilizing Indian feminism around the legal issue of child marriage as a concern of greater significance than, and separate from, other allegiances.204 The unified agitation and petitionary politics adopted by the WIA, the NCWI, and the AIWC acted as a right of passage for organized feminism in India. As Geraldine Forbes described it, the groups learned “lessons about competing agendas and the difficulties of collaborating with their apparent well wishers.” She continued, noting, “At the same time they learned to distinguish between effective petitioning and effective action.”205 In other words, the process of coming together to provide a united front in support of the passage of legislation also brought them the skills they needed to enter the world political stage.

By the mid 1920s, Indian feminists showed independent leadership on the issue of child marriage. Though many have written about Gandhi’s feminization of the Indian independence movement, he was actually late entering the organized push against child marriage. In his later years, Gandhi wrote of his own child marriage as having to

204 Sinha, Specters, 10.
205 Forbes, Women, 83.
“swallow many such bitter draughts,” and referred to the “cruel custom of child marriages” in his autobiography.\textsuperscript{206} He also briefly addressed the issue in his magazine, \textit{Young India}, in 1926, writing, “It [child marriage] is sapping the vitality of thousands of our promising boys and girls on whom the future of our society entirely rests.”\textsuperscript{207} Explaining his hostility to the practice, Gandhi recounted his own experience, writing of his marriage, that by the time they were just sixteen, Mohandas and his wife Kasturbai were expecting their first child. As well, Mohandas’s father had contracted fistula, obligating Mohandas to act as his nurse. Gandhi confessed that when his father was near death, his carnal desires took him from his father’s side so that he could have relations with his pregnant wife. In so doing, he was not with his father when he passed.\textsuperscript{208} Almost immediately following, Gandhi’s first child was born, but lived only a few days. Gandhi left for London to study law shortly after their next child was born in 1888, leaving Kasturbai alone in India. Despite these painful memories of his own child marriage, Gandhi did little to initiate action against child marriage, and instead followed the lead of the Indian feminists in his pursuit of legislation against the practice. As a case in point, Muthulakshmi Reddi wrote of her first meeting with Gandhi in 1927 noting that Gandhi asked how she, as a legislator, would try to serve women. Reddi showed him the legislation she was championing against child marriage. Having read the bill, of which he had no prior knowledge, Gandhi stated that he was “in full agreement with the chief object of the Bill,” and promised his “whole-hearted support to the Bill through his

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\textsuperscript{206} Gandhi, \textit{Gandhi}, 8,13. \\
\textsuperscript{207} Gandhi, as quoted in Katherine Mayo, \textit{Mother India}, (New York: Harcourt, Brace \\ & Company, 1927), 59. \\
\textsuperscript{208} Gandhi, \textit{Gandhi}, 30.
\end{flushright}
writings in his magazine, *Young India.*" Thus, as late as 1927, though he was willing to lend publicity in support of the Indian feminists in their attempt to end child marriage, the fight remained theirs. Two years later, in 1929, Reddi chided Gandhi about his and the INC’s lack of action on child marriage, writing, “Does not early marriage strike at the root of all development—physical, intellectual, and even spiritual?” She continued,

If the members of the Congress believe that freedom is the birthright of every nation and individual, and if they are determined to achieve that at any cost, should they not first liberate their women from the evil customs and conventions that restrict their all-round healthy growth, which remedy lies in their own hand?210

Reddi’s frustration is evident here as she petitioned Gandhi for more action both from him as an individual, and the INC, in the fight against child marriage.

The feminist groups’ efforts to publicize the issue of child marriage garnered additional support for the Sarda Act. Some of the new supporters requested strengthening the proposed legislation before it even passed. An example was a unanimously passed resolution by the League of Non-Brahmin Youths sent a to the Viceroy on March 13, 1928, which read:

This meeting while welcoming whole-heartedly the Child Marriage Bill and the Age of Consent Bill brought before the Imperial Legislative Assembly, begs to request the Benign Government that they will be pleased to fix the minimum marriageable age of males to be 21 and that of females 16.211

Not only, then, did the publicity by Indian feminists about the pending bill work to make it known, it also motivated others to push for an even older legal age of marriage.

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209 S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Speeches and Writings, Vol. I, Part II, NMML.
211 S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Subject File 8 (Volume 1): Documents Emphasizing the Need for Legislation for the Prevention of Child Marriage, 1927-29, NMML.
By 1927, Indian feminists lead the way in the fight for effective child marriage and age of consent legislation, with Gandhi offering only sparse publicity for them on the topic. The related issues of age of consent, child marriage, and the Sarda Act, helped to both unify the three main Indian feminist groups, and taught them how best to influence the political system in India. Addressing these issues allowed them to provide examples of the British government’s moral failure, which gave them stimulus to make the nationalistic claim for an independent, self-governing India. Katherine Mayo would provide the needed impetus to draw these feminist groups into the international arena, where they would redefine women’s agency across the British Empire.

**From Mother India Through The Indian Minotaur, 1927-1934**

Meanwhile, in 1927, American journalist Katherine Mayo published her lurid, sexually explicit book *Mother India*. Although ostensibly about India’s cultural mores, Mayo’s racist intent was to convince readers of the intrinsic backwardness of the Indian people, which, in her mind, made them incapable of self-rule.\(^{212}\) For example, Mayo provided graphic details of a thirteen-year-old girl who was married to a fifty-year-old man. Mayo described the girl as so sexually abused by her husband that “Her internal wounds were alive with maggots.”\(^{213}\) It was only an English doctor who was able to help the girl, while her husband sued to recover his rights of consortium. She described widespread venereal disease among child brides, and quoted a white doctor who stated


that he had “never found one woman who had not some form of venereal disease.”

Filled with garish details, numerous statistics, and hundreds of quotations, Mayo always portrayed the white Briton as the rescuer of the poor Indian. The few times Mayo did represent an Indian speaking out against child marriage, it was usually a Christian Indian.

Katherine Mayo had many admirers. There were those who compared her book with Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*. Gandhi, however, called it a “Drain inspector’s report.” Indian feminist groups, having attained significant political awareness and effectiveness fighting the very evils Mayo highlighted in her book, were outraged. So stung were the Indian feminists by the salacious allegations made by Mayo that even eight years later, at the tenth annual session of the AIWC, after the president’s address by Maharani Travencore, the liaison officer between the AIWC and the British Women’s Association, Mrs. Sanger, took the stand to address the issue. To cheers, she noted that she “had come to India in a spirit of atonement in order to learn and understand the aspirations and ideals and undo the false and mischievous impressions created regarding India by an American author.” To continuing applause, she went on to note that Mayo had “done a spiritual wrong to India” with her book. Ten years after the publication of *Mother India*, the AIWC, in conjunction with The Liaison Group of British Women’s Societies, which represented the BCL, the SPG, the WFL and the WIL, issued another condemnation of Mayo’s work and

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the works of others, calling them “anti-Indian propaganda,” and noting that feelings remained very charged around these publications.\textsuperscript{219}

Though scorned in India, the book was initially well received in the United States and Britain. \textit{The Woman’s Leader} heaped praise on Mayo for what they perceived to be her understanding of the Hindu character, writing in their review of the book:

Her motif is that the Hindu and the Hindu alone is to blame for his own inherent defects of character and the general backwardness of his country resulting therefrom, and that no agency can save him except a new spirit in his heart. The Hindu delights to ascribe to that Universal Provider, the British Government, all his listlessness, apathy, lack of initiative and shyness of responsibility, regardless of the fact that these racial traits characterized him for many centuries before the British set foot in India.\textsuperscript{220}

This scathing indictment of Hinduism illustrated the depth of racism in much of British society at the time, and ascribed to Hindus an air of ingratitude toward the British government. Eleanor Rathbone, noted British feminist, and president of NUSEC, became so disgusted reading \textit{Mother India} that she threw the book across the room, and was so moved by it that she decided to run for a seat in the House of Commons in order to fight for better conditions for women in India.\textsuperscript{221} She wrote several defenses of Mayo’s work, including the pamphlet \textit{Has Katherine Mayo Slandered “Mother India?”} In this piece, Rathbone not only gave copious statistical data to back up Mayo’s claims, but also testily noted that the ending of child marriage was of much greater importance than the possible worry about hurting the feelings of certain educated Hindus.\textsuperscript{222} Mrinalini Sinha observed that, with her imperialist sentiments charged, Rathbone also called for the printing of a

\textsuperscript{219} A.I.W.C. Papers, File # 37, NMML.
\textsuperscript{220} “Mother India—a Challenge,” \textit{The Woman’s Leader}, 5 August, 1927, 208.
\textsuperscript{221} Pederson, \textit{Rathbone}, 241.
\textsuperscript{222} MSS EUR F165/161, Cornelia Sorabji Papers, European Manuscripts, Asia and Africa Collection, The British Library.
cheaper copy of *Mother India* in order to increase circulation in the broader Labour Party and its constituency.\(^{223}\)

Echoing John Stuart Mill’s idea that the status of women best showed a society’s place on the evolutionary scale, Rathbone felt it the duty and right of the already emancipated British women to lead the effort to elevate the status of Indian women.\(^{224}\)

Thus, full of outrage as well as ignorance as to the true vitality of women in India, shortly after her election to Parliament in 1929, she initiated a conference for British women, in which they would plot the redemption of their Indian little sisters.\(^{225}\)

Rathbone’s conference proved to be one of her deepest embarrassments. Several educated Indian feminists, such as Rama Rao, heard of the conference and attended. To their understandable offense, they were confronted with a table of Rathbone’s defenses of Mayo; additionally, there were a host of speakers, and none of them were Indian. Rama Rao criticized Rathbone and the conference from the floor, pointing out that Indian women had been politically active in challenging ideas of child marriage for years, and asking why Rathbone had failed to consult anyone from India.\(^{226}\) Rao’s criticism was well-founded. In a memorandum written in the early 1930s to the Governor General and the members of the Legislative Assembly in India, Muthulakshmi Reddi had noted “The numerous women’s organizations in this Presidency have been agitating for the last two decades and more for the abolition of child marriage and other social evils…”\(^{227}\) Indeed, with its founding in 1917, the WIA included as one of its top three objectives the goal to

\(^{223}\) Sinha, *Specters*, 83.
\(^{227}\) S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Subject File #8, Part II, NMML.
“secure the abolition of child marriage and other social issues.” Indian feminists possessed copious documentation proving their commitment to the eradication of child marriage well before the publication of Mayo’s book. Reddi noted in an untitled document from 1925 that when Indians attempted legislation against child marriage, “the enlightened British government opposed the Bill and thus sided with the orthodox reactionaries.” Reddi’s sarcasm showed her contempt for the British government in India, which had ignored majority opinion and, instead, sought out extremists to defend their inaction.

Stung by Rao’s criticism, Rathbone attempted to silence her, but British feminists Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Kathleen Simon insisted that Rathbone allow Rao to take the floor of the conference, which she did. The London press gave the conflict between Rathbone and Rao significant coverage. Rathbone, discomfited, backpedaled in a feeble written defense attempting to explain her good intentions in *The Times*. Still, her misguided stance had damaged her image with her Indian audience and with those at home.

After the conference, Emily Lutyens and ten other British feminists wrote to *The Times* that Rathbone had “Forfeited Indian confidence by her close association with Miss Mayo,” and thus engendered “racial cleavage” through her patronization of Indian nationals. Though the conference had no immediate effect on the issue of child marriage, it did serve as a significant point of expansion of dialogue and cooperation between Indian feminist nationalists and some British feminists. Rathbone, however, took

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228 Temp MSS 41/3/h, Society of Friends Archive, London.
229 S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Subject File #8, Part II, NMML.
her time to regroup before joining the interaction. While there were some positive outcomes from the convention, including the increased dialogue with British feminists, Indian feminists still faced significant battles in their fight to end child marriage.

The Sarda Act of 1929 proved a failure and unenforceable. Given its delayed implementation, the Act spurred a massive increase in the number of child marriages in the six months before its execution. In 1935, Lady Hartog noted that “In 1930 an Act, known as the Sarda Act, made it possible to penalize, but not to declare illegal, the marriages of girls under fourteen and of boys under eighteen, but the Act is hard to work in practice, and has done little to put an end to the terrible evil...”

Clearly, feminists in Britain familiar with India knew of the Act, and of its deficiencies. As the failure became evident, so too did the expansion of the interaction between Indian feminists and their British counterparts. Lakshmi Menon voiced her frustration in a letter to the British Liaison Committee in 1931. She was frustrated that the British government did not comprehend the depth of the ills of the child marriage issue:

> The most regrettable fact of all is that in all these aspects progress is so slow even if it is existant. For example, in 1921 there were 9,066 wives under the age of 1, in 1931 there were 44,082—an increase of nearly 5 times while the population increased only by one tenth. Again, in 1921 there were 759 widows under 1 and in 1931 the corresponding number was 1,515….the population is increasing far more rapidly than progress in measures to check these evils. The call for active steps to eradicate them is therefore most urgent than ever and the women’s movement in India can have no higher or more urgent task than ever than the rousing of the conscience of the public and the government in this matter.233

While illustrating the enormity of the failure of the Sarda Act, Menon also showed how close relations between Indian and British feminists had come in just a few short years,

with a liaison committee existing to help foster better communications between them (More will be written on the liaison committee in later chapters).

In response to the failure of the Act, Rathbone petitioned her fellow MP’s to support needed changes to make the Act enforceable. Failing to get the desired response, she then wrote a letter to The Times. Rathbone initially viewed the problem of child marriage as one of proper legislation and governance. Faced with the government’s inaction to amend or enforce the failed piece of legislation, however, her faith in the British imperial system waned.\(^{234}\) Still committed to her cause, Rathbone reached out to Indian feminists. She first contacted Muthulakshmi Reddi in 1931, and then initiated correspondence with Radhabbai Subbarayan.\(^{235}\) Both women shared with Rathbone that it was the British government in India, not the Indian people, who hampered reform on child marriage. Reddi wrote to Rathbone “If women and the depressed classes are given freedom, power and responsibility, I am sure they would very soon learn how to rectify the present social evils.”\(^{236}\) Reddi’s statement verified again that Indian feminists tied the issue of social reform, specifically regarding child marriage, to the Indian feminists perception that self-governance would be the key to viable positive change regarding the status of women.

Rathbone heard the message, and she began to see social reform in India as an issue equally concerned with constitutional reform regarding the issue of suffrage for women as a means of bringing about social change. Though I will deal with the question

\(^{234}\) Pederson, Rathbone, 244.

\(^{235}\) Radhabbai Subbarayan (1891-1960) was a moderate, non-INC reformer, who attended the first Round Table conference in London in 1930. She was also a member of the AIWC.

\(^{236}\) Rathbone Papers, 7ELR Box 2, The Women’s Library, LSE.
of Rathbone’s involvement in the issue of female suffrage in India in a later chapter, Rathbone seemed to assume a more significant healing in the rift between her and her Indian counterparts than actually existed, as we see when Reddi directly addressed Rathbone’s opinion that Indian women were not doing enough regarding the issue of child marriage during the time of the Round Table talks in London when she stated:

Again Miss Rathbone wonders why women who in such large numbers threw themselves into the National movement with effect have not come out in sufficiently large numbers to work out this much needed reform as that of the Sarda Act. The answer is that while a movement for political and economic freedom in any country draws to its banner all classes and ranks from both sexes, namely, the educated and the ignorant…that for social reform has appealed only to a few thinking men and women who are far ahead of their times and further even the social reformers have fully realized that only with the help of a National Government that they could effectively further social reform and social progress.237

Reddi was obviously frustrated by Rathbone’s criticisms, but she showed mature political understanding for how a nationalist agenda would have a broader appeal than a social reform agenda, and she was also effectively able to tie the issue of child marriage once again to the need for national independence.

Rathbone kept working on the issue of child marriage, though her tactics changed. While in 1927, Rathbone agreed with Mayo that social reform initiated by the British government in India must precede any Indian constitutional reform, by 1930, Rathbone’s dealings with empire convinced her that democracy and individualism were not proprietary nuances of the West and should be available in all societies.238 She did, however, continue to see the world in gendered terms and felt that women anywhere in the world were best suited to work towards reform on issues concerning them, confiding

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237 S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Subject File # 8, Part II, NMML.
238 Pederson, Rathbone, 249.
to Amrit Kaur “Men all over the world are much the same.” Addressing the House of Commons in 1931, Rathbone stated the time for self-governance for India was approaching. She went on to point out:

> Only when the political question is settled will those who care for the real India be free to turn their attention to those ends to which constitution making is only the means, that of bringing about conditions in India which will secure the happiness and prosperity of the whole people, the common people.  

This statement demonstrated Rathbone’s realization that British women should not dictate to Indian women how to use their political power; instead, it was the role of British women to support Indian women in their quest for their fair share of power.

By 1931, Rathbone had accepted Indian feminist arguments that, though the accounts of the deplorable lives for some women in India presented in Mayo’s book may have been true, the conclusion that the trouble stemmed from the backwardness of the Indian people was inaccurate. Rathbone was ready to adapt her strategies to make her point that it was the British government in India who bore the blame for the continuation of the social problems facing women. She threatened in 1931 to adopt “Mayo tactics” and publish a sensationalist book of her own to shame the British government into action. Rathbone continued her agitation on the subject as noted in the May 12, 1933, report in *The Vote* (the publication of the Women’s Freedom League), which recounted that Rathbone challenged the Secretary of State for India, Sir Samuel Hoare, regarding the statistics from the recent census that showed a significant increase in the number of child marriages. Hoare replied to Rathbone, “I am aware of the figures cited by the hon.

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239 Eleanor Rathbone, 7/ELR/24, The Women’s Library, LSE.  
240 As quoted in Pederson, *Rathbone*, 245.  
Member. The questions of the marriage age and the age of consent are constantly under the consideration of the government of India, and I do not consider it necessary to give any directions on the subject. Rebuffed, Rathbone followed through on her threat to adopt Mayo’s tactics, and published in 1934, *Child Marriage: The Indian Minotaur, An Object Lesson From the Past to the Future*.

In her book, Rathbone agreed with Mayo’s depictions of the horrors of child marriage, but she broke with Mayo as to causality. She celebrated the work Indian women had done to end the practice, which is evidenced in the dedication page, which reads: “To all Indian women who have suffered from or are struggling to remedy the Evils discussed in this book [Italics mine].” In the 1st paragraph of her introduction, Rathbone wrote about the evil of child marriage and how Britain must “use its history as a warning of the frightful risks to which we are exposing Indian women if we give them in the new constitution of India no better means of self-protection than they had in the past, during the years of our dominion.” Continuing, she stated that the male British government in India kept the mandate to “’keep off the woman question’ as delicate ground likely to cause trouble and bring odium on the government,” but that, in contrast, “The grave evil of child marriage and the right of the state to take cognizance of it and intervene have been recognized by Indian administrators for over a century.” In other words, though the men in government wanted to avoid the issue of child marriage, Rathbone advocated it should remain a point of governmental responsibility. She noted

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242 “India: Child Marriages,” *The Vote*, 12 May, 1933, Rathbone Papers, 7ELR Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
that due to strong public outcry in favor of ending child marriage, the British government in India succumbed to the pressure, and forwarded Sir Harbilas Sarda’s bill to a committee headed by Sir Moropant Joshi for review. In praise, Rathbone detailed how, except for one British woman doctor, the Joshi committee was all-Indian and its membership included two judges and four lawyers.\footnote{Rathbone, \textit{Minotaur}, 21. Sir Moropant Joshi (1861-1962) was a distinguished lawyer and former Home Member of the Central Provinces.} Rathbone then outlined how this committee discovered that the issue of child marriage was more severe than previously thought, included Muslim practitioners instead of just Hindus, and called for legislation to end the practice.\footnote{Rathbone, \textit{Minotaur}, 22-23.} Rathbone then wrote about the issue of female suffrage, which we will deal with in another chapter, and she ended her book with praise for the industriousness of Indian women, calling on them to be the Theseus to kill the Indian Minotaur of child marriage.\footnote{Rathbone, \textit{Minotaur}, 101.}

Rathbone’s book received mixed reviews. On April 2, 1934, \textit{The Times} wrote that Rathbone believed “Nothing, or little is to be expected from Governments …therefore she pins her faith to the women, the chief sufferers, from the system of early marriage.” The review continued, “If Miss Rathbone’s controversial methods tend at times to jar, her sincerity of purpose is always manifest, and her little book will appeal to the reformer here and in India.”\footnote{“Child Marriage in India,” \textit{The Times}, 3 April 1934, Rathbone Papers, 7ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.} Thus, while the reviewer found Rathbone’s passion to be just, the author also thought her to be abrupt. The WIA publication in India, \textit{Stri Dharma}, wrote of the book:
It is a masterly exposition of the many factors that have made the Sarda Act a harmless and innocuous piece of ornamental legislation. The author has been most just in her criticisms to all who are concerned in this matter and she has not spared either the government or Indian society in the way in which she has tried to bring home to one and all their fare share of the responsibility in making this law…

The Indian feminist publication provided support for Rathbone’s book and found her treatment of all parties involved balanced. The Illustrated Weekly of India echoed Stri Dharma’s praise, writing that it was of “great use to all those reformers and well wishers of India.” The Times of India used the opportunity to publish a letter to the editor berating Gandhi for failing to take on “this piece of social reform of great urgency and magnitude,” illustrating that many perceived Indian feminists as leading the fight against child marriage, with Gandhi lagging behind. British feminist publications, too, viewed the book in a positive light. The Time and Tide reviewer wrote, “Her little book is earnest and restrained; it can and should be used to the utmost in a great cause. Her authorities, as she rightly says, are impregnable.” Continuing, they, too, linked the issue of child marriage to Indian independence when they wrote, “But does any one believe that the British government can embark upon a radical policy of social reconstruction? That must be the task of a self governing India.” So, while The Times found Rathbone’s book to be jarring, British and Indian feminists not only saw Rathbone as restrained, but also perceived the link between social reform and independence posited by Indian feminists.

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250 “Miss Rathbone and the Sarda Act,” Stri Dharma, May 1934, Rathbone Papers, 7ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
251 “The Indian Minotaur: The Effects of Child Marriage,” The Illustrated Weekly of India, 22 April 1934, Rathbone Papers, 7ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
252 “Readers’ Views: Social Evils in India-Suffering Inflicted Upon Girls,” Times of India, 5 May 1934, Rathbone Papers, 7ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
253 S. K. Radcliffe, Time and Tide, 26 May 1934, Rathbone Papers, 7ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
Rathbone used her book to the greatest possible effect, distributing free copies to Indian and British feminists, and to members of the governments in Britain and India. Sir Malcolm Hailey, Governor of the United Provinces, wrote to Rathbone after receiving her book. In his letter, Hailey stated, “I have been much moved by it, as indeed one is bound to be moved by the facts as you have stated them and by the deep feeling which lies behind what you have written.” He continued “I of course admit the charge you bring against us on page 15 of your introduction. We have all known the facts; but it is true that our knowledge had not had behind it the deep feeling which would impel us to action.” Hailey goes on to lament the governments inability to effectively influence the behavior of people under its rule, noting “Perhaps a more Indianized form of government could effect this; I hope that in some respects it will manage to do so; for if the social revolution is to come at all it must come from inside and not by imposed authority. Hailey’s statements were striking. As a high British government official in India, his admission of the failure of the government on a significant moral issue was significant. Additionally, his words proclaimed his own doubt that any but an Indian government would be able to effectively bring about the necessary change.

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254 Sir Malcolm Hailey, 16 April 1934, Rathbone Papers, 7ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE. Sir Malcolm Hailey (1872-1969) was a career British politician and administrator in the British government of India. The charges Hailey referenced on page 15 of Minotaur read, “take down some score or so of the innumerable books On India by those who have served her…Look up in the index words such as ‘women,’ ‘marriage,’ ‘purdah.’ You will find sometimes nothing, sometimes a few paragraphs or sentences paying conventional to missionary efforts, or to the recent uprising of the women’s movement… That is not the way men write of a subject that has ever occupied many anxious hours in an official day or been wrestled with in the wakeful hours of the night which they keep for their knottiest problems, or has set their hearts aflame and left scars on their conscience.”
Rathbone’s *Minotaur* helped repair her damaged relations with Indian feminists. Muthulakshmi Reddi wrote praises of the book, stating “The book ‘Child Marriage,’ one of the recent publications of Miss Rathbone, the English M.P. is an outspoken document of not only the horrors of child marriage in India, but also of the indifference and apathy of the administrators, both Indian and European, towards this evil.” Continuing, she makes a clear statement about the improved relationship by stating, “Miss Rathbone has undertaken this task out of her love for humanity and her feeling for her suffering Indian sisters.” Whereas Reddi had previously criticized Rathbone for not understanding the issues involved in trying to mobilize public support for the issue of child marriage, now Reddi was praising Rathbone for her bond with Indian women. In a private letter to Rathbone about the book, Reddi wrote “I will not misunderstand you now, as I have known you personally.” Amrit Kaur, too, wrote to Rathbone of the book “I do not see anything in it that should hurt the feelings of any Indian women.” Thus, Rathbone’s book ameliorated tensions and promoted future dialogue between Rathbone and Indian feminists.

Mayo’s *Mother India* initially influenced many British feminists to believe in the inherent moral failings of Hinduism, which made it impossible for Indians to be self-governing. In the end, it strengthened the Indian feminist movement, motivating Indian feminist resistance to the allegations presented. Their resistance led Indian feminists to initiate dialogue with their British sisters, strengthening ties between Indian and British feminists.

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255 Muthulakshmi Reddi, Untitled document, S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Subject File # 8, Part II, NMML.
256 Muthulakshmi Reddi, 29 March, 1934, Rathbone Papers, 7ELR, Box 1, The Women’s Library, LSE.
257 As quoted in Pederson, *Rathbone*, 259.
feminists. The depth of emotion surrounding the issue of child marriage, in concert with Mayo’s slander, helped Indian feminists convince British feminists, as well as some British governmental officials, of the need for effective child marriage legislation. Because of their decades long work on the issue of child marriage, Indian feminists were able to demonstrate the moral failure of the British government in India, which also provided an incentive for Indian nationalists to advocate for full Indian independence.

**Continued Efforts for Child Marriage Reform, 1929-1938**

Meanwhile, some government officials sought to weaken the Sarda Act further by issuing amendments to lower the age of consent. In response, Margaret Cousins wrote to the Viceroy of Delhi on behalf of the WIA, stating,

> Viceroy, Delhi. The Women’s Indian Association appeals to your Excellency to uphold the Sarda Act intact, disallow any amendments or change on any ground. Proposed amendments will nullify all expectations of social reformers especially of women who are the chief sufferers under present custom.\(^{258}\)

Cousins not only reminded the Viceroy of the large audience of women interested in the Act, but also of the audience of social reformers in general who held high expectations of the legislation. In a letter to Cousins, Reddi wrote that the Sarda Act was “ineffective,” but laid the blame initially on the Indian people, writing,

> We know that in the advanced countries health and moral reform always preceded the formation of public opinion in their favor as they were themselves educative factors. In this Presidency, we cannot blame the Government so much as the high caste people who do not sufficiently realize that all children irrespective of caste and creed need our care and

\(^{258}\) Margaret Cousins, S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers Subject File # 7, Efforts on the Part of Women’s Indian Association to Lend Maximum Support to the Harbilas Sarda’s Bill on Raising the Age of Marriage for Girls and Boys, NMML.
sympathy and in this matter of rescuing innocent children from the prospect of a dreadful life, they should rise above their communal and caste prejudices.\textsuperscript{259}

In this communication, Reddi placed immediate blame on the upper castes in India for the poor results of the Sarda Act; however, as we have seen, the issue of responsibility came fully back upon the British government in India and Britain. Rathbone initiated a letter writing campaign in 1933 requesting various women’s groups in Britain to call for changes to the Sarda Act. Writing to Florence Underwood of the need for support, she stated “If you could possibly stir up the Branches of the Freedom League to take action and to induce other organizations to take action, it would be most helpful.” She continued, writing “We know that in Lord Lothian’s opinion nothing will save the situation for Indian women but very strong expressions of public opinion both in this country and in India, and I am sure this is correct.”\textsuperscript{260} Rathbone acted to pressure the government to strengthen the law, and in doing so she was also able to use the issue as a unifying point for several of the British feminist groups.

Feminists in Britain and India knew domestic pressure on the British government to strengthen the Sarda Act would not be sufficient to force the change. On September 18, 1933, Corbett Ashby wrote to Amrit Kaur regarding the International Alliance for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship’s (IASEC) desire to have Indian women represented on the League of Nations Child Protection Committee and the Traffic In Women Committee. Ashby stated,

\textsuperscript{259} Muthulakshmi Reddi, Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Correspondence, Cousins, M. E. NMML.
\textsuperscript{260} Eleanor Rathbone, Rathbone Papers, 7ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
…it is not very easy (to influence nominations to these committees) except by direct pressure on your Government. The Alliance would be very willing indeed to address a letter to the Indian Government urging the appointment of women as its delegates if you consider it useful, and if we were definitely asked to do so by our affiliated Society, the Women’s Indian Association.  

Here is evidence of not just willingness by this group to pressure the British Government in India for the representation of Indian women within the LON, but also of the status afforded to the organized women’s groups in India, as Ashby referred to the WIA as its “affiliated Society.” The IASEC was not the only organization calling for representation for Indian women, by Indian women, in the LON. In its March 1934 newsletter, the Women’s International League (the British section of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom) wrote, concerning the issue of child marriage in India, that “International representation at the League of Nations is desired and demanded for an India woman elected by the Indian Women’s organizations to be included in the Government of India Delegation to Geneva is reiterated in no uncertain terms.”

Continuing, the newsletter stated, “The Child Marriage Restraint Act has been supported unanimously and the Government urged to enforce it more stringently and even amend it so as to make child marriage impossible.” This was a call for stricter enforcement and possible amendment of the Sarda Act. It was also a demand for representation of Indian women by an Indian woman not appointed by the government, but elected by the joint Indian women’s organizations.

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261 Margery Corbett Ashby, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur Papers, Correspondence with International Alliance of Women, NMML.
While international pressure for increased representation for Indian women grew, along with calls to strengthen the Sarda Act, high level activity continued in Britain to amend the Act. In July 1934, Lady Hartog, Lady Layton, and Eleanor Rathbone met with Lord Willingdon to discuss women’s issues in India.\textsuperscript{263} Per the memorandum of conversation of that meeting, “It was suggested that while better enforcement of the Sarda Act must depend upon an awakened public opinion, much more might be done by those in authority to help in the formation of public opinion.”\textsuperscript{264} This illustrated a meek acknowledgment of responsibility by Willingdon, and contained no real promise of action; thus, Rathbone turned back to the feminists in India. Rathbone offered to fund an Indian women’s group to deal specifically with the child marriage issue. In a letter of response to Rathbone’s offer dated September 13, 1934, Lakshmi Menon rebuffed Rathbone, stating that the majority of the AIWC and the chairwoman “…felt that we should not accept any help from abroad.” Though wounded by the rejection, Rathbone continued her work to strengthen the Sarda Act, contacting the barrister S. L. Polak with the idea of re-writing the legislation.

In the interim, the issue of child marriage gained even more interest among British feminist groups, providing a rallying point to bring together the fractious organizations. With the help of the Society of Friends in London, the AIWC established a liaison committee to develop closer ties with British feminist groups in January 1935.

\textsuperscript{263} Lady Hartog (1887-1954), married to sir Philip Joseph Hartog, wrote several books on India, as well as the biography of her husband. Lady Layton (1887-1959) was a Cambridge educated suffragist and politician. Lord Willingdon (1866-1941), also educated at Cambridge, was Viceroy of India in 1931.

\textsuperscript{264} Notes Of Points Made In An Interview Between His Excellency Lord Willingdon and Lady Hartog, Lady Layton, and Miss Eleanor Rathbone, July 1934, Rathbone Papers, 7/ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
Grace Lankester served as the committee’s head. The group issued a monthly newsletter concerning the Indian feminist movement. In its 3rd issue, Lankester wrote:

We are glad to report that this bulletin is now subscribed to by over 30 women’s organizations, besides a number of individuals. We are aware of a growing interest in the Indian Women’s Movement and a desire to understand their problems and hear of their work and we endeavor to give information in this Bulletin which is not otherwise easily attainable in this country.  

Here we see that over 30 women’s organizations were willing to pay the annual subscription fee to receive information about the feminist activities in India; interest in Indian feminist activities was growing in London. Further in the publication Lankester wrote

The enforced of the Sarda Act was pressed at many of the conferences in view of the fact that it is being ‘very flagrantly violated,’ and the Government was urged so to amend it as to make child marriage impossible, while all Constituencies were pressed to co-operate with the All India Sarda Act Committee, newly formed by the A.I.W.C.

The author assumes that her readers were familiar with the Sarda Act and thus offers no description, demonstrating that many women’s groups in Britain already had by now significant prior knowledge of issues concerning Indian feminism. As well, Lankester laid the responsibility for the violations of the Act upon the government of Britain, while the AIWC attempted to take centralized control of the issues surrounding the legislation. In the next month’s Bulletin, Lankester wrote about the annual meeting in Karachi, where

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the AIWC passed a resolution that it forwarded to the British government in India.

Lankester wrote:

The All India Women’s Conference urges the members of the Legislative Assembly to amend the Child Marriage Restraint Act in such a manner as to empower every first class Stipendiary Magistrate in British India to issue injunctions for stopping child marriages and also to make provisions for the care and custody of the child bride or bridegroom on the lines of the provisions in the Children’s Act.267

While initiating formal ties with British feminist groups, the AIWC continued to pursue direct action to influence the government in India. Rathbone, too, continued her work.

On January 17, 1935, Rathbone sent Polak a copy of the Sarda Act with notes on her perceptions as to its weaknesses.268 Less than a week later, Rathbone wrote to Polak again, announcing her intentions to send the strengthened bill to Narayan Malhar Joshi, the former head of the 1928 Age of Consent Committee to ask him to find a sponsor for the toughened bill. Polak engaged the help of former government barrister William Wallach to re-write the legislation. Though Rathbone offered to pay them for their time, both Polak and Wallach refused. Rathbone, still stinging from the AIWC rebuff of her offer to help finance a special committee to focus exclusively on the child marriage issue, bypassed the Indian feminist organizations, and wrote to Joshi

If it is introduced, I think it would be wiser for my name to be kept entirely out of it. Perhaps it would be better for you not to even mention that you got it from me to the Introducer, but you must be the judge of that. I suggest this because I think it might prejudice the Bill’s chances if it was supposed that it was engineered by English people. Also, as the All India Women’s Conference has set up a special Committee to deal with

268 Rathbone, Rathbone Papers, 7/ELR Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
the subject, I think it is just as well for me not to have any public action in the matter.\textsuperscript{269}

Rathbone chose to put progress on the issue of child marriage ahead of any possible personal gain or notoriety. She believed her standing with Indian feminists had improved but she also understood they may have resented by the work she was doing without their knowledge or through their leadership, thus demonstrating her continued sense of paternalism towards the Indian feminist groups.

Joshi replied to Rathbone on February 8\textsuperscript{th},

I cannot take any action except speaking to a few friends about the subject. I think we may be able to secure some headway to support this Bill. Mr. B. Das, who belongs to the Congress Party, has provisionally agreed but wants to examine the Bill himself.

Joshi also explained that the bill would face many difficulties from the outset, as there were already “too many Bills for this session.”\textsuperscript{270} Despite Joshi’s un-encouraging response, papers in India reported that same month on the new attempt to amend the Sarda Act. One paper reported, “A Bill to amend the Child Marriage Restraint Act with a view to make the law more effective has been given notice of by Mr. B. Das M.L.A., and permission of the Governor-General has been sought for its introduction into the Legislative Assembly.”\textsuperscript{271} The author of the article noted the current ineffectiveness of the law and outlined specifics as to how the Das Bill would strengthen it. Joshi wrote to Rathbone the day after the newspaper article, informing her that Das had agreed to sponsor her bill. Joshi never informed Das of the bill’s origin.

\textsuperscript{269} Rathbone, Rathbone Papers, 7/ELR Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
\textsuperscript{270} Narayan Malhar Joshi, Rathbone Papers, 7/ELR Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
\textsuperscript{271} “Sarda Act Amendment: Move to Make Law More Effective, Notice Given by Mr. B. Das. (Unfortunately the clipping did not include the name of the Indian paper, but did include the date, Feb. 2, 1935), Rathbone Papers, 7/ELR Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
Having sent the bill to Joshi too late for the winter legislative session, Rathbone pushed for its introduction in the fall. She continued to pressure the British government by writing to Joshi on February 20, 1935, requesting he keep her advised concerning Das’s plan to introduce the bill, so that she could “secure that the official bloc was not used against it.” She wrote to Joshi again on March 22, requesting a copy of the bill so that she could “try to interest Sir Samuel Hoare or Mr. Butler, or at least Sir John Megaw and other officials concerned with health matters, and try to persuade them to use their influence with the Viceroy to sanction its introduction and ensure at least the neutrality, or better still the support, of the official bloc.” Rathbone used all available contacts at her disposal to promote the passage of the bill. Joshi followed up by sending her a copy of the bill on April 15. That same week, Rathbone reached out to Lakshmi Menon of the AIWC, to ask if they planned any propaganda in favor of the bill. She wanted to determine the timing of the propaganda to be able to coordinated publicity efforts to coincide in London. On July 13, Menon replied to Rathbone, “As soon as I received your letter I sent a cable to the Secretary of State on behalf of my committee, requesting him to support the new clause.” She also noted that she had written Das as well, promising, “to organize meetings in support of the amendment.” Joshi wrote to Rathbone on September 29, to tell her that normally the bill would have had no chance of being introduced in the fall legislative session, but that “promoters of some social reform legislation approached the Government to find some government’s time for the formal

272 Rathbone, Rathbone Papers, 7/ELR Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
273 Rathbone, Rathbone Papers, 7/ELR Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
274 Rathbone, 18 April, 1935, Rathbone Papers, 7/ELR Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
275 Lakshmi Menon, Rathbone Papers, 7/ELR Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE. At this time, Menon was chair of the AIWC committee against child marriage.
introduction of the Bill.”  

As Rathbone worked behind the scenes, women in India continued to claim ownership of their issues, which was apparent from the 1935 AIWC conference address of Rustomji Faridoonji:

Women in India in one way have been more fortunate than their Western sisters: we have no suffragette question, and we want no sex war; the scope of our activities is not limited, and we should show, by real work for the welfare of others, that we are ready for the equality of status we deserve.

Here we have not only the claim of Indian women’s equality with men, but also an assertion of the character of the women’s movement in India as superior to the women’s movement in Britain. Faridoonji continued, noting that eight years prior:

…we followed up on our previous year’s decision, by a resolution deploiring the effect of early marriages on women’s education and demanding that the age of consent be raised to 16. A deputation was accordingly sent to H. E. the Viceroy to urge the desirability of appointing a Committee to enquire into the problem of child marriages. A committee was appointed, and on its recommendation the Child Marriage Restraint Act, better known as the Sarda Act, was passed.  

Faridoonji claimed full ownership of the work done to influence the government despite the significant efforts by British women to influence the government regarding the child marriage issue.

Women in India and Britain fought to keep the bill alive in 1936. Rathbone heard in May that the legislature had moved the Das Bill forward in proceedings. She wrote to the Indian women’s organizations that “…now is the time for the women’s organizations and everyone else who is interested in the matter to bring pressure to bear on the Provincial Governments so that they may give a favourable opinion on the Bill.”

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276 Joshi, Rathbone Papers, 7/ELR Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
Rathbone was politically sensitive while encouraging the Indian feminists in the action they were taking. She laid responsibility for the passage of the bill entirely on the Indians, writing:

I am afraid, however, it is a matter which will have to be worked entirely from inside India, as the authorities here are sure to refuse to interfere with a Bill already before the Assembly. But we will willingly do anything we can to influence British opinion...”

Rathbone, then, gave the appearance to her Indian counterparts of removing herself from the politics of the bill in Britain. Lakshmi Menon, writing for the AIWC responded to Rathbone that the problem was not simply legislative in nature, but that

...laws like the Sarda Act might remain in the statutes book without doing any good as long as people believe that ‘kanya dan’ [giving away a girl at age eight] is the proper thing to do. In fighting the custom of child marriage we are really face to face with a foolish and irrational belief which propaganda and education alone could combat.

Here Menon claims greater knowledge of the situation in India, and proposes that the problem is not just a legal one. Simultaneously in London, seeking to influence public opinion on child marriage in India, the British Commonwealth League planned a joint letter to the Times in support of the Das bill. Grace Lankester contacted Rathbone about the letter on behalf of the BCL, and she mentioned members of the BCL thought it best that Rathbone sign it. She also suggested additional signatories be the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Lothian, the Master of Balliol, Reverend W. Paton, Mrs. Corbett

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278 Eleanor Rathbone, 5 May 1935, Rathbone Papers, 7 ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.

279 Lakshmi Menon, 5 July, 1936, Rathbone Papers, 7 ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
Ashby, Dame Elizabeth Cadbury, and Lady Astor. While the BCL pursued its plans, Rathbone continued goading the AIWC to act. In November, for example, Rathbone wrote to Menon that the Indian women’s organizations needed to “ask for a deputation to the Viceroy, asking him either to give special facilities to the Bill, or that the Government might introduce a measure of their own.” The AIWC interacted with Rathbone, as we have seen, often taking issue with her assumptions and proposed methods.

While the AIWC was often at odds with Rathbone, it still continued to reach out to other British feminists. By December of 1936, the Bulletin of Indian Women’s Movement, formerly just published by the Liaison Group, now claimed publication by the Liaison group in conjunction with four other major British women’s organizations: the BCL, the SPG, the WFL, and the WIL. The Bulletin reported that month on the failure of the Das Bill, and attributed its failure to “obstructionists” in the Legislative Assembly.

Despite many setbacks, by 1937, many groups and individuals continued work in London and in India for a stronger child marriage restraint bill. The women’s movement in India proved to be a galvanizing factor helping bring more unity within the British women’s movement. In a remarkable show of harmony that included equality feminists, new feminists, Labour, Conservative, and Liberal politicians, the April 1937 edition of the Bulletin included a number of quotes praising the work of the Indian feminists. Notable British feminists, such as Margery Corbett-Ashby, Eleanor Rathbone, Irene

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280 Grace Lankester, 7 July, 1936, Rathbone Papers, 7 ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
281 Eleanor Rathbone, 26 November, 1936, Rathbone Papers, 7 ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
282 Bulletin of Indian Women’s Movement, December 1936, A.I.W.C. Papers, File #7, NMML.
Ward, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, and Ellen Wilkinson, were contributors. The *Bulletin* also continued reporting on child marriage in India, noting in July 1937 that authorities had tried case in Jullundur under the Sarda Act, but the result was only a paltry fine of Rs 10. The reporter noted that those in the marriage simply treated the expected fine as “part of the marriage expenses,” thus emphasizing again the ineffectiveness of the bill.

British and Indian feminist cooperation continued, as evidenced by the note Miliscent Shephard wrote to Dina Asana, the Organizing Secretary of the AIWC:

I do hope that when you discuss the program for the All India Women’s Conference in Nagpore, you will include a strong resolution in support of Mr. Das’s Amending Bill to the Child Marriage Restraint Act. I understand from reliable sources that the Central Government Officials are prepared to be sympathetic to this Bill…

Asana replied that she would put Shephard’s suggestion before the Standing Committee.

Asana also mentioned that AIWC translators had rendered Rathbone’s book, *The Indian Minotaur*, into Gujarati. This communication illustrates that while British feminists continued to support Indian feminists and make suggestions to them, the Indian feminists remained careful to take responsibility themselves, avoiding a subordinate role to their British sisters.

At the aforementioned Standing Committee meeting, members voted to invite Grace Lankester, head of the Liaison Committee, to attend their next annual meeting in

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283 *Bulletin of Indian Women’s Movement*, April 1937, A.I.W.C. Papers, File #7, NMML.
284 *Bulletin of Indian Women’s Movement*, July 1937, A.I.W.C. Papers, File #7, NMML.
285 Miliscent Shephard, 12 July, 1937, A.I.W.C. papers, Subject Files, File # 23, NMML.
286 Dina Asana, 17 July 1937, A.I.W.C. papers, Subject Files, File # 23, NMML.
The meeting was also the venue for the release of AIWC publication of a series of eight articles on various subjects concerning the Indian feminist platform. Chief among the issues discussed in the articles was child marriage. These actions illustrate the AIWC’s political maturity; they continued in their attempt to directly mold public opinion through publication, and in their continuation to cultivate the proper relationships with British feminists to their cause, while not allowing them to control Indian efforts.

The tenacity in the pursuit of their goals and the willingness of Indian feminists to pursue overseas relations on their own terms in order to garner support for their work produced significant results. On August 2, 1937, the Executive Committee of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom wrote to the AIWC:

> We send you from 19 countries represented in our conference our greetings and our good wishes for the further success of you wonderful work for the progress and freedom of your own people, which we follow with admiration. *We would say to you that we need your help and cooperation in our work* (italics mine) and that we believe especially that the path which you are treading in the practice of cooperation and understanding between diverse groups, in your deep knowledge of the contribution women can make in the public life of their community, you have a great contribution to make towards the solution of the tensions in the world today.\(^{288}\)

The women’s groups in India transcended enormous barriers of religion, caste, and class to advance their cause to change laws associated with child marriage. What they achieved in the public sphere of national and international politics through their political maturity and tenacity was astounding. To see, though, in an era ripe with ideas of scientific racism

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\(^{287}\) Minutes, A.I.W.C. Standing Committee Half Yearly Meeting, 31 July 1937, AIWC papers, Subject Files, File # 23, NMML.

\(^{288}\) Signature corrupted due to damaged file, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom Executive Committee, 2 August 1937, AIWC Papers, Subject Files, File # 23, NMML.
and eugenics, a women’s group representing 19 different countries, most of them European or neo-European heaping this kind of praise, and soliciting help from the Indian feminists was astonishing.

The October 1937 Bulletin continued its reports on the Das bill and the women’s efforts in campaigning for it, and mentioned derisively attempts to remove any language involving bigamy. On February 11, 1938, the Hindustan Times ran an article that quoted Sir Henry Craik as saying,

I have clearly analyzed the opinions on the Bill. There is a great deal of support in the country and outside it. I can assure the House that the Government would not be supporting the Bill unless it was convinced that a majority of people favored it.

The united front of Indian and British feminists had finally succeeded in moving the British government in India from a position of neutrality on the issue of child marriage to that of supporting the Das bill. Finally, Das re-introduced the bill during the winter session in 1938, with it passing. The Governor General gave it sanction on April 16 of the same year. Over a decade of unflagging work on behalf of the feminists in India not only secured passage of the legislation, but built a new alliance between Indian and British feminists, and provided a unifying point for the fractured British feminist groups. On April 18 1938, Lakshmi Menon wrote to thank Eleanor Rathbone for all her support, and told her that the authorities in India were already investigating the first case under the

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289 Bulletin of Indian Women’s Movement, October 1937, AIWC Papers, File #7, NMML.  
290 “Report of the Debate on Mr. Das’s Bill to Amend the Child Marriage Restraint Act,” Hindustan Times, 11 February 1938, Rathbone Papers, 7ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE. Sir Henry Craik (1876-1955) was governor of Punjab from 1938 to 1941.
new Das bill. Rathbone later wrote that it had been her “maternal instinct” that drove her to pursue enhancing the Child Marriage Restraint Act.

Conclusion

As we have seen, Indian attempts to force legislation on the matter of age of consent and child marriage began in the mid 19th century, with Indian men first leading the issue. As Indian feminists became more politically active, they then took over as the driving force surrounding child marriage legislation in the interwar era. Their initial forays into domestic politics in India on the issue proved to be a training ground, building for them skill sets needed to enter international politics, and prompting them, especially after Mayo’s publication of *Mother India*, to build relationships with feminists and feminist groups in London and globally as they entered into League of Nations politics.

Though some historians have, correctly in many regards, credited Gandhi with feminizing the Indian independence movement, we saw in this chapter that, regarding actual legislation on issues important to Indian feminists, he offered little more than publicity. Indian feminists and the three national feminist groups not only led the way in the push to end child marriage, they also developed their own ideological link of the issue of child marriage to the call for full Indian independence by using it as a demonstration of the moral failure of the British government. Though the final passage of the strengthened Child Marriage Restraint Act was the result of work by British and Indian feminists, the

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291 Lakshmi Menon, 18 April, 1938, Rathbone Papers, 7ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
292 Eleanor Rathbone, 24 June, 1938, Rathbone Papers, 7ELR, Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
Indian feminists refused to allow British feminists or western feminist ideology to supersede their own work and political agenda. As we will see in the next chapter, Indian feminists also pushed for inclusion in other areas of national and international politics, particularly with regard to the Dandy March, and the British Roundtable conferences.
Chapter 3

The Salt March to the Round Table: Civil Disobedience, Conciliation, and the Feminization of Gandhi, 1927-1932

Introduction

Indian Feminists had developed the skills needed for successful participation in both national and international politics by the close of the 1920’s. As well, Indian feminists had developed their own nationalist discourse for India centering on Indian moral superiority over the British government as seen in the issue of child marriage. As we will see in this chapter, while Gandhi gave voice to a view of women’s equality, in practice he imagined very different roles for men and women in the early part of the civil disobedience movement. Indian feminists proved able to transcend Gandhi’s ideas, change his thinking about the roles of women, and take their place as equals alongside men in the fight for Indian independence.

D. R. SarDesai argued that a “conscious sentiment of kinship” was foundational to any sense of nationalism. In that various segments of the population of India practiced 6 different religions, and different groups spoke at least 20 different indigenous languages, the British found it easy to keep a sense of kinship, or as Benedict Anderson stated, “imagined community,” from developing for a large portion of their Raj. Yet, the British also unintentionally sowed the seeds for a rising Indian nationalism. For educated Indians, the English language provided a unified means of communication. The railroad network, which began in 1853, and extensively increased after the 1857 rebellion, helped the British tighten their hold temporarily in India by making it easier to

move troops around the country, but it also provided fast and relatively inexpensive transportation for Indians themselves. The advent of rail brought an affordable postal system, also making it easier for educated Indians to communicate with each other. Also in 1857 came the founding of three major universities in Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta. The liberal education in these schools included study of the philosophical underpinnings of the American and French revolutions, as well as instruction on the growth of the democratic institution of Parliament in Britain triumphing over the monarchical power, also helping educated Indians develop their own ideas for national independence. Next, as mentioned, the INC, founded in 1885, had as its purpose the greater inclusion of Indians in the governmental process of India. British bureaucrat Allan Hume founded this body as what he thought to be a safety valve to reduce civil unrest, and the INC initially enjoyed the official support of the Viceroy for the first several years of its inception. As a result, with the unwitting help of the British, nationalist thought in India grew, so that by the outbreak of the Great War, the INC favored not just seeking greater Indian participation in government, but instead, sought full dominion status. In 1917, the British government installed Edwin Montagu as secretary of state of India. Montagu was a reformer, the first secretary of state for India to personally go to the subcontinent, and he referred to himself as an “Oriental.” In August of that year, Montagu further excited nationalist sentiment by announcing that the goal of British government in India was the “gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British

\[295\] StarDesai, India, 256.
\[296\] StarDesai, India, 262.
Not only would Britain violate this promise, but, as we have seen, in Amritsar and with its subsequent behavior, Britain provided Indian nationalists with the “hostile other” needed for them to shift from seeking greater participation in government, or even dominion status, to full independence from Britain.²⁹⁸

In this chapter, I argue that by the late 1920’s, with Indian nationalism fully aroused, Indian feminists defied convention and successfully inserted themselves into the Indian nationalist movement as equals with men. While Gandhi claimed to support the equality of women, and did provide a venue for their participation in the independence movement, I show that he initially worked to relegate them to a separate sphere of less active roles within the nationalist struggle. The Indian feminists were able to overcome this marginalization and assume their positions as equals with men in the nationalist movement. Next, I argue that with the advent of the Round Table discussions in London, Indian women and British men and women simultaneously perceived the need to form groups dedicated to the organized transmission of knowledge regarding the Indian nationalists goals between Indians and Britains. My final argument is that the interactions of Indian feminists with Gandhi pushed him to a greater feminization both of himself and of the independence movement. We begin by looking at competing ideas regarding the expansion of Indian participation in Indian governance.

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Simon Commission Versus Nehru Report, 1927-1930

Edwin Montagu’s 1917 declaration that the goal of the British in India was to lead the Indians to self-governance proved to be another delay tactic by Britain to avoid any substantive change in their rule of the sub-continent. In 1919, the British government in India passed the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms. These reforms, on the surface, appeared to allow Indians more participation in government under a new system called diarchy; however, central government control remained wholly under the British in New Delhi. While the British did extend some responsibilities for education and agriculture to Indians in the provinces, along with the responsibility of collecting the necessary taxes, even there, British governors reserved crucial functions such as maintaining law and order under their purview. Within the reforms was the promise of another review of Indian governance within another decade. 299

In 1927, members of the British government anticipated the statutory revision of the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms by two years, and they appointed a committee to study and recommend new reforms to the Indian constitution. The government expected gratitude by the Indian people for the action. Instead, they received ire and increased non-cooperation by Indian nationalists. Headed by Liberal Sir John Simon, the committee included no Indians, which gave Indian people the impression that the British government treated them as children incapable of discerning for themselves what was in their own best interest. 300 The INC immediately rejected the all-white committee. In addition, British women’s groups protested the all male membership of the commission. Under the auspices of Eleanor Rathbone, the British women’s groups issued a joint

299 Metcalf, Concise, 168.
300 Metcalf, Concise, 190.
memorandum demanding that a British woman be admitted to the commission as a “technical advisor.” The WIA issued a carefully worded, more inclusive protest against the commission’s exclusion of Indians, Indian women, and British women. Indian women’s groups also organized boycotts of British goods, most notably cloth, as well as pickets of liquor stores and government auctions to show their objection to the lack of Indian representation on the committee. These activities benefitted Indian feminism, in that they included women not just from the educated classes, but also middle class and peasant women, thus breaking down class barriers as all classes of women in India united against the British action. As the Simon Commission prepared to visit India, the INC took the step of drafting and, subsequently, releasing a proposed constitution for an independent India, called the Nehru Report, on August 10, 1928. The report, based on the constitutions of dominion status countries such as Australia and Canada, proposed a government with a strong federal core and universal adult suffrage, which was very similar to the constitution eventually adopted by India upon its independence (see appendix 1). The British government rejected the report, and as we will see, Gandhi initiated a new civil disobedience campaign beginning in March 1930 in protest. The British government responded by arresting the key leaders of the INC, all of them male. As a result, Indian feminists, including educated elites, members of the middle class, and peasants, by their own initiative, rose to fill the gaps left by the British imprisonment of

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303 The majority of the members of the Simon Commission had little to no experience with India. One of its members, however, Clement Atlee, would later be the Prime Minister of Britain when India gained its independence.
the INC’s leaders, securing for themselves a more active role in the push for independence. As Jawaharlal Nehru wrote:

Most of us menfolk were in prison. And then a remarkable thing happened. Our women cam to the front and took charge of the struggle. Women had always been there, of course, but now there was an avalanche of them, which took not only the British government but their own menfolk by surprise. Here were these women, women of the upper or middle classes, leading sheltered lives in their homes, peasant women, working class women, rich women, poor women, pouring out in their tens of thousands in defiance of government order and police Lathi… My father…disliked in his paternal and somewhat old-fashioned way, young women and old messing about in the streets under the hot sun of summer and coming into conflict with the police. But he realized the temper of the people and did not discourage anyone, not even his wife and daughters and daughters in law.304

Nehru’s surprise at the surge of women into the nationalist movement indicates that Indian women rose to fill the necessary roles by their own initiative. The actions of Simon Commission inadvertently served to advance Indian feminism by broadening the nationalist appeal from the feminist educated elites to include middle, working, and peasant class women. Finally, when the Simon Commission at long last issued its report in May of 1930 (almost a full two years after the release of the Nehru Report), they brought undeniable credence to the Indian women’s movement in the eyes of the British government, the Indian government, and the international political arena when it wrote, “The women’s movement in India holds the key to progress.”305 With this statement by the Simon Commission, any imperial proposals for a new constitution for India would have to deal with the question of the women in India and their representation.

The Seasoning of Gandhi: Feminist Demands for Inclusion from the Dandi Salt March to the Dharasana Assault, January-May, 1930

With the British government’s rejection of the Nehru report’s demand for immediate self-rule, the INC declared January 26, 1930 as India’s symbolic *Purna Swaraj*, or Independence Day. Some British feminists thought this declaration to be a mere act of “extremists in India,” and noted a list of reasons why the journey for Indian independence would be a long one, including the “necessity for devising a form of constitution adapted to the temperament of an eastern people.”  Many British feminists believed British governance in India to be a necessity for the welfare of the Indians in general, and Indian women in particular. Though the INC anticipated a new round of non-cooperation to begin as a show of nationalist support, instead of planning how this resistance movement would take place, it left it to Gandhi to choose the design of the opposition. Gandhi chose the representational Declaration of Independence as his time to announce his newest *satyagraha*, however, the press did not report Gandhi’s plan until February 5, and Gandhi made no effort to explain his position publicly until February 27. Gandhi selected the British salt monopoly in India, with its regressive tax, as the focus for his next protest. With a protest involving the British salt monopoly, he was able to wrap his call for national freedom with an insistence on an act that would also help the

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poorest in Indian society.\(^{309}\) Gandhi then publicly communicated his intention to lead a march to Dandi to break the British salt monopoly law in India in an open letter to Lord Irwin dated March 2. This letter included a series of demands, which, if met, would bring Gandhi to call off the march. Though Irwin hurried back to Delhi from a polo match to receive the letter, he did not give Gandhi the courtesy of a direct reply. Instead, Irwin had his private secretary dictate and send a note to Gandhi stating that he was sorry Gandhi was choosing to break the law.\(^{310}\) Gandhi anticipated the British would not respond peacefully. He compared his anticipation of their reaction to that of General Dyer at Amritsar, and stated, “Many lives may be lost in the cause, I am quite prepared for that.”\(^{311}\) Gandhi’s response showed his concern for his personal safety and the safety of those with him, and showed the strength of his resolve in his choice to go forward with what he now called the salt satyagraha.

Though dismissive of Gandhi regarding his correspondence with him, Irwin was deeply concerned about Gandhi’s plans. Irwin noted that he believed Gandhi was hoping the government would arrest him, which he “naturally looks for bringing it (his independence movement) into greater popularity.” Irwin also expressed concern that Gandhi continued to “make considerable efforts to get Moslems into his movement, and a good many of those who are working to the same end are endeavoring to persuade them to adopt anti-government courses by playing on their feelings over the Child Marriage Act.” Here we see not just that Irwin was concerned that Gandhi might be able to bridge


\(^{310}\) Lelyveld, *Great Soul*, 203

\(^{311}\) Interview of Gandhi by Katherine Taylor prior to the Salt March, Temp MSS 4A/12/1 – Katherine Taylor’s account of a visit to Gandhi, 1930, London, Society of Friends Archive.
the Muslim/Hindu gap, but also, interestingly, a realization that domestic agitation against child marriage was a direct challenge to British authority in India. Finally, though many have credited Irwin with piousness, especially regarding Gandhi, in this same letter Irwin revealed his true character noting of Gandhi and the march, “I was always told that his blood pressure is dangerous and his heart none to good and I was also told a few days ago that his horoscope predicts that he will die this year and that this is the explanation of this desperate throw. It would be a very happy solution.” (Italics mine)\footnote{Private letter from Lord Irwin to Mr. Wedgewood Benn, Dated March 26, 1930, British Library, File IOR/PO/6/16 Correspondence with Viceroy Regarding Gandhi, 15 Oct 1924-Nov 1930.} In this single letter Irwin revealed he was not the confident and compassionate governor of India he wanted to appear to be. Instead, he exposed his worry about the British government’s ability to keep different religious factions in India from joining, and his wish for the death of the one person who seemed to hold the potential ability to unify the differing factions within the country.

Gandhi’s plan was simple: he would march from dawn to dusk, with his hand-picked band of followers from his ashram in Ahmedabad 240 miles to the coastal town of Dandi where he would harvest salt in legal defiance of the British monopoly. Regarding Gandhi’s plan, many British feminists continued to see the push for Indian independence as unrealistic. \textit{Time and Tide} noted of the proposed march:

> The Indian play proceeds according to the stage directions of Mr. Gandhi; but the time is drawing very near when we shall see finally whether this last effort of the Mahatma’s is going to turn into a farcical comedy or a grim tragedy. To date it contains all the elements of a farce.\footnote{“What Next in India? Gandhi Versus the Government of India: The Princes and the Politicians,” \textit{Time and Tide: An Independent Non-Party Weekly Review}, March 7, 1930, 296.}
British feminists were not alone in their opinion; others found the idea of the salt march laughable. Gandhi planned the beginning day of the salt *satyagraha* for March 12, in remembrance of the first day of National Week, which originated when Gandhi had announced his *hartal* against the hated Rowlatt acts in 1919. This *hartal* was what had led up to the civil disobedience that prompted the British to act out in the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh.\(^{314}\) It must be noted that the salt march was not the entirety of the civil disobedience campaign, which included pickets of liquor stores, a boycott of British goods, especially cloth, etc. The march was cornerstone of the campaign for Gandhi, however.

Many have praised Gandhi for his genius in choosing the salt march as an act that others could easily replicate in symbolic fashion as a “‘come, join me’ call for recruitment” for the masses in India.\(^{315}\) While the march may have been a call to the male masses in India to join Gandhi, this was not the case for women. Though Gandhi wanted women to participate in the broader civil disobedience campaign, especially regarding picketing liquor stores and spinning cloth, he specifically wanted women excluded from the march and from the salt *satyagraha* altogether, at least at its inception. One scholar described Gandhi’s exclusion of women from the march as a decision based on his “delicate sense of chivalry,” to protect them from the harshness of the physical conditions they would have to endure in the dusk to dawn march.\(^{316}\) This, however, was not the case. Though, as previously noted, Gandhi lauded femininity as superior to masculinity, and his ideas towards women would continue to change, at this point in his life, Gandhi still

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believed firmly in the idea of separate spheres for men and women. To Gandhi, the woman’s place centered in the home (though he despised purdah), with her first duty to her husband, then to his family, and then to her country. The idea of women transcending the constraints imposed upon them by the patriarchal upper caste Indian norms of Gandhi’s upbringing did not, at this time, appeal to him. Indeed, Gandhi berated women’s desires to participate in the salt satyagraha. He referred to “the impatience of some sisters to join in the good fight,” and their activity in doing so was to “change a pound for a penny.” Instead, he desired they donate their jewelry and, as mentioned, heed to the call for picketing of liquor stores and cloth shops.

Indian women, however, demanded inclusion in the salt satyagraha, and this was not the first time they had vocally demanded greater inclusion and recognition in the nationalist struggle. In 1929, Muthulakshmi Reddi wrote to Gandhi insisting that the INC work to “liberate their women from the servile bondage to which they are subject, so that they may develop to their full physical, mental, moral, and spiritual height,” so that they could then “be an example of courage and wisdom…” Thus, even prior to the salt satyagraha, Indian feminists demanded greater inclusion in nationalist politics. Though Gandhi opened no doors for women to participate in the salt satyagraha, by their sheer collective determination, Indian feminists forced their way in. Reddi, again confronting Gandhi, demanded inclusion for women in the march, only to be told by him that women

would “complicate things.”

Reddi argued that the women of India were “not satisfied with this explanation, and have protested against their arbitrary exclusion when they are, many of them, just as full of health, and patriotic self sacrifices as their marching brothers.” She pointed out that Gandhi had left the upkeep of his ashram entirely in the care of women, and that “this division of sexes in a non-violent campaign seems to us unnatural, and against all the awakened consciousness of modern womanhood.” Reddi argued that Indian women were just as healthy and as equal in nationalistic passionate as the Indian men, that given the non-violent nature of the struggle, women should be included, and that the lack of inclusion by Gandhi was an affront to the thinking women of India. Thus, we see that Gandhi was not opening the door for women’s participation so much as the educated elite women in India were demanding it. Other feminist voices demanded inclusion as well. Miss J. Kabral wrote to Gandhi of the need to include women in the salt march noting, “Women who bring life into the world are the greatest haters of bloodshed, for life is too precious to them. Give the women a chance therefore to show what they can do.” Here Kabral entreats Gandhi to consider women as central to the non-violent movement because they are lovers of life. Men, too, pleaded with Gandhi to allow women into the march. Bhupendra Marayen Sen Gupta wrote to Gandhi regarding the march that he knew “hundreds of trained workers who will rally around our

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320 As quoted in Muthulakshmi Reddi’s speech, “The Part Played by the Women’s Indian Association in the Salt Satyagraha Movement and After,” S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Speeches & Writings, Vol. I, Part II, NMML.
322 As quoted in Dalton, Mahatma, 98.
non-violent banner. Women are anxious to join.”323 It was not just women, then, who saw the problem in Gandhi’s reasoning of keeping women out of the salt march. Some men understood this lack of logic in Gandhi’s thinking, and acted as advocates for the women. Gandhi, however, remained firm in his belief women should not march. While many, then, credit Gandhi for the genius of his march as being a collective invitation for the populace of India to join in the nationalist struggle, he was clearly not universally inclusive. Gandhi’s call for the populace of India to join the fight for independence via the salt march was not equal. He saw different roles for men and women, with men to be included in the actual march, and women to be excluded, and relegated to tasks that fit more with his chauvinistic view of a woman’s place as dealing with issues of the home as opposed to the public sphere.

Against Gandhi’s wishes, women entered the march. As the Bombay Chronicle noted, women along the route “assembled in thousands” to join in the satyagraha.324 Sir Frederick Sykes, governor of Bombay from 1928-1931, noted in his autobiography of the salt satyagraha, “Most remarkable of all was the attitude of the women. Many Indian ladies of good family and high intellectual attainments volunteered to assist in picketing and salt making (italics mine).”325 Manmohini Zutshi Sahgal, Indian feminist nationalist and close friend of Jawaharlal Nehru, called the salt satyagraha the “biggest movement in the annals of any slave country of the world.” She went on to bemoan that, living inland, her family could not think of how to participate in the movement directly. The decision they and the other insurgents in Lahore made was to take water from the river

323 As quoted in Dalton, Mahatma, 98.
Ravi, boil it down, and declare any sediment that remained as “salt.” She described how everyone jostled for position to watch the water boil, while she and her mother, who were included as the leaders of the movement in the city, stood by the stove until all that was left of the water was the sediment.\textsuperscript{326} Sahgal’s actions, and her leadership in the Lahore attempt to participate in the salt satyagraha, demonstrate that Gandhi’s desires and instructions could not keep Indian feminists from participating, directly or symbolically, in the march. In Dandi, on the morning of April 6, 1930, Gandhi, in defiance of British law, stooped down to harvest a bit of salt. Thousands of Indian feminist nationalists, in disobedience to Gandhi’s wishes, joined him. Sarojini Naidu, the feminist poet, standing by Gandhi’s side at that moment of rebellion against British law, exclaimed “Hail, Deliverer,” with Gandhi’s successful defiance of Britain.\textsuperscript{327} Still, Gandhi resisted the inclusion of women in the salt satyagraha. On April 15, in a speech at Umber, Gandhi said, “Women ought not to take part alongside of men in defense of salt pans…This is men’s fight so long as the Government will confine their attention to men.”\textsuperscript{328} To say that Gandhi saw women as equal to men, then, would be to say that the “separate but equal” laws in the old South in the US were not discriminatory. Gandhi clearly had different spheres in mind for women and men. While Indian feminist participation in the salt satyagraha did not instantly change Gandhi’s understanding of the passion, drive, and abilities of the Indian feminist nationalists, their participation did hold significant sway in India and abroad.

\textsuperscript{327} As quoted in Lelyveld, \textit{Great Soul}, 204.
\textsuperscript{328} M.K. Gandhi, as quoted in Weber, \textit{Salt}, 424.
Gandhi’s prestige within the Indian nationalist movement reached a pinnacle at the conclusion of the march. The peaceful satyagraha had damaged the Raj and the perception of the British rule in India around the world. Core to the rise in Gandhi’s standing and the decline in the global impression of Britain’s rule in India was the participation, very much against Gandhi’s will, of the Indian feminist nationalists who had pressed their way into the salt satyagraha. Indeed, it was the purposeful actions of Indian feminists that gave traction to the international awareness of the salt satyagraha. As Muthulakshmi Reddi noted of the work by the WIA during the salt march,

…the Association (WIA) held frequent protest meetings against the insults and ill-treatment of the political prisoners, particularly women, and sent up resolutions not only to the Government but also to other international associations of women in other countries such as England and America to create world opinion in favour of India’s struggle for self-government.

Reddi continued, writing

The Women’s Indian Association had a very active branch in London during this period under the Chairmanship of Smt. Ramashwari Nehru who created a strong opinion by her active and intelligent propaganda in favour of Indian women’s demand for self-Government….The representatives of the Women’s Indian Association such as Mrs Cousins and Ramala Devi Chattopadyayaya who travelled both in the East and West did much to educate the world opinion about the real political situation in India and peoples desire to secure self-Government for India at any cost especially against Miss Mayo’s false propaganda against the interests of Indian people. 150 to 200 meetings were held by these representatives throughout the world.

We see here, through Reddi’s writing, that Indian feminists not only violated Gandhi’s directives and participated in the salt march, but that their self-directed actions were

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essential for reaching beyond the borders of India to enhance the international understanding of the movement.

Publications overseas give credence to Reddi’s claim, as the *New York Times* gave extensive voice to Naidu’s interpretation of the salt march five times in May, 1930 alone, including how she christened herself the new Indian “Joan of Arc.”331 The press in Australia, too, gave close coverage to Naidu’s ambassadorial role regarding the salt march, writing not just of the extensive women’s participation in the *satyagraha*, but also calling Naidu “Gandhi’s Deputy.”332 In June 1930, *Stri Dharma* also wrote of women’s participation in the *satyagraha*, going so far as to call it “A Women’s War:”

Thus it was inevitable that Srimati RukmaiLakshmipath of Madras, the first Teluga Brahmin Graduate in Arts, should be the first woman imprisoned, that Sarojini Naidu, the poetess and orator and peacemaker of India, it’s ambassadress to three continents, should be the leader of the biggest attack on the salt objective, that Kamaladevi the brilliant organizing secretary of the All India Women’s Conference, which united women of all castes, races and communities…are now acclaimed “Dictator.”

The article continued by noting the support given their movement by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, and called out, “Women all over the world! Pray that England may let go of the grip of *force majeure* and extend the hand of congratulations to its ward which has attained its majority…”333 The organized feminists in India clearly initiated their own contribution in the struggle for Indian Independence, and understood their role in increasing international awareness of the fight. The organized participation by women in the salt *satyagraha* confounded the government in


India, which issued at first the mandate that “in no case should women volunteers be handled or searched for salt; different arrangements are necessary in their case.” Later, in a January 1931 meeting of British police chiefs held in New Delhi, authorities decided that the police no longer had the luxury of extending chivalry to women protesters because their numbers had increased so substantially. The government, the world, and Gandhi began to take notice of women’s organized participation in the movement, and through the process Gandhi came to encourage, albeit unevenly, women’s increased participation in the swaraj movement.

Gandhi’s inclusion of women and his own feminization did not follow a linear path. In fact, there were significant times when he regressed. However, with the successful culmination of the salt march, and the forcefulness with which women of all socioeconomic levels had pushed their way in to participate, even to the degree that Sarojini Naidu stood by his side at the moment of the culmination of Gandhi’s civil disobedience, and the international attention brought to the movement by the self-directed action of the Indian feminists, Gandhi had to take note. On May 4, 1930, the British government in India arrested Gandhi. Gandhi had announced his much more aggressive plan to raid the Dharasana Salt Works in Gujarat just days before. With his arrest, Gandhi had many options of individuals to place in charge of the ongoing salt satyagraha. Jawaharlal Nehru would have been an obvious choice, as would have Muhammad Ali Jinnah because Gandhi was desperately trying to court increased Muslim participation in the nationalist movement and Muslim unity with the INC. Gandhi overlooked a host of experienced men, however, and placed Sarojini Naidu as the head of the ongoing planned

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334 Home Poll. File # 257/IV.1930, as quoted in Dalton, Mahatma, 129.
raid on the Dharasana Salt Works. His choice of a woman to lead was a significant change from his position at Umber just a few weeks earlier. It is important to note though, that not only was this a change for Gandhi, this was also a change for Sarojini Naidu. As one of the most influential feminist leaders in India, Naidu had given a speech in 1921 to a group of women in which she emphasized how important it was for women to maintain traditional feminine models.\footnote{Gail Minault, as quoted in Taneja, \textit{Women}, 71.} When asked in May of 1930 why she changed her position on the role of women, Naidu responded “The time has come in my opinion when women can no longer seek immunity behind the shelter of their sex, but must share equally with their men comrades all the perils and sacrifices for the liberation of their country.”\footnote{As quoted in Taneja, \textit{Women}, 128.} We see here that growth in understanding issues of equality was both needed, and took place, across gender lines, as Naidu also grew to embrace women entering the public sphere.

With Gandhi’s recommendation of Naidu as the leader of the raid on the Dharasana Salt Works, she took the imprisoned leader’s place as the field marshal for the ongoing nationalist struggle.\footnote{Lelyveld, \textit{Great Soul}, 205.} Naidu chose to be more than a mere figurehead, and recruited over 2,500 individuals to join her in the upcoming raid. American journalist Webb Miller wrote that after insurgents informed him of the planned raid, he sought to make his way up to Dharasana, which was 150 miles north of Bombay. The nationalists informed him that Naidu was the only one who could arrange transportation for him from the nearest city. Unfortunately, the government intercepted Miller’s telegram and un成功fully attempted to block his trip to report on the raid. As he travelled, Indian
nationalists mistook Miller for a British official, resulting in hostile treatment by the nationalist crowd before they took him to see Naidu. When she learned of his identity, she “explained that she was busy martiaing her forces for the demonstration against the salt pans,” and would talk with him later. Miller described her commanding presence; she spoke with such authority that Miller did not question that those surrounding them were indeed her forces. Miller reported Naidu was clearly well educated and spoke fluent English. He recorded how Naidu then called for prayer before beginning the march, led the prayer herself, and then exhorted the marchers, “Gandhi’s body is in jail but his soul is with you. India’s prestige is in your hands. You must not use any violence under any circumstances. You will be beaten, but you must not resist; you must not even raise a hand to ward off blows.”339 The crowd cheered as Naidu ended her speech, and the march began.

The participants marched in silence until, as they neared the salt factory, they echoed the cries of their fallen comrades from the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, “Inquilib Zindabaad.” (Long Live the Revolution)340 None of the marchers questioned Naidu’s authority, and as the British police beat the marchers over their heads with steal tipped clubs called lathis, Naidu was able to keep the freedom fighters from returning the blows. Out of frustration, the police began to kick the participants in their groins and stomachs. The march continued on, though the number of wounded needing treatment quickly exhausted the supply of stretchers. The British warned Miller to stay away from the crowd because they (the police) were preparing to fire into the throng. Miller wrote that

340 As quoted in Miller, No Peace, 169.
he then went to visit Naidu, and found her directing her sub-leaders to keep the crowds from engaging the police in any way. At that moment, a British officer put his hand on Naidu’s shoulder, informing her she was under arrest. According to Miller, Naidu haughtily shook his hand from her, and stated, “I’ll come, but don’t touch me.”341 The crowd then cheered her wildly as she strode out of her own accord, officer’s hand removed, and proceeded to the barbed wire stockade to await her imprisonment.342 The British government sent Naidu, as they had many other Indian feminists during the time of the salt march, to jail. When queried about the role of women in the civil disobedience movement, especially the salt march, after they had so forcefully inserted themselves against his wishes, Gandhi said, “The awakening of our women has helped mightily to awaken India. We cannot achieve freedom without them.” When further pressed as to the cause of the emergence of the newly vitalized women’s movement, Gandhi claimed no credit for himself, but instead said, “It can only be the work of God. Certainly God is with us in this struggle.”343 Previously Gandhi had provided opportunities for women to participate in the non-violent struggle for freedom, and though he had resisted their active participation in the salt satyagraha, Gandhi now acknowledged that the women of India, alongside men, were key to Indian independence.

The British government arrested approximately 90,000 men and women during the duration of the salt satyagraha, and placed many of them in jail. At the end of the satyagraha, Muthulakshmi Reddi wrote, “We found last year that women in India, in many instances surpassed their brothers in sufferings and the two played a noble part in

341 As quoted in Miller, No Peace, 171.
342 Miller, No Peace, 166-171.
the campaign. For, the idea of self-suffering became contagious and we embarked upon
amazing acts of self-denial.”\textsuperscript{344} Though not bidden by Gandhi to join the independence
movement as equals with men, Indian feminists inserted themselves directly into the
center of the struggle and undeniably earned equivalency with their male counterparts.
By the end of the salt \textit{satyagraha}, Indian women, from the rural poor to the urban
wealthy, were indelibly linked to the nationalist cause.\textsuperscript{345} The government in India and
groups around the globe took notice of the new feminist presence in the Indian
independence movement. Gandhi had not opened this door for them, as other scholars
have claimed. The Indian feminists forced their own inclusion, and their presence often
had greater effectiveness than their male counterparts could have achieved alone. Gandhi
saw the effectiveness the women achieved in the salt \textit{satyagraha} as well as how they rose
to fill the leadership roles as the British government arrested the men in the INC, and he
vowed from then forward to make sure they remained an integral part of the
revolution.\textsuperscript{346}

\textbf{Nights and Days of the Round Table}

At the beginning of the salt march, the British government and a large percentage
of the British population saw Gandhi’s plan as a farce. In fact, however, the march
proved to be one of Gandhi’s greatest non-violent success stories. In counter to Gandhi’s
civil disobedience campaign, in 1930, with great ceremony, the Ramsey MacDonald

\textsuperscript{344} Muthulakshmi Reddi, “The Part Played by the Women’s Indian Association in the Salt
Satyagraha Movement and After,” S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Speeches & Writings,
Vol. I, Part II, NMML.
\textsuperscript{345} Taneja, \textit{Women}, 53-54.
\textsuperscript{346} Shirer, \textit{Gandhi}, 81.
government offered its idea for the furtherance of deciding on a new constitution for India: a Round Table discussion, with delegates from India and Britain meeting together to work out the details for effective governance in India. Where the salt march was simple, the Round Table discussions would be complex. Where the salt march included the poor and all parts of society, the Round Table discussions were elitist. Where the salt march succeeded wildly beyond what anyone expected, the Round Table discussions would fail.

The hope was that a new idea for Indian constitutional reform would arise from the discussions. On the surface, the idea looked good; however, the British government immediately manipulated who could attend in order to keep the bulk of the attendees in their favor. The INC boycotted the first conference, and many of the leaders were already in jail due to their participation in the civil disobedience campaign associated with the salt march. Instead, the British government moved to court the independent princes in India. The goal was to bring the elites into closer union with Britain.\textsuperscript{347} As representatives chosen to attend the Round Table, The British hoped these princes, who feared a strong central government in India dominated by the INC, would play to Britain’s desire to keep their control over India.\textsuperscript{348} The government handpicked other delegates as well, but without any representational concession as to the size of the population groups they represented.

Gandhi and the INC leadership immediately recognized the British government’s motives surrounding the Round Table conferences, and Gandhi wrote to Irwin on behalf

\textsuperscript{347} Metcalf and Metcalf, \textit{Concise}, 193.
of the INC to announce their boycott of the meeting. Gandhi’s noted reasons were the excessive taxation of the people of India, and Irwin’s disproportionate salary compared to that of the average Indian. Gandhi stated directly that “revenue and expenditure must both be radically reduced which means transformation of the scheme of government, and that transformation is impossible without independence.”349 By the time of the announcement of the Round Table meetings, Gandhi and the INC rejected anything but complete independence from Britain.

The Round Table talks were not, in actuality, about equality or independence for India, but about power, and the British government showed that. Viceroy Irwin chose all delegates from India to either side with Britain, or be so contentious as to bolster the British argument that their presence was needed in India to maintain the peace. Even Figure 1

349 Telegram, recipient unknown, from Viceroy Irwin, dated 5 March, 1930, File IOR/PO/6/16 Correspondence with Viceroy Regarding Gandhi, 15 Oct 1924-08 Nov. 1930, British Library.
the meals were an exhibition of British power. The menu shown in Figure 1 is for the celebration of the arrival of the delegates for the 2\textsuperscript{nd} round table meeting. “Consomme Irwin” named after the Viceroy, Velouete Reform, or “Velvety Reform,” next. Note that the last dinner item listed before the desserts was “Curries Varies de l’Indie,” or “Various Indian Curries.” The menu order and plate names held meaning, praising not only British rule, but also the current British rulers, and relegating Indians to a lesser position. The price per plate for the meal was between $600-$750 per delegate in today’s dollars, and this was during the Great Depression.\textsuperscript{351} The exorbitant costs and nature of the meal was a message to the delegates about who had the resources, and who did not. It is also important to understand that most consommé is veal or beef-based. There are some recipes for chicken consommé, but whatever the base stock, all are clarified using gelatin

\textsuperscript{350} 7 KDC/K/07/01-03 Box FL Dame Kathleen Courtney Papers, The Women’s Library, LSE.

\textsuperscript{351} Special Thanks to my good friend Suzy Bergman, Culinary Institute of America graduate, Chef, and Sommelier, for researching the costs of the wines, aperitifs, and foods served.
made from the hooves of horses or cows. Thus, the consumption of the soup was an anathema to a Hindu, and its presence on the menu was an insult. The meal ignored the sensitivities of a significant portion of the representatives and favored the tastes of the British delegates over those of the Indians.

Though women comprised a full 50% of the population of India, the British government included women representatives to the first Round Table discussions as an afterthought. Against the protests of many Indian feminist nationalists, the British government invited Begum Shah Nawaz and Radhabai Subbarayan to attend the first Round Table conference as the sole representatives for all of India’s women. The government chose them due to their stances regarding accepting only limited franchise for women. At the 2nd Round Table, the government desired to restrict Indian women’s participation even further. The Secretary of State, in a telegram to the Viceroy, noted of women’s attendance in the upcoming Round Table “It will be enough if their representatives are allowed to act as delegates while the subjects with which they are specially concerned are under discussion. For that limited purpose they would have the same status as other delegates.” Rajkumari Amrit Kaur noted that as soon as the announcement was made as to the 2nd round table talks, “women’s organizations put forward their claim to being represented on it by women of their own choice.” The government again, though, hand picked the delegates for the 2nd Round Table to either

352 Kumar, Doing, 81.
353 Telegraph from the Secretary of State to the Viceroy, 21 October 1932, IOR/L/PO/6/81 India Round Table Conference: Secretariat of British India Delegation, 1932, The British Library.
side with them or be so combative as to bolster the British argument that India remained too divided for self rule. This time, the Viceroy wanted Rajkumari Amrit Kaur to serve as the representative for women. He thought that because Kaur was a Christian, she would be much more accepting of the British position.\footnote{Telegram from Viceroy, 22 October, 1932, recipient unknown, IOR/L/PO/6/81 India Round Table Conference: Secretariat of British India Delegation, 1932, The British Library.} Kaur refused the invitation, and Sarojini Naidu, Begum Shah Nawaz, and Radhabai Subbarayan served as the representatives for all Indian women. I will write much more extensively about the Round Table discussions in the next chapter, especially with regard to the issue of women’s franchise. For this chapter my focus is on two issues: how the Round Table conferences spurred the need for more formal communication between Indian delegates and the British, and how the divide between Gandhi and other conference attendees on designated seats for special sectors of the population led Gandhi to initiate one of his famous fasts.

**Towards Purposeful Communication: The Formation of the India Conciliation Group**

In May of 1930, with the announcement of the Round Table talks, and the obvious hostility of the INC to them, a member of the Society of Friends, Carl Heath, met at the India office with Wedgewood Benn, Secretary of State for India from 1929 through 1931, with the desire to help bridge the gap between the INC and the British government. Benn wrote to his friend, Joan Fry that he left the meeting “feeling anything but warmly
encouraged.” Heath described the British governance in India as nothing more than moving “from coercion act to coercion act,” adding that Benn was “always more and more aggrieved that our good intentions are treated to increasing hatred and violence.” Heath’s solution was to bypass the British government in an attempt to bring the desires of the Indian people to public attention in Britain. He continued, “I somehow come back to my ‘Conciliation’ – because unless the point of healing can be reached the utter lack of affection and confidence makes any declaration about Dominion Status impossible on the one hand, unless the other.” Concluding, Heath wrote:

Can the Society of Friends really do something? It hasn’t even thought of saying a Mass or two for the intent of this concern! But it might begin if we, the deputation, issued something like a stern call. And there is something that might be done with the “Christians” in England.

Heath’s letter provides more than just a glimpse into how some thinking individuals in Britain perceived British rule in India. It also shows how some understood the need to go around the government in order to find the truth about India, and illustrated how some had the courage to do so.

The resolve shown by Heath and Fry netted results as a group from the Society of Friends began correspondence with Gandhi about starting an assemblage to help inform the British public about matters in India. At the 2nd Round Table talks, Gandhi’s friend, Anglican cleric C.F. Andrews, introduced Gandhi to Agatha Harrison. Gandhi was so

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356 Joan Fry, member of the Society of Friends, was a social reformer and relief worker. After Germany’s surrender in WWI, Fry and three other Quaker friends organized aid to bypass the Allied blockade of Germany and get food in to the starving. The efforts of Fry and her team were so successful that, counter to the intense distrust of the Germans towards the British, the Germans coined a new word for charity called “Qackern.” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, [http://www.oxforddnb.com/libraries.colorado.edu/view/article/38522](http://www.oxforddnb.com/libraries.colorado.edu/view/article/38522), January 1, 2016.

impressed with her that he arranged for full-time funding for her to serve as the key mediator to work toward a “mutual understanding between India and Britain.” Harrison has noted of the event, “Often I have had to make a decision and not know which way to turn. This time I knew at once what was the thing to do, and found myself saying to him that I would do it.” This shows the passion with which Harrison felt about seeing that communications between Indian nationalists and British subjects was accurate and unhindered by the government. The India Conciliation Group asked Harrison to serve as their Honorary Secretary shortly thereafter, which she agreed to do. In December of 1931, Agatha Harrison distilled correspondence with Gandhi in a memorandum of conversation to Carl Heath, Horace Alexander, Percy Bartlett, Maude Roydan, Joan Fry, and Edith Pye. Gandhi had written saying that he had “found plenty of goodwill in this country, but what was almost an impossible barrier of colossal ignorance to the situation in India.” He agreed on the need for a group of like-minded men and women to travel to India. Such individuals had to be those who “were in the habit of sifting truth from untruth.” He then went on to note, “in view of the miraculous awakening of women, it was imperative that women should be a part of this group.” Gandhi concluded that he “would be willing to stand or fall by the proofs such a group arrived at.”

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359 Horace Alexander was a Quaker attorney specializing in international arbitration. He had visited India in 1927-1928. No information is available on Percy Bartlett. Maude Roydan was vice President of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. Edith Pye was a midwife and international relief organizer. Agatha Harrison was an industrial welfare reformer who also worked to bridge cultural gaps internationally.
360 Rough Notes of a Talk that Mr. Gandhi had with the Following People—Mr. Carl Heath, Horace Alexander, Percy Bartlett, Dr. Maude Roydan, Dr. Joan Fry, Miss Edith Pye, Agatha Harrison, December 1931, Formation of the India Conciliation Group, (TEMP MSS) 41/1/1) 1931, Society of Friends Archive, London.
that, having previously tried to keep women out of key positions in the nationalist struggle, Gandhi now wanted the full inclusion of women both in India and in Britain in helping transmit the nationalist message.

The Society of Friends in London formed the India Conciliation Group. Inclusion as a member of the Society of Friends was not a prerequisite for inclusion in the India Conciliation Group. The presence of Maude Roydan and Agatha Harrison in the assembly guaranteed, by virtue of their contacts, the opportunity to give Indian politics in general, and Indian feminist politics in particular, an entre to the world stage. The group grew rapidly. In a document dated November 4, 1932, the group cited a membership of over 25 individuals. For our purposes here, those significantly important were Grace Lankester, Lady Frances Stewart, Hon Secretary of the National Indian Association, Agatha Harrison, Social reformer Muriel Lester, Miss Collison of the British Commonwealth League, Dr. Hilda Clark of the Women’s International League, Mrs. Hunter of the Friends of India, Dr. Joan Fry, British women’s rights activist Mrs. Pethick Lawrence, Lady Parmoor, founding member of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, and Miss Edith Pye of the Women’s International League. Thus, nearly half of the composition of the India Conciliation Group was female, and most of the women had significant ties to British or international feminist groups.

The India Conciliation Group focused on all matters concerning India, while the sister organization mentioned in the previous chapter, the Liaison Group of British Women’s Societies, focused specifically on issues concerning women in India, such as child marriage, women’s suffrage, the rights of widows, and more. There was significant

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361 Document Dated November 4, 1932, India Conciliation Group, Temp MSS, 41/2/1, Society of Friends Archive, London.
overlap in the membership between these two groups; Grace Lankester, Agatha Harrison, Corbett Ashby, and Maude Roydan were extremely active in both groups. The British Commonwealth League, the Six Point Group, the Women’s Freedom League, and the Women’s International League all supported the Liaison Group in its work to publicize the issues that concerned the three main Indian feminist organizations. The support of these groups helped develop a significant international platform for the Indian feminists to share their points of view on the issues concerning India. While we saw examples of this support in the previous chapter regarding the subject of child marriage, we will see more in the next chapter, as we turn to the topic of women’s suffrage in the new Government of India Act. Though the Round Table discussions themselves proved ineffective, they did help to bring about better extra-governmental communication between Indian nationalists, feminists, and many British citizens. The discussions had other side effects as well.

**Touching on the Harijan Issue: Gandhi’s Fast Unto Death**

Issues of misrepresentation and poor communication by the government, and confusion by the British population over the demands and goals of the Indian nationalists leading into the first Round Table discussion helped spur the formation of the India Conciliation Group and the Liaison Group of British Women’s Societies. It was a dispute arising from the 2nd Round Table discussion, however, that lead Gandhi to another significant act of resistance: his September 1932 fast regarding the issue of representation for the Harijans, or “Untouchables.” As noted, the British arrested Gandhi in May of 1930 following the salt *satyagraha*. In a signal that the British wished to end the impasse
caused by the civil disobedience movement, Irwin ordered Gandhi released from jail on January 26 (the INC’s self proclaimed “Independence Day”), 1931, so that he could enter into direct negotiations with him. The result of the negotiations was the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, signed March 5, 1931, which ended the government’s ban on the INC and resulted in the government’s release of most political prisoners. Gandhi was then free to attend the 2nd Round Table discussions as the only representative of the INC, India’s largest political party, among fifty six delegates hand picked by the British government. While some Indian feminists were pleased with the pact, many others were not. Manmohini Zutshi Sahgal noted “Gandhiji had had no good reason to call off the satyagraha movement; after all, the response from all over the country had been so overwhelming.” She continued, “This pact and the subsequent Round Table Conference in London were doomed to failure, as the British had no intention of parting with any power.” Sahgal was correct; the British made sure that the meeting would accomplish little, if anything. Indian Secretary Samuel Hoare even stated that the goal of the conference was to simply give Indians “a semblance of responsible government, while keeping for ourselves the threads that really direct the system of government.” As with the first meeting, part of the British strategy in doing this was to build within the Indian delegates a sense of mutual distrust, to make India appear too divided to be capable of self-governance. The person central to the strategy was Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, the leader invited by the British to represent the Harijan, or “Untouchable” castes. Ambedkar became the leader of a group of minority interests in India who insisted on representation in the new

362 Lelyveld, Great Soul, 205.
363 Sahgal, Freedom Fighter, 89.
364 As quoted in Metcalf and Metcalf, Concise, 194.
government through a system of communal award, which guaranteed separate electorates to certain minority groups.

Ambedkar’s cause differed from Gandhi’s. While Gandhi sought independence, his rival simply sought the social uplift of the untouchables. The clash between Gandhi and Ambedkar became personal, and in the end, the British guaranteed a communal award that would specify a separate electorate for untouchables. Gandhi returned to India, and just seven days after his return on January 4, 1932, the British Government again arrested him and sent him to Yeravda prison. It was here that Gandhi announced his intention to fast unto death or until the government agreed to remove the communal award. Gandhi felt the communal award separated the Harijan’s from the rest of the Hindu community. As Tim Pratt and James Vernon have noted, Gandhi’s choice of fasting both articulated to Indians an act of sacrificial piety in the quest for nationalistic unity, but also “drew upon a symbolic repertoire India’s colonial governors could understand.” As a British educated Indian, Gandhi was keenly aware with how effectively suffragettes had used fasting in their quest for franchise. Oddly, the fast helped to show how much Gandhi’s thinking had changed regarding gender roles and separate spheres. Scholars such as Radha Kumar write of Gandhi’s “self feminization and his feminization of Indian politics,” and praise him as the ‘parent of the ‘Indian women’s movement.” As we have seen, this is not accurate. Indian feminists unified outside of Gandhi’s purview, and, as I have shown, forced Gandhi into not only allowing their participation in the nationalist movement, but also their assuming of leadership roles

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within it. By the time of Gandhi’s fast, then, Indian feminists had forced Gandhi to re-think his ideas of gender as we see in this exchange when Sarojini Naidu heard of his decision to fast, and wrote to him saying,

Beloved Little Man of Sorrow and Destiny,

In the words of modern poets, “it was like your gracious way” to hurl the sudden thunderbolt upon a world caught unaware and startled into complex emotions of wonder, terror, anguish and despair at the revelation of your self sacrifice, for the sake of an ideal more precious to you than life, and to be ratified in your death.

Doubtless you sit immersed in some strength and mystic ecstasy of self immolation unmoved by, perhaps hardly conscious of, the countless passionate and poignant appeals that the four winds scatter around you…But who of the myriad of men or women whose hearts are lacerated both with the knowledge of your imminent self chosen doom has the gift of words so wise, so subtle, so eloquent, so lovely, so invincible in their power to plead or persuade or to prevail upon you if not to cancel, at least to defer your decision or to alter the scope and purpose of your supreme sacrifice, from a smaller issue of little significance to an issue far larger, more vital and urgent, more deep rooted and far reaching in its implications of wrong and oppression unlike the vast majority of those to whom the incident of your physical death appears an incalculable calamity, I am not unduly, though I confess profoundly grieved at the thought that you should have chosen the way of death rather than the more difficult and, shall I say, courageous way of life as your channel of service and expiation of an age long injustice towards our disinherited kindred whom in our arrogance we have dared to name and treat as an outcaste, the depressed, oppressed dishonoured children of the Hindu faith…I assert my right to make an imperative demand of you that you shall not make so superb a gesture of renunciation on any issue that in itself and by itself is not commensurate with the grandeur of your sacrifice.\(^{368}\)

Naidu felt she had the right to challenge Gandhi, accuse him of taking the coward’s way out, and demand he change his plan of action. She also clearly did not find the issue of the *Harijan* worthy of Gandhi’s death. Gandhi responded to her,

Dear Mother, Singer, and Guardian of My Soul,

\(^{368}\) Letter from Sarojini Naidu to Gandhi, Temp MSS 41/1/1, 1931, Formation of the India Conciliation Group, Society of Friends Archive, London.
I have your beautiful touching letter preceded by, perhaps, a lovelier one still from Padmaja. The decision was taken after much prayer in the name of God and in obedience to His call. I have no power therefore to postpone the hour of execution.

You have every right to call upon me to revise my decisions and actions and it is my duty to respond if I discover the error. And I claim unquestioned obedience, if I cannot with all the prayerful effort discover any error. You have manfully asserted the right, and womanlike offered obedience.

The motherly affection has blinded the poetic vision and prompted you to appeal to my pride to retrace my steps so as to make me cling to life. But I know you have not missed the woman in me…He who sees life in death and death in life is the real poetess and seeress. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating. You will soon taste it and prove it yourself. Meanwhile pray that God may give me strength enough to walk steadily through the veil. If Hinduism is to live Untouchability must die.

It may be this is my last letter to you …If I die I shall die in the faith that comrades like you with whom God has blessed me will continue the work of the country which is also the work of humanity in the same spirit in which it has begun. If the interests of the country are to be one with those of humanity, if the good of one faith is to be the good of all faiths, it will only come by strictest adherence to truth and non violence in thought, word, and deed.\(^{369}\)

Gandhi’s letter illustrated his recognition that both the feminine and the masculine resided in Naidu, but that the feminine fully resided in himself, as well, and he embraced that. He reversed even their roles, claiming that he was the true “poetess,” and “seeress.” He treated Naidu as a full equal, even anticipating that she would have to endure the same sufferings he had chosen for himself, and, in effect charged her with continuing the path of non-violence in the quest for Indian independence. Effectively, then, at least for this time, having seen the efficacy and passion of the Indian feminists in the independence movement, Gandhi acknowledged that the idea of gendered separate

\(^{369}\) Letter from Gandhi to Sarojini Naidu, Temp MSS 41/1/1, 1931, Formation of the India Conciliation Group, Society of Friends Archive, London.
spheres, for him, was gone, having allowed the feminists nationalists example to feminize him, while accepting their masculine expressions, chastisement, and challenges. In an October 1936 letter to Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Gandhi praised her and her work in seeking continued coverage for the independence movement in the press. He continued by saying, “If you women would only realize your dignity and privilege, and make full use of it for mankind, you will make it much better than it is. But man has delighted in enslaving you…and the slave–holders have become one in the crime of degrading humanity.”

Gandhi then went on to count himself as a former slaveholder, who finally awakened to the value of women. In 1938, Kaur wrote to chide Gandhi for failing to do more to organize the intellectual women of India, as he had for men. Noting that the educated women in India did not need his help, as they had already organized, he wrote, “You can’t blame me for not having organized the intellectuals among women. I have not the gift.”

Responding later that year to a woman’s query about why Gandhi did not do more to organize women, Gandhi, again noted the success the feminists had in organizing themselves, responding, “I do believe that it is woman’s mission to exhibit ahimsa at its highest and best. But why should it be a man to move the woman’s heart? …For woman is more fitted than man to make explorations and take bolder action in ahimsa.”

Gandhi, who had earlier claimed the right to organize men, sidestepped calls to do the same with women, noting that they had proven capable of organizing themselves. Last of all, in 1940, in answer to a complaint that pro-independence activities had resulted in the

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^371 Gandhi, Letters, 146.
degradation of the domestic duties of women, Gandhi, who had once advocated that a woman’s first and best place was in serving her husband and his family, wrote, “More often than not a woman’s time is taken up, not by the performance of essential domestic duties, but in catering to the egoistic pleasure of her lord and master…” Continuing, he noted, “It is high time that our womankind was free from this incubus.” This demonstrates again that Gandhi’s call for separate spheres for men and women, with women relegated to the private sphere, was gone. He now understood and advocated their role in public politics.

**Conclusion**

The five years from 1927-1932 marked the greatest advance yet in the inclusion of Indian women into the fight for Indian independence. Men, including Gandhi, did not open the door for them; instead, they forced their way into the nationalist movement. As we have seen, Indian feminist resistance to the Simon Commission helped to further unify Indian feminist nationalists because the picketing and protesting broke down barriers between women of various classes in India as they fought a common foe. With the increased sense of feminist unity, and with the advent of the arrest of most of the INC male leadership during the rise of the civil disobedience movement, Indian women rose to fill the void left by their male counterparts, much to the praise of INC leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru.

Despite the increased unity of Indian women and the well-focused work of the organized feminist groups in India, and while having included them to a degree in the

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fight for independence, Gandhi sought to relegate Indian women to a lesser role at the
time of the salt *satyagraha*. The WIA resisted Gandhi’s segregation of duties, as did
individual feminists such as Sarojini Naidu, Manmohini Zutshi Sahgal, Muthulakshmi
Reddi, and others. So forceful was the Indian feminist push for equal inclusion in the salt
*satyagraha* that Gandhi began to re-think his ideas of the role of women in the civil
disobedience movement. He overlooked several obvious choices of various men to serve
as the leader of the salt *satyagraha* following his arrest, and instead choose Sarojini
Naidu as the head of the civil disobedience campaign. As well, Indian feminist activity in
and publicity of the salt march brought greater international attention to the salt
*satyagraha*. Through the effective increased participation of Indian feminists in the
nationalist movement, by the time of his *Harijin* fast, Gandhi had come to the point of
recognizing in himself both masculine and feminine characteristics, as well as seeing the
masculine and feminine in Sarojini Naidu, even to the point of believing that her
endeavors would lead her to sacrifices equal to his.

With confusion in the general public over the demands and goals of the Indian
nationalists on the eve of the 1st Round Table discussion, a group of men and women in
Britain, originally organized by the Society of Friends, established the India Conciliation
Group in order to provide accurate information on the goals and desires of the Indian
nationalists. When contacted about the effort, Gandhi, insisted on the inclusion of women
due to of the miraculous awakening of women in India and their participation in the
nationalist struggle.

At the close of the 2nd Round Table discussions, Gandhi was so moved by the
strength of women in the movement that he arranged for a British woman, Agatha
Harrison, to be paid to coordinate communication between Indians and British around the nationalist agenda in India. Harrison and other British feminists took leadership roles in not just the India Conciliation Group, but also helped started a group dedicated to enhancing dialogue between British feminists and Indian feminist groups. As we will see in the next chapter, this lead to a vastly increased transnational feminism around the issue of the Indian feminists and their nationalist goals. As well, as the Round Table discussions progressed, and the subject of women’s franchise in India came to the fore, British feminist groups rallied to support their Indian sisters, though not always in the fashion desired by the Indians.
Chapter 4

Closing Ranks on the 1935 Government of India Act, 1930-1937

Introduction

As I demonstrated, Indian feminists’ work on the abolition of child marriage provided them with the skills needed to participate not only in Indian politics, but in global politics as well. In addition, through their work on the child marriage issue, Indian feminists developed their own nationalist discourse. They based this nationalist discourse on what they saw as the moral superiority of the Indians over the British regarding legislating and enforcing effective laws to curb the marriage of youths. Indian feminists were not content to focus on one issue, however; instead, they sought a position of equality with men in the fight for Indian independence from Britain. Although they acted against Gandhi’s initial wishes, Indian feminists demonstrated a professionalism, passion, and unity that gained international attention and favor through their push into the salt satyagraha, and as they provided effective guidance to the nationalist movement after the arrest of the majority of the male INC leadership.

Interwar Indian feminists transcended cultural, class, religious, and caste boundaries to forge a unity in India never seen before. In contrast, British feminists, who had held a significant degree of unity before the Great War, splintered into competing groups in the interwar era. “Equality” feminists, who had advocated before the war against the separate sphere mentality for men and women, and for legal equality for the sexes, continued to focus in the interwar era on issues such as equal pay, equal
opportunity, and equal suffrage. The other major faction of British interwar feminists, the “New” feminists, acknowledged differences between men and women and sought legislation to end the social system that denigrated the unique contributions of women, such as motherhood. New feminists saw motherhood not just a biological event, but as a long-term labor that benefitted society. They sought to protect the value of motherhood by establishing a new societal order in which women could be mothers without sacrificing either economic independence or political participation via the new-found limited suffrage. With limited suffrage, too, came a new petitionary politic aimed at influencing parliament instead of directly influencing public opinion. British feminists splintered not just into two major ideological camps, but also into a multitude of organizations under each competing ideology. These subgroups often contended with each other even when adhering to the same overarching ideology of New or Equality feminists. Some British feminists attempted in the early interwar period to unify the splintered feminist groups, most notably with the Consultative Committee of Women’s Organizations (CCWO), but this proved ineffective.

By the time of the first Round Table discussions, British feminist groups remained fragmented. Indian feminism, in contrast, was a significant unifying force in India not just among women, but also among men, especially the male leadership of the INC. The Simon Commission’s statement before the first Round Table discussions that “The women’s movement in India holds the key to progress,” then, ensured that the

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Round Table discussions would have to address issues central to Indian feminist nationalists.\textsuperscript{377} With respect to promulgating a new constitution, the core issue for this group was suffrage.

As noted in the last chapter, the Round Table discussions underscored the lack of understanding amid the general British populace regarding the desires of the Indian nationalists. This faulty grasp of the nationalists’ agenda inspired a group of individuals to form the India Conciliation Group. Founded by the Society of Friends, it expanded rapidly to include members outside of the religious order. The purpose of this group was to bring to the fore, both for the general public and government officials, accurate representations of the desires and tactics of Indian nationalists. At Gandhi’s insistence, almost 50% of this group was female. The Liaison Committee of British Women’s Societies, a sister group containing significantly overlapping membership, also formed with the goal of fostering communication between the three major Indian feminist organizations and several of the key British feminist groups. These two groups helped ensure that the Round Table discussions would address the issues central to Indian feminists vis a vis any attempt to develop a new Indian constitution.

In this chapter I argue that, although British feminist groups remained splintered throughout the interwar era, the issue of Indian women’s suffrage, which the Round Table discussions had to address, provided a rallying point for British feminists. This, and the resulting alliances with Indian feminists resembled the campaign against child marriage, in which British feminists supported Indian feminists in their fight to end the

practice. True, the British feminists’ support for increased women’s suffrage in India and their support for the Indian feminist groups on the child marriage restraint legislation was not enough to bring the British feminist groups into full unity, for several of them disagreed on the issue of full versus limited suffrage for women in India. Still, these issues did invoke a renewed sense of passion within British feminism. The next argument in this chapter addresses the Indian feminists’ dynamism, specifically their ability to unite women in India across class and cultural lines in support of Indian nationalism. Combined with the abilities of the Indian Conciliation Group and the Liaison Committee of British Women’s Societies in making these accomplishments known, this cohesive approach propelled Indian feminists onto the international stage with greater recognition and praise than most of their male counterparts received. Such recognition included inviting Indian feminists to serve on several League of Nations committees, though India was not yet an independent state.

**Women’s Suffrage in India, the Round Table Discussions, and the Government of India Act, 1935**

Though the British government maintained publicly that the purpose of the Round Table discussions was to find a means of transitioning power to Indians, their true objective was to maintain British control over India, especially economic control. Nevertheless, many in Britain, including feminist groups, held high hopes for the talks. With the announcement of the discussions, *Time and Tide* published a perceptive article on the task of establishing a new constitution for India, noting previous errors by the British government, writing,

> Whatever the Constitution that is to be framed, it must be one which Indians have had their full share in making, not a gift bestowed, however
benevolently, by Great Britain upon India. It is almost impossible for people in this country to understand the depth of the resentment and mistrust caused in India by the operation of the Simon Commission. The author continued: “The Englishman…cannot realize how deeply Indian self respect was wounded by the brutally tactless manner in which the Commission was appointed.” The author demonstrates understanding not only of the people of India’s need for ownership of the new constitution, but also recognition of the British government’s previous mistakes in attempting to forge a document without the inclusion of the Indian political leaders. Although *Time and Tide* covered all three of the Round Table discussions extensively, they neglected to cover the topic of women’s issues. The only exception was one article noting that the obstacles to women’s development in India “are largely to be found in social and religious traditions and customs which only Indians themselves can remedy.” Having shared a laissez-faire attitude towards the social conditions of women in India, *Time and Tide* later expressed its extreme economic conservatism towards any new governance in India when it published the following:

> We may sympathize with the hard lot of the peasant…We may admire Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru’s character and Mr. Gandhi’s ideals. But we must keep it clear in our mind that so long as we believe in a social organization based on private property, we cannot enter into a partnership with these men or these classes for government in India. Our allies are the property-owning classes, not the drones but the men of energy, the men of business.

Again, this shows the magazine’s conservative stance regarding any changes to the governance of India. The editorial staff clearly recognized that the British government

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had made significant mistakes with the Simon Commission; however when it came to real change, at least at the beginning phase of the Round Table conferences, a good portion of British feminists, members of the government, and Britons in general sought to maintain the status quo.

Gandhi and the INC recognized the attitude of the majority of Britons, especially those in the government, and chose to boycott the first conference. In a March 5, 1930, telegram Lord Irwin recalled a 1929 meeting with Gandhi about the decision to boycott the talks in London. Lord Irwin wrote that Gandhi told him “my conversation with him on the 23rd of December destroyed all hopes that the London Conference might furnish a solution…” Gandhi and the INC were not alone in perceiving the British government’s intent behind the Round Table talks. In a 1932 memorandum by the Indian Affairs Committee of the Society of Friends, the group wrote,

The first session of the Conference had already met without the cooperation of Gandhi and the Congress… It had been a packed conference of the Viceroy’s nominees, hopelessly overweighted with the same heavy monied interests that filled the Legislative Assembly and the Chamber of Princes, together with the chosen “communalists”—men who (in the name of the Muslim masses, the Depressed Classes and other minorities, whose rank and file and real leaders were with the congress) wrangled about jobs and privileges for their various cliques. This demonstrates that not only did many thinking individuals in Britain see through the British government’s motives, but they also sought to make the government’s motivations public.

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381 Telegram from Lord Irwin, recipient unknown, March 5, 1930, File IOR/PO/6/16 Correspondence with Viceroy regarding Gandhi, 15 Oct. 1924-Nov. 1930, the British Library, London
Some conservatives in Britain, such as Churchill, strove to derail the talks outright. In his address to the Indian Empire Society, Churchill sought to instill fear, citing racial issues and potential militarism as reasons why the British government should not consider Indian sentiment regarding their future governance:

The Indian political classes have in their turn moved their goal forward to absolute independence, and picture themselves an early date when they will obtain complete control of the whole of Hindustan, when the British will be no more to them than any other European nation, when white people will be in India only upon sufferance, when debts and obligations of all kinds will be repudiated and when an army of white janissaries, officered if necessary from Germany, will be hired to secure the armed ascension of the Hindu.  

Whereas Churchill and some conservatives sought to impede the discussions, the majority of Britons maintained a sense of hope concerning them. *Time and Tide* wrote optimistically about the discussions, reporting that Lord Irwin and the government of India “had agreed upon a policy which they hoped and anticipated would conciliate Indian nationalists and bring the leaders of all parties willingly to the Round Table Conference in London.”  

Although most in Britain failed to see the government’s true intent behind the talks, Gandhi and the INC, perceiving the British government’s actual motives, chose to boycott the Round Table discussions, as noted above. Others, notably Indian feminists, did their utmost to join the talks.

When the British government first announced the Round Table talks, as Muthulakshmi Reddi wrote in her an address to the WIA, the WIA “immediately asked [the Viceroy] that women should be among its delegates.” The WIA also petitioned the

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Secretary of State to include women as delegates in the talks. It also used its growing contacts with British feminist organizations, such as the WILPF, asking them to petition the British government to include at least two female Indians as delegates to the talks.

Believing that Indian women should choose who should represent them at the first Round Table discussions, the WIA put forward the names of Sarojini Naidu, Muthulakshmi Reddi, and Brijial Nehru as their favored delegates. Each of these proposed delegates favored universal adult suffrage.

Ignoring the WIA’s specific request for delegates of its choosing, the British government invited Begum Shah Nawaz and Radhabai Subbarayan to attend the first Round Table conference (November 1930-January 1931) as the sole representatives for all of India’s women. Though women accounted for 50% of the population of the subcontinent, the British government in India treated them as a minority class, and favored granting only very limited franchise, with a specified number of reserved seats in Indian government set aside for women. Lord Irwin chose Nawaz and Subbarayan as delegates representing all of India’s women because they were pro-British and were willing to accept these terms. For them, limited suffrage was a stopgap measure, necessary until women in the electorate finally reached parity with men over time to, then, gain universal adult suffrage.

In Nawaz’s opening address to the Round Table

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385 Muthulakshmi Reddi, “Our Part in Politics,” an address to the Women’s Indian Association, Date Unknown, S. Muthulakshmi Reddi Papers, Speeches & Writings, Vol. I, Part II, NMML.
387 Reddi, “Politics,” NMML.
Conference, she defied all of the major organized women’s groups in India, saying “…to finish nearly 160 Million of His Majesty’s subjects by saying that ‘No special provision should be made for women,’ shows a complete lack of understanding.” Here Nawaz disregarded what she knew to be the stated desires of organized Indian feminists. Instead, she chose to placate the government of Britain while claiming to represent the women of India. Subbarayan, too, served as a lackey to the British government’s desires, referring to the women of India whom she claimed to represent, as “one of the smallest minorities in the Conference.” Though, as noted, women made up 50% of the population of India, Subbarayan minimized their role. In so doing, she justified the British desire to set aside reserved seats for women, abate women’s suffrage through special voting qualifications, and hold the vote for the women’s seats along communal lines.

While Indian feminists sought representation in the Round Table conference, women in Britain, too, tried to influence the government to appoint specific individuals to the talks. Eleanor Rathbone assembled a core of collaborators, including Mabel Hartog, Margery Corbett Ashby, and MP’s Edith Picton-Turberville and Nancy Astor. Several of these allies petitioned the British government to include Rathbone as one of the British delegates to the first Round Table talks.

When the government did not appoint Rathbone, she turned her attentions to attempting to sway the government regarding whom they should choose to represent women in India. Ever the pragmatist, Rathbone favored what she saw as attainable goals:

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389 Indian Round Table Conference Proceedings: 12th November, 1930-19th January 1931, A transcription, no author or editor noted, (Calcutta: Government of India Central publication Branch), 108.
390 Indian Round Table Conference Proceedings, 423.
reserved seats for women elected along a communal basis, with specific qualifications for women voters. She voiced her concern to Muthulakshmi Reddi that if the women’s organizations in India demanded full adult suffrage without property, literacy, or marriage qualifications, the government of Britain would consider them unreasonable and irrelevant. Though the Franchise subcommittee of the first Round Table conference had endorsed Rathbone’s proposal of special electoral qualifications for women, Rathbone remained worried, and understood that many of the Indian feminists did not trust her. She wrote to Subbarayan that she had decided to travel to India and meet with the feminist leaders, in hopes of bringing them to accept her pragmatic, though limited, goals. Always the politician looking for the opportunity to press her points, she chose to sail to India on the same ship that the Franchise subcommittee members were taking on their exploratory mission. However, she was disappointed that few opportunities presented themselves for her to interact with them. Once in India, she proceeded on her own, making the arduous train journey from Bombay to Madras, then to Nagpur, Lucknow, Calcutta, and finally Lahore. On the trip, she met with Indian feminist leaders such as Mrs. Hamid Ali and Muthulakshmi Reddi. Although she had intended to change their thinking, the journey and interactions changed her, though not regarding the issue of reserved seats and special qualifications for women. Instead, she heard firsthand the

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392 Reserved seats meant that a set number of seats were to be set-aside in India’s Parliament for women. These seats, then, too, were to be divided on a communal basis, where Hindu’s could only vote for Hindu’s, Muslims for Muslims, etc. This served the British government in that it helped keep the Indians divided along communal lines, instead of allowing them greater opportunity to unite politically.


stories of the arbitrary use of power by the British government and how the government there repressed those with opposing views. She wrote a letter of complaint to Ramsay Macdonald about this.\footnote{Eleanor Rathbone to Ramsay Macdonald, April 1932, Rathbone Papers, 7/ELR/9, The Women’s Library, LSE, London.} She also wrote to Sir Samuel Hoare (Secretary of State for India), that, in light of the hostile nature of British governance in India, the British government should make to the INC and Gandhi,

Some kind of conciliatory move at the very first moment when the opportunity offers…so that the drafting and launching of the new constitution have some chance of being done in consultation with Mr. Gandhi and his leading colleagues in an atmosphere of less suspicion, bitterness, and general depression than that which now prevails.\footnote{Eleanor Rathbone to Sir Samuel Hoare, April, 1932, Rathbone Papers, 7/ELR/11, The Women’s Library, LSE, London.}

Rathbone’s visit to India changed her views of British governance there. However, even after exhaustive meetings with feminist leaders in India, Rathbone still favored reserved seats for women with limited franchise, parsed out on a communal basis.

Rathbone’s trip to India helped her change her ideas regarding the legitimacy and tactics of British government in India, but it also left her with a significant sense of cognitive dissonance regarding the leaders of the various Indian women’s organizations. Unable to convince the heads of the WIA, the AIWC, and the NCWI to accept limited suffrage and reserved seats for women on a communal basis, Rathbone wondered if the women’s organizations in India really represented anything but a “small body of opinion.”\footnote{Eleanor Rathbone, as quoted by Susan Pedersen, \textit{Eleanor Rathbone}, 254.} She also wrote to Samuel Hoare’s Secretary, “The Indian women – or the vociferous among them – are cutting up very rough about the communal basis for their
reserved seats. I think they are mistaken and am doing my best to soothe them down.”

Although claiming to represent Indian women, Rathbone had moved beyond mere pragmatism to a paternalistic belief that she knew better than they did what was best for them.

It was in this paternalistic spirit that, with the announcement of the Second Round Table discussions (to take place September 1931-December 1931), Rathbone opted to ignore the collective desire of the Indian feminist organizations to vote for their own representatives. Although the Indian feminists groups all agreed on Sarojini Naidu as one to properly give voice to their demands, Rathbone bristled, writing to Subbarayan: “From what I know of Mrs. Naidu, she is a poet and an orator, but not a practical politician, nor, I think, genuinely keen about women.” Rathbone went on to say that she was pressing the government for Subbarayan, instead of Naidu, to serve as representative based on Subbarayan’s previous experience at the First Round Table discussion. Rathbone, then, while claiming to represent Indian women, proved willing to ignore their demands not only for universal suffrage, but also for their choice of representative. In the same letter, Rathbone also suggested Muthulakshmi Reddi as a possible representative to the Round Table based on her experience as a physician (Rathbone was also dealing quite extensively at this time with the issue of child marriage in India). She continued, asking Subbarayan if she knew of any “…women in positions of influence, such as British civil servants or missionaries” whose names she might put forward as possible Round Table

delegates who would “look at things practically.” In other words, Rathbone wanted women represented and wanted to push the issue of effective child marriage legislation, yet she also wanted to ensure that the women representatives for the Indian Round Table talks would favor her pragmatic approach, limited female suffrage, as opposed to representatives who would champion the universal adult suffrage favored by all of the major Indian feminist groups.

Indian feminists recoiled at the idea of reserved seats and at Rathbone’s decision to ignore their desires regarding suffrage and representation at the Round Table discussions. Sarojini Naidu and Begum Shah Nawaz attended the Second Round Table talks, with Naidu dominating the representation. Naidu presented to the conference the nationalist-feminist memorandum, which rejected any concessions or reserved seats for women, demanding instead full adult suffrage. Later, Naidu expanded on this, writing “The special privilege idea for women is characteristic of Western feminism but entirely against Eastern ideas. There is no thought in the East of women being pitted against men.” She continued, “The day for Western leadership in the East has passed. The East does not desire the West to pioneer in the East but will receive the Western leaders if coming in the spirit of general service…The West will not be repudiated, but should not set the standard.” Here Naidu states that Eastern and Western feminism are different qualitatively, that Eastern feminism seeks unity, not just within feminism, but also with men. According to Naidu, the reservation of special seats was a foreign idea to Eastern

400 Kumar, Doing, 81.
feminists; furthermore, Eastern feminists did not desire Western leadership. Indian feminists would accept Western feminists only if they came in a spirit of service, but they would reject any notions of paternalism.

Indian feminists then turned their focus to countering Rathbone’s ideas, not just in India, but in Britain, too. They enlisted the help of the British Commonwealth League to bring pressure in Britain to support universal adult suffrage in the upcoming Indian constitution. In particular, they noted that any scheme to link women’s suffrage to the property of a woman’s husband as a qualification to vote would “give new lease of life to the old male notion of a woman’s dependency on a man and as such is repugnant to the educated and thinking women of India.”402 This argument from Indian feminists found traction among the Equality feminists of Britain and, as a result, they rallied for Indian women’s right to choose what was in their own best interests.403 The Third Indian Round Table conference proved a non sequitur, as the INC in India and the Labour party in Britain both chose to boycott it, leaving only 46 delegates to attend. In addition, only a single woman delegate, Begum Shah Nawaz, attended, in theory to represent the collective will of all women of India. However, as the conferences progressed, they did excite the passions of British feminists, especially around the idea of women’s suffrage.

With the closing of the Third Round Table talks, the editors of Time and Tide expressed their pleasure at what they perceived to be the success of the conferences, writing, “the psychological effect of the Conference has been excellent. Opinion in this country has been impressed as never before with the seriousness of the Indian claims and the political capacity of India’s spokesmen: a clearer perspective has been attained, in

402 As quoted in Pederson, Rathbone, 254.
403 Pederson, Rathbone, 254.
which picturesque extremism no longer occupies the foreground of the picture.”

Attacking Churchill’s earlier address about the conferences, the article continues, “The irreconcilable element in this country has also lost ground, and it was encouraging to note that the general response to Mr. Churchill’s free-lance attempt at sabotage was wholesale resentment.”

Thus, the Conferences, at least in Britain, excited the imagination of the people and did help to bring to the British populace, though in faltering fashion, a sense of what the Indians actually desired. Regarding women’s suffrage in India, the two factions of British feminists battled each other on the issue. New feminists largely fell behind Rathbone, and a significant group of Equality feminists backed the Indian feminist nationalists’ push for universal adult suffrage. Nevertheless, the conferences served to re-ignite the flames of passion for British feminist groups.

Though the Round Table discussions ended, the debate on Indian women’s franchise did not, and Rathbone continued to overlook the Indian feminists’ plea for equal suffrage in the upcoming constitution. A self-imposed ignorance continued to dominate Eleanor Rathbone’s thoughts, as well as those of the British Government. Rathbone had traveled to India, met with the feminist leaders there, and overcome the dissonance in some of her views. For example, where she had previously agreed with Mayo’s interpretation that the cause of India’s problems lay at the feet of Hinduism, she now understood the British government’s responsibility in the failure to end child marriage; she also acknowledged governmental excesses in the poor treatment of Indian political prisoners. Nevertheless, she could not see past her own ideas about seeking limited, instead of universal, adult female suffrage. Moreover, she continued to put

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herself forth as the single voice for Indian women, even though educated Indian women countered her time and again before the government. One illustration of her sense of entitlement occurred when Rustomji Farudsonji, the vice president of the AIWC, addressed the government to denounce reserved seats for women. Notwithstanding, Rathbone continued to press her point, and the government chose to believe her.405

Having seen the facts and talked with the feminist leaders in India, why would Rathbone willingly misrepresent the desires of Indian feminists? The answer comes from agnatology, the study of the non-transmission of knowledge. Sometimes such non-transmission of knowledge is willful, as when tobacco companies covered up data on the harmful effects of smoking. Sometimes, however, it is accidental, the result of the selective nature of inquiry. Rathbone was, psychologically, exercising what biologists call predator’s fovea; that is, a predator’s tendency to lock in on one animal, rather than indiscriminately scanning the herd.406 Rathbone saw Indian feminist nationalists ideologies only in terms of the issue of suffrage, and this was a subject in which she felt she could claim unsurpassed proficiency.407 As a feminist politician, Rathbone understood the needs of Indian women in the context of her own past, having negotiated a “wife’s” local government franchise in 1918. As a university member, she also sat for a type of “reserved seat.” Rathbone, therefore, on hearing the AIWC’s objections to limited franchise and reserved seats, filtered them through the previous arguments she had heard

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405 Pedersen, Rathbone, 254.
407 Pedersen, Rathbone, 255.
in Britain regarding women’s franchise. She thus tried to encourage Subbarayan not to be too upset about the organized Indian feminist nationalist stance, in that, as she wrote to her in May 1931, “We had much the same difficulties to encounter here from our own extremists.” Rathbone’s failure to communicate the wishes of the clear majority of Indian feminists did not stem from a willful intent to mislead. Instead, Rathbone’s previous experiences in her fight for British women’s suffrage made her so myopic on the subject of suffrage alone, that she could not see that Indian feminists linked the issue of universal suffrage to the broader issue of future Indian independence. Even after her trip to India and her copious letters with Indian feminist leaders, her limited vision persisted. For example, in her March 25, 1933, press release to *The Times*, Rathbone not only failed to mention the desires of Indian feminist nationalists regarding suffrage (she instead listed the government’s White Paper on the subject, as well as the Lothian Franchise Committee’s ideas, and those from the Simon Commission), but she also completely ignored the idea of Indian independence. While Rathbone became more dismissive of the Indian feminist groups’ perspective on suffrage, the volume and intensity of her correspondence with Subbarayan grew. Rathbone’s growing dissonance and distance from the main Indian feminist organizations in India at this time explain her decision in 1935 to send her strengthened draft of the Child Marriage Restraint Act to a man, Narayan Malhar Joshi, to find a sponsor for the bill. In doing so, she entirely bypassed the Indian women’s organizations.

408 Pedersen, *Rathbone*, 256.
409 Eleanor Rathbone, as quoted in Pedersen, *Rathbone*, 256.
410 Eleanor Rathbone to The Editor of The Times, March 25 1933, Rathbone Papers, 7/ELR, Box 1, The Women’s Library, LSE, London.
The feminist groups in India recognized Rathbone as a person of import, and thus proceeded carefully with her. Although we are discussing the issues of suffrage and child marriage separately, for the purpose of analysis, we must remember that whereas Rathbone opposed Indian feminists’ demands for full adult suffrage, she remained among the Indian feminists’ strongest allies regarding the child marriage restraint debate. Indian feminist nationalists, therefore, maintained dialogue with Rathbone, while they successfully reached out to other British feminists through the various liaison groups. The Women’s Freedom League, quick to ally itself to the Indian feminist nationalist cause, directly challenged both Rathbone and the government. In May of 1933, Florence Underwood, representing the Women’s Freedom League, wrote to Rathbone informing her that they were not only countermanding Rathbone’s ideas for reserved seats for women, but they were also delaying enrollment in the British Committee for Indian Women’s Franchise, a group formed by Rathbone, because of her stance regarding reserved seats. Underwood went on to share with Rathbone the resolution that the Women’s Freedom League had sent to Samuel Hoare and the Joint Select Committee, which read,

Believing as we do that the women of India hold the key to progress in that country, and that women themselves must take their full share in the building up of the New India, including the solution of its many problems of social reform, the Women’s Freedom League calls upon the Government forthwith to concede to the women of India the largest possible measure of franchise.\footnote{Florence Underwood to Eleanor Rathbone, May 1932, Rathbone Papers, 7ELR Box 2, The Women’s Library, LSE.}

Here we see that the Women’s Freedom League was willing to rebuff Rathbone’s ideas of reserved seats. Not only did the League side with the Indian feminist nationalists, but
they also petitioned the British government on their behalf. The Indian feminists aggressively pursued avenues of communication and alliance with other British feminist groups as well. Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur spoke by invitation to the British Commonwealth league in June 1933 to great effect. The BCL secretary, Denise Solomon, wrote to Kaur in gratitude, stating,

I am writing on behalf of the League to thank you very much indeed for so kindly coming to speak at our Conference. We were delighted to have you with us, and were most interested in what you had to tell us. I hope that we shall be able to do our share in helping the Indian women obtain their franchise rights under the new constitution.412

Again, we see another major British feminist group offering to help the Indian feminist nationalists in their quest for full franchise.

Kaur, an effective ambassador to the British feminists, also reached out to the Six Point Group, which offered its strong support. Writing to Kaur on June 28, 1933, they informed her that they had sent a letter to the Joint Parliamentary Committee agreeing with the British Commonwealth League’s resolution of support for universal adult suffrage as requested by the three major Indian women’s groups. In part, this resolution read, “That a statement declaring the equality of men and women be included in the Fundamental Rights in the Constitution Act.” The resolution also rejected reserved seats and called for the immediate implementation of universal adult suffrage in urban areas (prior to the implementation of the new constitution).413 In July, the Six Point Group went even further, with its political secretary (either Betty Archdale or Helen Fletcher, title, but no signature on the carbon copy) writing to the Secretary of the Joint Parliamentary

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412 Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur Papers, Correspondence, British Commonwealth League, Hon. Secretary, NMML.
413 Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur Papers, Correspondence, British Commonwealth League, Hon. Secretary, NMML.
Committee, House of Lords, noting that, “Miss Rathbone does not represent the opinion of a large section of British women and of Indian women, and we would beg that you give time to the representative of the British Commonwealth League to put forward the views held by such a large body of women.”\footnote{Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur Papers, Correspondence, British Commonwealth League, Hon. Secretary, NMML.} Further allying the Six Point Group with the Indian feminist nationalists, Monica Whately, chair of the Group’s Equal Rights Committee, wrote to the president of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Indian Constitution, House of Lords that,

…the proposal to enfranchise women on their husband’s qualifications is entirely repugnant to the social and spiritual ideas of the East and that the proposal has received the united opposition of Indian women, an opposition with which the Six Point Group identifies itself.\footnote{Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur Papers, Correspondence, British Commonwealth League, Hon. Secretary, NMML.}

As a result of such effective outreach by Indian feminist nationalists to British feminist groups, many British feminists not only listened, but also offered support, and not simply in a moral sense. Rather, they directly contradicted Rathbone’s assertion that she represented Indian women to the government of Britain, and put their petitionary strength behind the ideals of the Indian feminist nationalists. Emmeline Pethick–Lawrence also placed her support fully behind the Indian feminist push for universal adult suffrage, writing to Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur on July 22, 1933,

I find it difficult to adequately express my feeling about the stand that the Indian women are taking on the communal questions. Where we are in the midst of turmoil and perplexity which is engulfing the whole world—torn and rent by conflicting convictions and overshadowed by the menace of war. On the other side is a united group representing the whole of the progressive womanhood of India actually putting in practical expression a spirit that would solve most of the world’s problems and would put an end to war. All our peace treaties and Conventions are mere scraps of paper
but this spirit of the Indian woman is the real thing…political powers that want to frustrate the real self government of India are directly concerned in fomenting and strengthening communal differences.\footnote{Amrit Kaur Papers, File: Pethick-Lawrence, Lady, NMML.}

Here we see more than support for the Indian women’s desires for full franchise and recognition of the British government’s use of communal difference to continue its divide and rule policy; we also see wholesale admiration for the unity, resolve, and spirit of the Indian feminists. In August of 1933, Kaur, Reddi, and Mrs. Hamid Ali wrote to the AIWC of their ambassadorial work and of the great success they had in Britain, noting,

The following is a list of Associations who have supported our demands entirely:
- The British Commonwealth League
- The International League for Peace and Freedom
- The St. Joan’s Political and Social Union
- The Six Point Group
- The Women’s Indian Association (London Branch)
- Dr. Maude Boyden’s Congregation of the Guild House
- Miss Whately and her group of women\footnote{AIWC Papers, Subject Files, File #10, NMML.}

Though this list is extensive enough to be impressive, the trio went on to identify the British Advisory Committee on Indian Affairs, the Lyceum Club, the National Women’s League for Peace and Freedom, the National Union, and the National Council of Women as organizations in significant sympathy with their demands as well. \textit{The Vote}, too, in September of 1933, put its support fully behind the Indian feminist nationalist groups. First, the publication clearly laid the blame for the depressed conditions for women in India at the feet of the British government, writing, “Those who are interested in Indian matters probably realize the terrible social conditions under which many Indian women are living—conditions which have changed relatively little during the century and a half.
while Great Britain has been the dominant power in the subcontinent.” Calling on the “fully enfranchised” women of Britain to act to change the government’s proposal for women’s franchise in India, the editors also wrote,

Every woman who reads this should do her best to induce not only women’s organizations but every organization whether of men or women with which she has the slightest influence to pass a resolution in the next few months urging the Joint Select Committee to give the most generous measure of franchise possible to Indian women…

Here, the editors of _The Vote_, the periodical of the Women’s Freedom League, asked the women of Britain to persuade all possible organizations in which they participated to petition the government for maximum female suffrage in the new Indian constitution. To facilitate this, the article included the addresses for the chair of the Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform and the Secretary of State for India.

The ambassadorship of the Indian feminist nationalists reaching out to British feminist groups bore self-sustaining fruit. As a result of this outreach, British women’s groups initiated contact and formed alliances with the Indian feminist groups. For example, Equal Rights International (ERI) wrote to Muthulakshmi Reddi in 1934 seeking a “closer and more effective and mutually beneficial” cooperation between the ERI and the WIA. By enlisting the aid of British feminist groups, Indian feminist nationalists not only gained assistance in the cause for universal adult suffrage, but they also, as noted, rekindled a sense of passion within British feminist organizations.

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418 “The Indian Women’s Franchise,” _The Vote_, Rathbone Papers, 7ELR Box 3, The Women’s Library, LSE.
419 Equal Rights International Group, File 5, ERI/1/AA/08 Box FL 333, The Women’s Library, LSE.
Despite the significant work by the Indian feminist nationalist groups and many British feminist establishments to influence the new constitution in favor of universal adult suffrage, the Government of India Act, 1935, did not grant full suffrage to the women of India. Instead, the bill included literacy qualifications, as well as property qualifications for women voters (though wives could claim their husband’s property toward voting eligibility). To the great consternation of the Indian feminists, the constitution also had reserved seats for women, split along communal lines. In the end, then, despite the many Indian and British feminist groups’ petitions for universal adult suffrage, the government of Britain chose to believe Rathbone’s claim that she spoke for the majority of women in India. As a result, they shaped the suffrage provisions in the constitution largely along the lines suggested by her. Still, the Indian feminist nationalists had opened new doors advancing themselves within the Indian and British political stage, as well as garnering international support and admiration. In addition, though disappointed by the terms of suffrage in the 1935 Government of India Act, they did not give up. The Indian Conciliation Group and the Liaison Group both continued to foster increased communication between Indian feminist nationalists and British feminist groups. On July 28, 1937, Mrs. Hamid Ali, writing on behalf of the AIWC to the Liaison group and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, continued to declare Indian moral superiority over the British government, noting, “I claim that [India] has risen above the greatest and most powerful nation in contributing a new world Idea which deals in spiritual forces pitted against material forces. No air bombs, no submarines, no machine guns can penetrate and exterminate a non violent passive resistant mind of the people.” Ali continued, “We are as yet in the experimental stages,
but we have every hope of reaching our goal soon, very soon, as years go in India, to arrive at self government without bombs, without bloodshed, and in friendship and goodwill…” Regarding suffrage, Ali wrote, “We are one and all united in desiring not to allow the communal poison to enter the ranks of womanhood.” Ali’s letter illustrates that the organized feminist groups in India had not given up on the idea of full franchise. Furthermore, they held fast to their beliefs that they were morally superior to the British government, that independence for India would soon come, and that the government’s insistence on communal electorates would not break that spirit of unity the Indian women’s groups had built. Ali framed this letter against the backdrop of the increasing likelihood of a new war in Europe, making the contrast of Indian unity even starker against the impending violence about to erupt on the European continent.

The Globalization of Indian Feminism: Indian Feminist Nationalists and the League of Nations, 1933-1938

British interwar feminist groups not only supported the goals of the Indian feminists within Britain, they also enabled Indian feminists to gain prominence within the international arena through involvement in the League of Nations. For the most part, British interwar feminists saw the League of Nations as a catalyst for raising the status of women globally. They believed that the League of Nations could combat the conservative ideologies that came with the end of the Great War and, subsequently, worsened during the Great Depression. The League of Nations was so vital to the thinking of

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420 Mrs. Hamid Ali, Memorandum to the Liaison Group and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, July 28, 1937. AIWC Papers, File # 37, NMML.
international feminists that Geneva became the axis of the international women’s movement. In 1926 Lady Rhondda, founder and chair of the Six Point Group, and American feminist Alice Paul proposed to the League of Nations an Equal Rights Treaty, with the clause, “The contracting States agree that upon ratification of this Treaty, men and women shall have Equal Rights throughout the territory subject to their respective jurisdictions.”\footnote{422} During a time of conservative backlash against feminism in the United Kingdom, the League of Nations seemed to provide a better option in seeking to protect the individual rights of women, in that the League had within its mandate the obligation to protect the civil rights of minorities, including equality before the law with respect to both political and civil rights. Members of the Six Point Group even believed that the proposed equal rights treaty would supplant suffrage as the unifying global force of the women’s movement.\footnote{423}

Given the Six Point Group’s ties to the League of Nations and the Equal Rights Treaty, as well as its passionate support of the Indian feminist nationalists with respect to ending child marriage and achieving equal suffrage in the new Indian constitution, it is reasonable to assume that Indian feminist involvement in the League of Nations came through their interaction with the Six Point Group. However, there is no primary source information to uphold or refute this. The earliest evidence of Indian feminists’ desire to become involved with the League of Nations appears in a reply letter from Florence Underwood of the Women’s Freedom League, to Amrit Kaur, on August 19, 1933. Underwood wrote,

\footnote{422} As quoted in Miller, “Geneva,” 221. 
\footnote{423} Miller, “Geneva,” 222.
I am wondering how we can be of any assistance in getting Indian women on international committees at Geneva...What we are doing is as follows, and I hope it meets with your approval. We are writing to the Secretary of State for India urging him to use the influence of the India Office to persuade the Authorities to include a woman in the Indian delegation to the Assembly and to the ILO. We are sending a similar letter to the Foreign Office, because that has chiefly to deal with the League of Nations.

Underwood’s letter had results. She wrote back to Kaur just four days later, informing her that the Secretary of State had not only received her letter, but had also forwarded it to the government of India. On September 8, Kaur also received a letter from Florence McFarlane, Honorary Secretary of the Six Point Group, informing her that the executive committee of the group voted to “do everything possible to secure representations of the Indian women on the International Committees of Women in Geneva.” On September 18, Kaur received a letter from Margery Corbett Ashby, President of the International Alliance for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, saying, “The Alliance would be very willing indeed to address a letter to the Indian Government urging the appointment of women as its delegates if you consider it would be useful.” Support for Indian women in the League of Nations continued to mount, evidenced by a letter of support Kaur received the next day from D. D. Solomon, General Secretary of the British Commonwealth League, stating, “We are only too anxious to do what we can to get Indian women on the International Committees at Geneva…” Finally, in its March 1934 newsletter, the Women’s International League, referring to the AIWC, wrote, “International representation at the League of Nations is desired and demanded for Indian women, to be

424 Amrit Kaur Papers, File: The Women’s Freedom League, Secty of, NMML.
425 Amrit Kaur Papers, File: The Women’s Freedom League, Secty of, NMML.
426 Amrit Kaur Papers, File: Six Point Group, London, Hon. Secty of, NMML.
427 Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur Papers, Correspondence, British Commonwealth League, Ho. Secretary, NMML.
elected by the Indian Women’s organizations and to be included in the Government of India delegation to Geneva.” In each of the communiqués, the authors stressed that the typical way to become a representative at the League of Nations was through governmental appointment, and that they would use all of their influence to convince the British government of India to do just that. Each also stated that all other feminist groups in Geneva would welcome the addition of Indian women to the League.

As interest in Indian feminist representation in the League of Nations grew, the League’s concern for women’s issues increased. Latin American feminists, with the support of American women from the National Women’s Party, began in 1934 to encourage Latin American governments to present their issues concerning the women in their respective countries to the League of Nations. Ten Latin American delegates then pressed the League of Nations to expand their focus to include “widespread and alarming encroachments upon the rights and liberties of women.” As a result, in 1935 the League invited 15 transnational women’s organizations to give presentations on the nationality and status of women. Flowing from these invitations, the League then invited governments to forward information regarding the political status of women in their countries.

The Liaison Committee intended to ensure that Indian women’s voices came to the fore in this inquiry. On February 11, 1935, Grace Lankester wrote to Kaur on behalf of the Liaison Committee that Mrs. Pethick-Lawrence wanted to confirm that the AIWC was responding to the request to produce a paper on the status of women in India for the

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429 As quoted in Miller, “Geneva,” 231.
League of Nations. The League of Nations followed up with the AIWC directly in March, asking, “Please send us any information you may have on the discriminations against women in your country particularly in regard to their political and economic life and in regard to those inequalities which have arisen recently.” Evidently, the League of Nations had queried the government of India as well; however, in the governments’ response, they failed to include the thoughts of any of the organized women’s groups, as the AIWC noted in its newsletter of December of 1936:

An important memorandum on the status of women in India, political, legal, economic, and educational, was drawn up and submitted jointly to the League of Nations by the AIWC and the Women’s Indian Association. The memorandum began by regretting that the Government of India had sent the League of Nations a memorandum on the political and civil status of women in British India without consulting Indian women’s organizations…

The persistent work by the AIWC and by various British feminist groups thus bolstered the status of the Indian feminist groups; their opinions held sway with the League of Nations. In this way, the Indian feminist groups thwarted the British government in India’s attempts to bypass them in delivering the report on the status of women in India. Later that year, S.N. Ray, the new Liaison Officer, wrote in her half-yearly report, “The AIWC has been appointed a corresponding member of the League of Nations Social Affairs Committee…” Apparently, the League of Nations was able to see through the attempts of the British government in India and took steps to include the AIWC as a corresponding member on its own.

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430 AIWC Papers, Subject Files, File # 1, NMML.
431 AIWC Papers, Subject Files, File # 1, NMML.
432 AIWC Papers, File # 37, NMML.
433 AIWC Papers, File #37, NMML.
As Indian feminist involvement in the League of Nations grew, so did the admiration of British feminists toward them. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence wrote of the accomplishments of the Indian feminists in the April 1937 *Bulletin of the Indian Women’s Movement*, “The attitude taken by women in India with regard to the communal problem transcends all that I have hoped or dreamed of women’s influence in public life.” She continued, “I rejoice also in the lead they have given at the International Conferences [of the League of Nations]. In my view, the women of the East are foremost in their insistence upon women’s complete equality and freedom.” Pethick-Lawrence credited the Indian women for their leadership in bringing unity in India and in helping to overcome the communal problem. She also admired them for both their participation in the League of Nations conferences and their leadership in them. In addition, on the topic of Indian feminist participation in the League of Nations, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom wrote in August of the same year to the leadership of the AIWC,

We would say to you that we need your help and cooperation and understanding that the path which you are treading in the practice of cooperation and understanding between diverse groups, in your deep knowledge of the contribution which women can make in the public life of their community, you have a great contribution to make towards the solution of the tensions of the world today.

Again, the British feminists praised the leadership of the Indian feminists in the international arena and, with the prospect of war looming, asked them for much-needed guidance in world affairs to help overcome the deep divisions in world politics.

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434 AIWC Papers, File #37, NMML.
435 AIWC Papers, File #23, NMML.
A similar request for Indian feminist leadership in the pursuit of world peace occurred in June of 1938, when Grace Lankester wrote on behalf of the Liaison Committee to the standing committee of the AIWC that,

The Women’s International League in this country is making at this time a special forward effort and each branch has been arranging a series of meetings in outlying districts where the work for peace has not been much stressed before, and I have been asked to help in several areas with the special request that I would pass on your message from India. I have felt that message a real inspiration, and it serves as a text through which to make a fundamental appeal for a new outlook on this question of world peace.436

Clearly, the Indian feminists provided both a sense of moral purpose and an example that British feminists hoped to replicate in their push for world peace.

In the five years from 1933 to 1938, Indian feminists, with the help of British feminists, not only advocated for representation in the League of Nations, but also took on leadership roles on the subjects of peace and inclusiveness. With the world on the brink of a new war, they served as an example that others at the League of Nations desired to duplicate. Whereas many scholars have interpreted the work of British feminists in the pursuit of pacifism and world peace as a decline in feminist spirit, this was not the case. The Indian feminists’ ability to transcend communal issues and bring into the fold of Indian feminism a diversity of Indian women, regardless of class, caste, religious, or linguistic issues, inspired the British feminists. Motivated by this unprecedented inclusiveness in pursuing their goals for equality and self-governance, the British women celebrated their Indian counterparts. At home and abroad British feminists pointed to the Indian feminists’ work as an example of the peace across diverse lines they hoped could take place globally.

436 AIWC Papers, Subject Files, File #42, NMML.
Conclusion

By the 1930’s Indian feminists proved themselves a formidable power within the international community, and their strength kept growing. Although the announcement of the Round Table talks energized public interest in Britain, Gandhi and the INC chose to boycott the first talks. Despite this, Indian feminists sought more than British appointed representation in the discussions; they strove to elect one of their own as representative. Their bid to choose their own representative failed in the first Round Table talks. However, at the second Round Table talks, Sarojini Naidu stood as one of the representatives for Indian women and dominated the discussions of what Indian women desired. Unfortunately, Eleanor Rathbone strongly opposed the Indian feminists’ push for universal adult suffrage, believing that, pragmatically, limited suffrage for women might be possible. Thus, Rathbone, claiming to represent all Indian women, pushed for designated seats for women, and only for those who met certain restrictions, and for voting on a communal basis. To counter Rathbone, the Indian feminist organizations successfully lobbied the Equality feminists in Britain, who not only sided with them, but also worked extensively on their behalf. The issue of Indian women’s suffrage, then, proved to be a rallying point that energized British feminists. Though New and Equality feminists disagreed on how the implementation of Indian women’s suffrage should look, each side worked extensively to influence the government demonstrating a renewed sense of passion within British feminism.

This passion continued on the international front as well. Many British feminists, impressed by the Indian feminists’ ability to unify groups from different socioeconomic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, sought to help Indian feminists attain
representation on the League of Nations. Organizations such as the Six Point Group saw
the Equal Rights treaty within the League of Nations as a potential rallying point for
feminists around the globe. As such, they lobbied for an expanded role for Indian
feminists in the League. Their efforts succeeded; although the British government in
India reported to the League on the condition of women in India, the League also directly
sought a dissenting report from the Indian feminist organizations. In 1936, The League of
Nations asked the AIWC to become a corresponding member of the Social Affairs
Committee, even though India still did not have its independence. So effective was the
leadership provided by the AIWC in the League of Nations that, by 1938, British feminist
groups were praising Indian feminists for holding the key for world peace.
Conclusion:
The Impact of Interwar Indian Feminists, Yesterday to Today

Before the Great War, British feminists aggressively supported ideas of empire. They argued that by supporting empire, they demonstrated political beliefs and activism identical to their male counterparts, and thus deserved the vote. This tactic identified them ideologically with the paternalistic status quo toward empire during the Edwardian era. As I have demonstrated, after the war and with the advent of limited, then universal, adult women’s suffrage in Britain, British feminists’ ideas towards empire and Indian independence began to change. Although this change was slow and faltering, as we have seen, by the mid-1930’s a significant portion of British feminists not only supported their Indian sisters, but they also saw them as leaders in the global feminist movement.

Though the almost miraculous unity of interwar Indian feminist nationalists began to quickly erode during the 2nd World War, their ideals endured through the Constitutional Convention upon India’s independence from Britain. In these pages, I have demonstrated that through the tragedy of the Amritsar massacre, Indian women began to gain entree to the public sphere. This greater access beyond the walls of purdah, and society’s acceptance of it, provided Indian feminist nationalists the opportunity to advocate within the political arena, with the abolition of child marriage one of their first major projects. The skills learned in this fight, and the international alliances made during it, strengthened the Indian feminist nationalists’ development of skills needed not just to

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advocate within their own national political stage, but on the global one as well.

Furthermore, the feminist groups developed their own discourse for Indian independence around the idea of moral superiority to the British, as it was the British government that had thwarted Indian attempts to cease the practice of child marriage. The publication of Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India*, in 1927, encouraged Indian feminists to defend their record in domestic social advocacy for political reform, which subsequently allowed them to cultivate international relationships that would bring the feminist nationalists into leadership roles within the League of Nations.

The advent of the Round Table discussions provided a new venue for the Indian feminists to further hone their political skills, as they practiced both petitionary politics and sought to directly influence public opinion regarding universal adult suffrage. These discussions and the widespread public confusion regarding the goals of the Indian nationalists fostered the creation of the India Conciliation Group, which worked to bring the facts of the Indians goals and tactics to the fore for both the British government and the British populace. A sister group, the Liaison Group of British Women’s Societies, with significant overlap in membership with the India Conciliation Group, focused on making issues concerning Indian women known to British feminists. These groups, too, advanced the cause of the Indian feminist nationalists to the global arena of the League of Nations, where I demonstrated that they attained significantly greater admiration than their male counterparts. In particular, many credited them with holding the key of peace for ending the increasing hostilities in Europe because of their demonstrated ability to forge unity across economic, religious, class, and linguistic divides.
I have also shown across these chapters that, while many scholars, such as Radha Kumar, credited Gandhi as the one who engaged the women of India and feminized the independence movement, this an overstatement. Indian feminist nationalists insisted on a greater role in the independence movement than originally envisioned by Gandhi. They forced their way into greater participation in the movement and proved themselves equals of men. They also brought the light of international attention to the independence movement in an unprecedented manner, earning international admiration once again. It was the Indian feminist nationalists’ tireless work and international success as ambassadors for the Indian nationalists that caused Gandhi to reject his previous ideas of separate spheres regarding the roles of men and women. Ultimately, he not only embraced the masculine in them, and the feminine within himself, but he also acclaimed them as the key to Indian independence.

The British government in India in the interwar era entertained many ideas on how to silence Gandhi, from Lord Irwin wishing him to die of a heart attack or stroke on the salt march, to schemes for his deportation or even assassination. If the government had been able to silence Gandhi, other leaders would have risen to take his place. Though it did not come to fruition, as I have shown, Gandhi even prophesied that Sarojini Naidu would have to endure the same privations, including death, as him. Though in theory the British government may have successfully silenced Gandhi, it is my contention that the independence movement would have continued relatively unchanged. Moreover, I argue that the Simon Commission, with all of its faults, was correct in their statement that Indian women held the key for the future of Indian governance. I contend that if the government had silenced the interwar Indian feminist nationalists, not only would the
shape of Indian independence have changed dramatically, but their future constitution upon independence would have differed significantly as well. Due to their tireless work in petitionary politics and in molding domestic and international public opinion in favor of universal adult suffrage, as well as their ability to transcend economic, religious, cultural, and linguistic differences in a manner not seen anywhere else in the globe, the interwar Indian feminist nationalist built a foundation that ensured a progressive constitution that, with British influence gone, guaranteed equal rights for women and universal adult suffrage.

At the heart of Gandhi’s political vision for India after independence was a country not bound by a strong federal core, in which Indians stepped in to fill the voids recently vacated by the British. Instead, his vision for an independent India looked more anarchical, involving loosely linked groupings of nearly self-sufficient villages that acted as their own miniature republics.\textsuperscript{438} However, by the time of Independence in 1947, Gandhi’s anarchist ideas held little sway in the new constitution. Instead, the past ideals of the interwar feminist nationalists reverberated into the constituent assembly from 1947 to 1949, with single-member constituencies, open to all, replacing the old colonial designated seats for women (though the assembly did put into place designated seats for some minority groups such as Harijan) that had been so effective in the British policy of divide and rule. This system held to the feminist nationalists’ desire to end the divisive electoral practices of the past. In addition, the new constitution progressively granted equal rights to all, regardless of gender, giving credence to the Indian feminist nationalists’ argument that they already understood themselves to be equals with men,

\textsuperscript{438} Metcalf and Metcalf, \textit{Concise}, 172.
and, unlike British feminists, were not at war with them (See Excerpt of India’s 1949 constitution in Appendix A). In the end, post-independence India forged an advanced, secular constitution.

Today, with nearly 20% of the world population living inside its borders, India is developing as an international powerhouse both economically and militarily. Narenda Modi’s ascension as Prime Minister in 2014 broke the old familial power dynasty within the leadership of the country. Though India has made significant progress, and the rights of women are guaranteed in theory, much more needs to take place for the ideals of the interwar feminist nationalists to come to full actualization. Although the constitution guarantees equal rights for women, many women in India remain second-tier citizens. A significant reason for this is the gap in literacy rates between men and women. In the 2011 census the male literacy rate was 82.14%, while the female literacy rate was 65.45%.\textsuperscript{439} Literacy rates are highest in urban areas, but drop significantly outside of the major cities. This lack of literacy engenders a lack of awareness of political and economic rights. Though the constitution of India may be progressive, until the government deals with this issue—and we saw that this was the core concern in the founding of the AIWC--the rights of women will continue to languish in many areas of the country, hindering the nation’s growth. Indian feminists today must keep alive the ideals of the interwar Indian feminist nationalists, and regain the sense of unity they once held, in order to attain the freedoms that these brave women fought so tirelessly to bring about.

Appendix A:
Excerpts of the Constitution of India, 1949

14. Equality before law The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth

15. Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth
(1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them
(2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to
(a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and palaces of public entertainment; or
(b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public
(3) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children
(4) Nothing in this article or in clause (2) of Article 29 shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes

16. Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment
(1) There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State
(2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the State
(3) Nothing in this article shall prevent Parliament from making any law prescribing, in regard to a class or classes of employment or appointment to an office under the Government of, or any local or other authority within, a State or Union territory, any requirement as to residence within that State or Union territory prior to such employment or appointment
(4) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any provision for the reservation of appointments or posts in favor of any backward class of citizens which, in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State
(5) Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any law which provides that the incumbent of an office in connection with the affairs of any religious or denominational institution or any member of the governing body thereof shall be a person professing a particular religion or belonging to a particular denomination

39. Certain principles of policy to be followed by the State: The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing

(a) that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means to livelihood;

(b) that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good;

(c) that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment;

(d) that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women;

(e) that the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength;

(f) that children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment

326. Elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assemblies of States to be on the basis of adult suffrage The elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assembly of every State shall be on the basis of adult suffrage; but is to say, every person who is a citizen of India and who is not less than twenty one years of age on such date as may be fixed in that behalf by or under any law made by the appropriate legislature and is not otherwise disqualified under this constitution or any law made by the appropriate Legislature on the ground of non residence, unsoundness of mind, crime or corrupt or illegal practice, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter at any such election
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