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**Citizens of Everywhere.
Indian Nationalist Women
and the Global Public Sphere,
1900 – 1952**

Rosalind Parr

Doctor of Philosophy (History)

University of Edinburgh

January 2018

Declaration of Own Work

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Rosalind Parr

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Abstract

The first half of the twentieth century saw the evolution of the global public sphere as a site for political expression and social activism. In the past, this history has been marginalised by a discipline-wide preference for national and other container-based frames of analysis. However, in the wake of 'the global turn,' historians have increasingly turned their attention to the ways historical actors thought, acted, and organised globally. Transnational histories of South Asia feed into our understanding of these processes, yet, so far, little attention has been paid to the role of Indian nationalist women, despite there being significant 'global' aspects to their lives and careers.

Citizens of Everywhere addresses this lacuna through an examination of the transnational activities of a handful of prominent nationalist women between 1900 and 1950. These include alliances and interactions with women's organisations, anti-imperial supporters and the League of Nations, as well as official contributions to the business of the fledgling United Nations Organisation after 1946. This predominantly below-state-level activity built on and contributed to public and private networks that traversed the early twentieth century world, cutting across national, state and imperial boundaries to create transnational solidarities to transformative effect. Set against a backdrop of rising imperialist-nationalist tension and global geopolitical conflict, these relationships enable a counter-narrative of global citizenship - a concept that at once connotes a sense of belonging, a *modus operandi*, and an assertive political claim. However, they were also highly gendered, sometimes tenuous, and frequently complex interactions that constantly evolved according to local and global conditions.

In advancing our understanding of nationalist women's careers, *Citizens of Everywhere* contributes to the recovery of Indian women's historical subjectivity, which, in turn, sheds light on gender and nationalism in South Asia. Further, Indian women's transnational activities draw attention to a range of interventions and processes that illuminate the global history of liberal ideas and political practices, the legacies of which appear embattled in the present era.

Lay Summary

When independent India emerged on the world stage in 1946-47, a number of women were appointed to represent the fledgling nation-state in the international arena. As well as signaling India's purported commitment to gender equality, this reflected a long history of Indian women's participation in the global public sphere. *Citizens of Everywhere* charts this history by examining the ideological development and transnational interactions of prominent Indian women in the first half of the twentieth century. These included alliances with international women's organisations and anti-imperial supporters as well as involvement with the work of the League of Nations and, eventually, the United Nations.

This history of Indian nationalist women contributes a narrative of transnational solidarity and global citizenship to an era more usually defined by nationalist-imperialist conflict and geopolitical tension. *Citizens of Everywhere* helps us understand this complex history. In doing so, it sheds light on gender, nationalism, and the development of liberal ideas and political practices in both South Asian and global historical contexts, the legacies of which appear embattled in the present day.

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List of Abbreviations

AAWC	All Asian Women's Congress
AFL	American Federation of Labor
AICC	All-India Congress Committee
AIWC	All-India Women's Conference
BCIWF	British Committee for Indian Women's Franchise
BCL	British Commonwealth League
BL	British Library
CHR	Commission for Human Rights
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
CWVG	Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
IAW	International Alliance of Women (shortened form of IAWSEC)
IAWSEC	International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship
ICS	Indian Civil Service
ICW	International Council of Women
ILO	International Labour Office
IMS	Indian Medical Service
IPR	Institute of Pacific Relations
IWSA	International Women's Suffrage Alliance (later IAWSEC)
LoN	League of Nations
LSE	London School of Economics
MUA	McMaster University Archive
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NAI	National Archives of India
NCIF	National Committee for Indian Freedom
NCWI	National Council of Women in India
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
PSB	Pearl S. Buck Archive
RTC	Round Table Conference
SAADA	South Asian American Digital Archive
SCSW	Sub-Commission on the Status of Women
SPG	Six Point Group
SSA	Sophia Smith Archives
SSG	Sherborne School for Girls
UCC	Uniform Civil Code
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UKPP	UK Parliamentary Papers
UNESCO	United Nations Economic and Social Conference
UNT	University of North Texas
WFL	Women's Freedom League
WHO	World Health Organisation
WIA	Women's Indian Association
WIL	Women's International League (British Branch of WILPF)
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WL	Women's Library
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

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Dramatis Personae

Central Figures

Sarojini Naidu: poet, nationalist leader, President of the Indian National Congress (1925), Governor of Maharashtra (1947-1949).

Shareefah Hamid Ali: Liaison Officer between AIWC and Europe 1935-1936, member of United Nations Commission for the Status of Women 1947.

Amrit Kaur: Liaison Officer between AIWC and Europe 1934-1935, AIWC President 1938, Minister for Health in Indian Cabinet 1947-1957, President of World Health Assembly 1950, Indian delegate to UNESCO and WHO.

Hansa Mehta: AIWC co-founder and President (1946), member of United Nations Sub-Committee on the Status of Women (1946) and Commission on Human Rights (1947-52).

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit: Cabinet Minister for Health and Local Government in UP Government (1937-39), AIWC President 1941-43, leader of the Indian delegation to the UN, Ambassador to Moscow and Washington, High Commissioner in London.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya: co-founder AIWC and Congress Socialist Party, AIWC President 1944-45, member Commission on Human Rights (1953).

Supporting Roles

Indian Women

Muthulakshmi Reddy: Indian feminist, WIA leader, first woman legislator in India, member of Indian women's delegation in London 1933.

Radhabhai Subbarayan: Indian feminist, not supportive of Indian women's delegation in 1933, appointed by the British to the Round Table Conferences (1930-1931) and to League of Nations and ILO commissions (1934).

Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz: Indian feminist, appointed by the British to the Round Table Conferences (1930-1931) and to League of Nations and ILO commissions (1935), member of the Muslim League.

Ammu Swarninathan: AIWC member, member of Indian women's delegation to League of Nations in 1933.

Keron Bose: NCWI member, member of Indian women's delegation to League of Nations in 1933.

Indian Men

M.K. Gandhi: Indian nationalist leader.

Jawaharlal Nehru: Indian nationalist leader, first Prime Minister of India, brother of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.

Virendranath Chattopadhyaya: exiled Indian revolutionary, brother of Sarojini Naidu, brother-in-law of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya.

J.J. Singh: President of India League of America.

European Women and Organisations

Annie Besant: British Theosophist, Indian nationalist, first woman President of the Indian National Congress (1917).

Grace Lankester: British member of WILPF and Liaison Officer between the 'five friendly societies'/Liaison Group and the AIWC.

Margaret Cousins: Irish Theosophist, suffragist, Indian nationalist, co-founder of WIA and AIWC.

Margery Corbett Ashby: British feminist, President of IWSA/IAWSEC, influential member of Joint Standing Committee of Women's Organisations in Geneva, visited AIWC meeting 1935.

Eleanor Rathbone: British feminist, Independent MP, author of *Child Marriage. The Indian Minotaur* (1935), BCIWF leader.

Agatha Harrison: British industrial welfare reformer, member of WIL and YWCA, supporter of Gandhi.

Vera Brittain: British feminist, pacifist, writer, supporter of Indian independence, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's biographer.

Maude Royden: evangelical Christian preacher, supporter of Gandhi, visited AIWC meeting 1935.

Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence: British suffragist, member of WFL, wife of Secretary of State for India.

British Committee for Indian Women's Franchise (BCIWF): British feminist umbrella group, led by Eleanor Rathbone, which supported the enfranchisement of Indian but did not support the specific demands of Indian women's organisations during their campaign in the 1930s.

The Liaison Group of British Women's Organisations: Supportive British feminist umbrella group made up of the 'five friendly societies': the Women's International League (WIL), the British Commonwealth League (BCL), the Six Point Group (SPG), the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance, and the Women's Freedom League (WFL). Unlike BCIWF, supported specific demands of Indian women's organisations during campaign in 1930s.

International Women's Organisations

International Women's Suffrage Alliance (IWSA): international organisation (President: Margery Corbett Ashby), conference attended by Indian women's delegation in 1920.

International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAWSEC): name of IWSA after 1926, AIWC affiliated to 1935, later shortened to **International Alliance of Women (IAW)**, 1946. Hansa Metha served as President 1946.

Joint Standing Committee of Women's International Organisations: umbrella organisation for international women's societies in Geneva. Founded in 1926 to promote women's representation at the League of Nations.

International Council of Women: international organisation, delegation to League of Nations 1933, of which Amrit Kaur was part.

Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA): international Christian network interested in social reform and women's rights.

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF): International, women's pacifist organisation. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit served as Vice-President 1942.

League of Nations

Eric Einar Ekstrand: Swedish Director of the Social Section, League of Nations Secretariat.

Gabrielle Radziwill: Secretary of the Social Section and Liaison Officer to international women's organisations at League of Nations.

Advisory Commission for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People: League of Nations body that oversaw the Child Welfare and the Traffic in Women and Children Committees. The Indian women's delegation sought representation on this Commission in 1933 and contributed to its work until 1939.

Americans

Paul Robeson: Afro-American Rights actor and activist, leader of Committee on African Affairs, friend of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Jawaharlal Nehru, later blacklisted for Communist sympathies. Husband of Essie Robeson.

Essie Robeson: Wife of Paul Robeson, friend of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit

Eleanor Roosevelt: Wife of President, sympathetic to Indian independence, Chair of Commission for Human Rights, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit claimed her as a friend.

Richard J. Walsh: Nehru's publisher, member of India League of America, friend and supporter of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.

Pearl Buck: Novelist, Honorary President of India League of America, friend and supporter of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.

India League of America: Organisation promoting Indian nationalist cause in America and rights of Indians in America. Established by Indians but recruited

many well-connected Americans during the Second World War, including Richard Walsh, Pearl Buck, and Walter White.

National Committee for Indian Freedom (NCIF): Washington-based organisation that broke away from the India League in October 1943

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP): African-American rights organisation. Led by Walter White.

Walter White: President of NAACP, served on National Advisory Board of India League of America, supporter of Indian independence and colonial freedom.

Henry Luce: *Time* magazine publisher. Interventionist. Husband of Clare Boothe Luce.

Clare Boothe Luce: Supporter of Indian immigration rights and sponsor of Luce-Celler legislation. Friend of Nehru. Wife of Henry Luce.

At the United Nations

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO): established 1945

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC): Organ of United Nations responsible for Economic and Social work including Sub Commission on Status of Women (SCSW), Commission on Status of Women (CSW) and Commission on Human Rights (CHR).

Sub Commission on Status of Women (SCSW): established 1946 to survey global status of women. Members: Way Sung New (China), Fryderyka Kalinowski (Poland), Angela Jurdak (Lebanon), Marie Helene Lefauchaux, (France), Bodgil Begtrup (Denmark), and Hansa Mehta.

Commission on Human Rights: established 1947 to draft a Bill of International Rights. Drafted Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

Commission on Status of Women (CSW): successor to SCSW.

Other

Amina El-Said: Egyptian feminist, travelled to AIWC meeting 1946.

Note on Names

In the spirit of consistency, I have standardised names for which there is more than one contemporary spelling - Chattopadhyaya instead of Chattopadhyay, Reddy instead of Reddi – unless the name appears in a book title or quotation.

Women's names in the early to mid-twentieth century public sphere were rarely abbreviated to family name only. Sarojini Naidu was more often referred to as Sarojini or Mrs. Naidu. Prior to her marriage, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was named Swarup Kumari Nehru, but after her name changed at marriage she was more normally referred to as Mrs Pandit. It was much more common for contemporaries to use Kamaladevi, than Chattopadhyaya or Mrs Chattopadhyaya. Despite this, I have taken the liberty of abbreviating full names to family names, as is common practice for male figures (e.g. Gandhi). However, this logic does not quite follow in all cases. Amrit Kaur is a given name which reflects the subject's North Indian heritage and Kaur is not strictly a family name. Her parents were known as Sir (later Raja) and Lady Harnam Singh. During her lifetime, Amrit Kaur was generally referred to as Rajkumari (Princess) Amrit Kaur, or 'The Rajkumari.' Having acknowledged that, and again in the spirit of consistency, when abbreviation has been desirable, I have opted to use Kaur.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

[O]nly those who as voluntary members of an 'elementary republic' have demonstrated that they care for more than their private happiness and are concerned about the state of the world would have the right to be heard in the conduct of the business of the republic.¹

Many of the central and most enduring struggles in the history of politics have taken place in and over the language of citizenship and the activities and institutions into which it is woven.²

'Indian women are taking a lead in the councils of the world,' reported Grace Lankester, Secretary of the Women's International League in June 1947.³ India was not yet independent, but as representatives of Jawaharlal Nehru's interim government, a small cohort of Indian women - all prominent figures in the nationalist movement - created a notable presence in the global arena. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, a close associate of M.K. Gandhi, had led India's delegation to the United Nations Economic and Social Conference (UNESCO) in 1945 and 1946 and would go on to serve at the World Health Organisation (WHO) where she was elected President in 1950. Kaur's friend and colleague, Hansa Mehta, was one of seven women on the United Nations Sub-Committee on the Status of Women in early 1946 and would represent India on the Commission for Human Rights between 1947 and 1952. The Indian woman with the highest international profile at this point was Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, the only woman to lead a national delegation at the First Session of the UN General Assembly. It was Pandit's campaign against the Union of South Africa's race policy in late 1946 that announced

¹ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 285.

² James Tully, *On Global Citizenship. James Tully in Dialogue* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 3.

³ Grace Lankester, 'Light on India', *Women's International League Monthly News Sheet*, June 1947, 1, File No. 53, All India Women's Conference (AIWC) Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML). See also Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), *International Circular Letter*, No. 5/1947, April 1947, 9, WILPF 3/7, London School of Economics (LSE).

soon-to-be-independent India's arrival on the international stage. For Lankester, such achievements marked India out: '[c]ompare this record with British women's representation on International bodies,' she remarked.⁴

With India emerging painfully, yet surely, from the era of colonial rule, and with the world system in flux after the rupture of World War Two, these international appointments carried the promise of a new beginning. Yet they were also the culmination of over two decades of activity by Indian nationalist women in the global public sphere. This thesis examines these global careers, along with the ideologies that drove them and the relationships that sustained them. This means focussing on the ways Indian nationalist women thought and acted beyond 'the nation', even as the nationalist cause and, later, the nation-state, structured their public lives. To a great degree, these cosmopolitan interactions occurred at the level of, or in association with, civil society rather than being state-level interventions. The interest of Grace Lankester in the international achievements of Indian women in 1947 was based, as we shall see, on solidarity achieved through a history of transnational civil society collaboration and stands as testament to this extensive below-state-level activity in the pre-independence era. The intention in what follows, then, is to present a history of nationalist actors in which both the nation and the nation-state are decentred. This is not to set nationalism and cosmopolitanism in diametric opposition. Rather, it is to consider some of the ways these seemingly opposing concepts were intertwined in the lives of Indian nationalist women in the first half of the twentieth century.

For reasons that will be discussed, nationalist women and, in particular, the global aspects of their lives have received insufficient scholarly attention. At one level, then, tracing their global careers is a project of recovery that brings previously neglected mindsets, activities, and transnational interactions to

⁴ Lankester, 'Light on India'. For British women see Helen McCarthy, *Women of the World. The Rise of the Female Diplomat* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), Chapter 3.

light. This endeavour raises a host of immediate questions, which, in turn, lead to bigger, more expansive questions about Indian nationalism and about the global context. In immediate terms, it is important to establish how Indian nationalist women understood the relationship between the local and the global contexts, in what sense their activities transcended 'the nation', what was the nature of these transnational relationships, and what purpose they served. Questions about the ways Indian nationalists thought and acted beyond the nation lead to questions about the significance of these cosmopolitan interventions. What do they tell us about the history of nationalism and feminism in India? What, more widely, do they tell us about the making of the modern world?

The subjects of study comprise a small cohort of elite, mobile, well-connected women who were born in colonial India around the turn of the twentieth century. Although they are better known for their connections with the nationalist movement, they also thought and acted as citizens of the world. They understood that their lives were entwined with an interconnected global system structured by imperial domination and their response was similarly global in scope. Indian nationalism, they believed, offered a progressive global alternative, which would produce a more equal and peaceful world. At the same time, through their work in the Indian women's movement, they were deeply invested in the reform of society at a local and national level. Here the idea of progress was invoked against social practices and other conservative forces that disadvantaged women. These political and social projects at a local and global level, all based on a narrative of progress, brought nationalist women into contact with a range of progressive civil society interlocutors. In interacting with these actors, they contributed to an interlinking system of liberal networks that challenged a set of reactionary, conservative, or otherwise entrenched forces through alliances that cut across national boundaries. Along with the world's media, which they made use of skilfully, and the instruments of world governance, these below-state-level civil society organisations comprised a globalising public sphere

'between state and society' through which various actors attempted to influence the future of the world.⁵ Although for some of the period covered in this thesis, nationalist women operated as state or proto-state actors, their careers were substantially rooted in the civil society tradition. As a result, what follows constitutes not so much a history from above or below but a history from the middle.

The languages and practices of liberal citizenship structured and gave meaning to nationalist women's transnational activities. Originally a concept that legitimated their public sphere participation and enabled women to lay claim to democratic rights in the imperial context, citizenship was also applied to the global arena where it not only underpinned political claims but provided and reflected a sense of identity and belonging. During the period prior to Indian independence, these claims were always aspirational but, by employing the practices of citizenship – democratic organization, public debate, and the petitioning of authority – nationalist women's civil society activities were also assertions of citizenship that were to some extent self-fulfilling. By purposefully operating as global citizens, they, arguably, actually became global citizens, although not, of course, in any legal sense. It is here that the spirit of citizenship indicated by Hannah Arendt in the opening epigraph comes into play - although the idea is that their participation enabled the possibility of citizenship, rather than legitimised it as Arendt appears to suggest.

The ways Indian nationalist women appropriated the concept of citizenship in the Indian context is impressively documented.⁶ This thesis argues that they also deployed the languages and practices of citizenship at a global level and that, in doing so, they contributed to the development of both rights-based discourses and civil society participation in the global public sphere. As

⁵ The phrase is from Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. (Translated by Thomas Burger with the Assistance of Frederick Lawrence) (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989).

⁶ See Mrinalina Sinha, *Specters of Mother India. The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2006).

such, these figures should be considered as agents not only of Indian nationalist history but of some of the globalising processes that defined the twentieth century world.

Indian Nationalist Women: The Historiographical Context

Historians of gender in South Asia have long since moved on from previously prevailing narratives that denied or otherwise downplayed the agency of women in the colonial context.⁷ Today, our understanding combines richly documented knowledge of the structural conditions that circumscribed women's lives with an awareness of women's subjectivities against the evolving backdrop of Indian society.⁸ However, although women's history in the context of South Asia provides some valuable accounts of nationalist women's activities, in the wider history of Indian nationalism, women are marginalised, being generally consigned to the shadows of their better known male colleagues.⁹ In addition to this, women's activities in the global public sphere are insufficiently documented because, in transcending the boundaries of the nation, they fall outside the usual analytical frameworks of

⁷ See Partha Chatterjee's claim that, 'the new constitution of independent India gave women the vote without any major debate on the question and without there ever having been a movement for women's suffrage at any period of nationalist politics' in Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 131. For a useful critique of this position see Himani Bannerjee, 'Projects of Hegemony, Towards a Critique of Subaltern Studies' "Resolution of the Women's Question", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11 March 2000, 35, 11, 902-920.

⁸ For example, Tanika Sarkar, *Rebels, Wives, Saints. Designing Selves and Nations in Colonial Times* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009).

⁹ Important histories of nationalist women include Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing. An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1993); Maitrayee Chaudhuri, *Feminism in India* (London: Zed, 2005); Vijay Agnew, *Elite Women in Indian Politics* (Delhi: Vikas, 1979); Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*. Biographical accounts include Tara Baig Ali, *Sarojini Naidu* (New Delhi Publications Division Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1974); Raj Kumar, Rameshwari Devi, Romila Purthi (eds.) *Women and the Indian Freedom Struggle. 7 Volumes.* (Jaipur: Pointer Publishers, 1998); Anne Guthrie, *Madame Ambassador. The Life of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit* (London: Macmillan and Co Ltd, 1963); Vera Brittain, *Envoy Extraordinary: A Study of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Her Contribution to Modern India* (South Brunswick, N.J.: A. S. Barnes, 1965). More critically engaged accounts include Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *Sarojini Naidu. Her Way With Words* (New Delhi, Niyogi Books, 2012); Reena Nanda, *Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya. A Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002); Ellen Carol DuBois and Vinay Lal (eds.), *A Passionate Life. Writings by and on Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2017).

a historiography traditionally delimited by 'methodological nationalism'.¹⁰

Mrinalini Sinha's work stands out not only for providing essential insights into the role played by women in Indian public life but in its acknowledgement of the global context with which this history is interwoven.¹¹

One of the themes that will be explored in this thesis is the relationship between British and Indian women. There is a relatively large literature on this topic but studies of these interactions predominantly focus on the motivations of British women and are usually rigidly structured by the imperialist-nationalist dichotomy.¹² Few existing studies present interactions between Indian and Western women as productive or enabling.¹³ By contrast, without denying the inequalities of power that framed transnational interactions in the colonial era, this thesis will explore the wider aspects of these relationships. This includes putting Indian women's perspectives at the centre of the analysis and examining relationships between British and Indian women that were supportive and were based, to a certain degree, on a sense of solidarity and shared purpose that cut across national boundaries. A further consideration in this thesis is the extent to which Indian women's transnational activities impacted on the points of view of their interlocutors and beyond. The approach of this thesis builds on recent attempts to include non-Western women in global histories of the international women's

¹⁰ For 'methodological nationalism' see Kenneth Pomeranz, 'Presidential Address, Histories for a Less National Age', *American Historical Review*, 119, 1, February 2014. Some stand-alone exceptions to this trend are Emily Rook-Koepsel, 'Constructing Women's Citizenship. The Local, National, and Global Civics Lessons of Rajkumari Amrit Kaur,' *Journal of Women's History*, 27, 3, (2015), 154-175; Anupama Arora, 'The Nightingale's Wanderings: Sarojini Naidu in North America' in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 44, 3 (2009), 87-105.

¹¹ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*.

¹² Antoinette M. Burton, *Burdens of History. British Feminists, Indian women and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Barbara N. Ramusack, 'Cultural missionaries, maternal imperialists, feminist allies: British women activists in India, 1865-1945,' *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13, 4, (1990), 309-321; Nancy L. Paxton, 'Feminism under the Raj: Complicity and resistance in the writings of Flora Annie Steel and Annie Besant', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13, 4 (1990), 333-346.

¹³ An exception is Mrinalini Sinha, 'Suffragism and Internationalism: The enfranchisement of British and Indian women under an imperial state,' *Indian Economic Social History Review*, 36, 4 (1999) 461-484.

movement – a historiography in which Indian women’s subjectivities are only just beginning to emerge.¹⁴

Beyond the women’s movement, some accounts of Indian women’s activities in the global public sphere do exist. Manu Bhagavan offers an impressive account of the ways Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and, to a lesser extent, Hansa Mehta exported a progressive ‘One World’ ideology to the global community via American public opinion and the United Nations.¹⁵ Although Pandit and Mehta are nominally assigned ‘leading roles’, in Bhagavan’s account they function more as conduits for Indian state or proto-state policy rather than as individual historical agents.¹⁶ Similarly, in Mark Mazower’s otherwise valuable analysis of the Indian campaign against the Union of South Africa in the UN General Assembly of 1946, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, who led the campaign, is presented simply as a mouthpiece for Nehruvian state policy.¹⁷ Against this record, the present thesis is an attempt to bring Indian women’s particular contributions as agents of global history to the fore. In order to do

¹⁴ Marilyn Lake, ‘From Self-Determination via Protection to Equality via Non-Discrimination: Defining Women’s Rights at the League of Nations and the United Nations,’ in Patricia Grimshaw, Katie Holmes and Marilyn Lake eds., *Women’s Rights and Human Rights: International Historical Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Devaki Jain, *Women, Development, and the UN: A Sixty-Year Quest for Equality and Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Francisca de Haan, Margaret Allen, June Purvis and Karssimira Daskalov (eds.), *Women’s Activism. Global Perspectives from the 1890s to the Present* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013); Marie Sandell, ‘Learning in and from the West: international students and international women’s organisations in the interwar period’, *History of Education*, 44,1 (2015), 5-24. For invaluable new histories from the perspective of Indian women see Sumita Mukherjee, ‘The All-Asian Women’s Conference 1931: Indian women and their leadership of a pan-Asian feminist organisation’, *Women’s History Review*, 26, 3 (2017), 363-381; Sumita Mukherjee, *Indian Suffragettes: Female Identities and Transnational Networks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); DuBois and Lal (eds.), *A Passionate Life*.

¹⁵ Manu Bhagavan, *India and the Quest for One World. The Peacemakers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Glenda Sluga, ‘Spectacular Feminism’. The international history of women, world citizenship and human rights,’ in de Haan et al, *Women’s Activism* relies heavily on this account. See also James Kember, ‘Indian and International Affairs, 1944-1947: The Prelude to Independence’, *International Studies* 1976, 15, 3, 365-391; Rakesh Ankit, ‘In the Twilight of Empire: Two Impressions of Britain and India at the United Nations, 1945-47’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38:4 (2015), Lorna Lloyd, ‘“A Family Quarrel”. The Development of the Dispute over Indians in South Africa’, *The Historical Journal*, 34, 3 (1991), 703-725.

¹⁶ Bhagavan, *India and the Quest for One World*, xx.

¹⁷ Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace. The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), Chapter 4.

so, it is necessary to move away from an international history approach and instead consider the significance of below-state level activities and interactions in the lives and careers of nationalist women. One of the implications of this is the decentring of the nation.

South Asia and 'The Nation'

As global historians have argued for over a decade, academic history-writing in South Asia, as elsewhere, has long been subject to a dominant 'methodological nationalism' linked to the discipline's origins in the nineteenth century.¹⁸ This has, to a large degree, determined the analytic frameworks historians have used and the subject matter they have chosen to examine. One effect of this has been the obscuring of actors, phenomena and processes that crossed borders or operated in different spatial contexts. Meanwhile, the trajectory of nationalism itself has determined how we understand its historical development. As Manu Goswami has argued, nationalism has too often been read backwards from the eventual ascendancy of the sovereign nation-state, meaning that its cosmopolitan or internationalist aspects have been overlooked.¹⁹ This has the effect of producing an understanding of nationalism that refers exclusively to inward-looking nationalist ideas.²⁰ Taken to the extreme, this produces a polarised conception in which nationalism is seen as the diametric opposite, not just of the ideal of global citizenship, but of its associated children: multilateralism and human rights.²¹ Yet, as has been emphasised in recent work on cosmopolitanism in the colonial context, Indian nationalism was not necessarily exclusive and national consciousness might also mean, for

¹⁸ A.G. Hopkins, 'The History of Globalization – and the Globalization of History?' in A.G. Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico; 2002), 13-14.

¹⁹ Manu Goswami, 'AHR Forum: Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms', *American Historical Review*, 117, 5 (December 2012), 1461-1485, 1462.

²⁰ See, for example Chatterjee, *The Nation*.

²¹ Samuel Moyn, 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 in the History of Cosmopolitanism,' *Critical Enquiry* 40, 4 (Summer 2014), 365-384.

example, 'affinity with those of an anti-imperialist bent within the fortress of Europe.'²²

Specific conditions inform debates around nationalism in the South Asian context, which, of course, developed in the context of imperialism. British imperialism, itself a form of nationalism, required a theory of 'difference', based on the supposed superior rationality of Western civilisation, to justify the civilising claims of empire.²³ Indian nationalism inverted the theory of difference, as a matter of ideology and of political expediency, to give shape and legitimacy to the anti-colonial movement, and, later, the postcolonial state.²⁴ This provenance contributed to a master narrative based on the binary opposition of imperialism-nationalism that was further reinforced by the history of political struggle that preceded the decolonisation of South Asia.²⁵

In the 1980s and 1990s, the imperialism-nationalism binary narrative was somewhat subverted by scholarship associated with the Subaltern School, which was influenced by postcolonial studies. Broadly speaking, this impacted our understanding of Indian nationalism in two important ways. First, attempts to reassign nationalist consciousness away from bourgeois-elite figures by writing South Asian history 'from below' drew attention to some of the ways the nation was constructed and exposed its 'fragmentary' nature.²⁶ Second, the essential opposition of imperialism and nationalism was called into question by a focus on European intellectual and cultural

²² Dilip Menon, 'A Local Cosmopolitan: Kesari Balakrishna Pillai and the invention of Europe for Kerala' in Sugata Bose and Kris Manjappa (eds.), *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones. South Asia and the global circulation of idea* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). See also Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siecle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

²³ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects. Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002).

²⁴ Chatterjee, *The Nation*.

²⁵ Bipan Chandra et al, *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi; Penguin, 1989).

²⁶ Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India' in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies. Writing on South Asian History and Society. Volume 1* (Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) and subsequent volumes.

influences in the elite nationalist movement.²⁷ However, even as the neatness of the imperialism-nationalism binary was undermined, postcolonial narratives inscribed an equally dichotomous master narrative of 'East'- 'West.'²⁸ Arguably, this had the effect not of decentring the imperialism-nationalism framework but of reconstituting it along a new axis of colonialism versus (authentic) anti-colonialism. In narratives such as these, the dominance of binary frameworks prevents an understanding of the wider, more expansive aspects of nationalism and the histories of global interconnectedness associated with them. The present thesis relies on a framework that is less rigid, more complex, and based on interactions and exchanges that cut across the divisions of nationalism-imperialism or 'East'- 'West'.

The 'Global Turn' and South Asia

It may be argued that, despite the traditional importance of binary frameworks in the historiography of South Asia, all imperial, nationalist and postcolonial narratives are, to some extent, implicitly global in perspective.²⁹ The variously-motivated declarations of 'difference' they contain are all made in a wider universal context – their references to 'the other' registering their implicit acknowledgement (and indicating the tensions) of the forces of globalisation, even if some of the meanings of global connections are ignored. Imperial narratives, for example, although emphasising 'difference',

²⁷ Chatterjee, *The Nation*; Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World. A Derivative Discourse?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²⁸ This is very much associated with Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978). My critique of postcolonialism draws on the following: D.A. Washbrook, 'Orient and Occidents: Colonial Discourse Theory and the Historiography of the British Empire' in Robin W. Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume V, Historiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion. Postcolonial Theory, India and The Mystic East* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009); Richard G. Fox, "East of Said" in Michael Sprinker (ed.), *Edward Said. A Critical Reader* (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992); Michael Collins, *Empire, Nationalism and the Postcolonial World. Rabindranath Tagore's writings on history, politics and society* (Abingdon, Oxon: New York: Routledge, 2012), 4-6.

²⁹ C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World. Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 8.

bound South Asia to a universalising, theoretically global, theory of 'progress' that applied a supposed 'Western' modernity to the rest of the world.³⁰ Recent work on cosmopolitan anti-colonial networks indicates some of the ways the nationalist response to colonial intrusion was also globally-framed.³¹ What is also increasingly clear from the field of international relations is the extent to which Indian nationalism, as reflected in the foreign policy of the postcolonial Nehruvian state, was influenced by global ambition.³² In addition, as C.A. Bayly has observed, postcolonial histories, in common with all postmodern narratives, contain an implicit universal 'meta-narrative,' even as they ostensibly reject 'grand' universalist historical narratives.³³ The delineation of a distinct, 'authentic' historical path in order to rescue South Asian history from its position as 'a footnote' in a Eurocentric historical narrative, in effect, keeps 'the West' firmly in view.³⁴

Historians associated with the 'global turn' consciously employ a schema of global interconnectedness in order to understand the colonial past and direct their attention towards long-range connections and linkages between different geographical zones.³⁵ What have emerged are narratives of transnational 'entanglements' and dynamic flows of people, goods, and

³⁰ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, 'Between Metropole and Colony' in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire. Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, California; London: University of California Press, 1997).

³¹ Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia. How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2011).

³² Chris Ogden, *Indian Foreign Policy. Ambition and Transition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014). Ogden locates the origins of India's aspiration to great power status in the anti-colonial period.

³³ Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, 8.

³⁴ Chatterjee, *The Nation*, 34.

³⁵ Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*; Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History*; A.G. Hopkins (ed.), *Global History. Interactions between the universal and the local* (Basingstoke, England; New York; Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Patrick O'Brien, 'Historiographical traditions and modern imperatives for the restoration of global history,' *Journal of Global History*, 1 (2006), 3-39; C.A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, Patricia Seed, 'AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,' *American Historical Review*, 111, 5 (December 2006), 1440-1464; Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization. A Short History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014); Samuel Moyn & Andrew Sartori, (eds.), *Global Intellectual History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

information that at once decentre 'the nation', the nationalist-imperialist conflict, and the narrative of civilisational difference. The purpose of global history, as proposed by C.A. Bayly and others, is to redress the imbalance - previously tilted in favour of the narrative of division and difference - towards a recognition of the forces of commonality in an interdependent and 'polycentric' modern world system.³⁶ Of crucial importance in the new global history, which distinguishes it from earlier iterations of world history, is the decentring of Europe, or as Patrick O'Brien describes it, the compulsion to 'craft new, more inclusive and persuasive general narratives that might hold together without the fishy glue of Eurocentricism'.³⁷ Although concerns have been raised that the focus on exchange and circulation flattens the inequalities of power associated with imperialist and other forms of domination, proponents of global history insist that it is possible to produce narratives of interconnectedness in which tension, conflict, and difference remain in view.³⁸ It is such a balance that the current thesis attempts to achieve.

Amongst the new global histories to emerge are a wealth of recent studies concerning South Asian actors whose physical and intellectual worlds are not adequately understood within the containerised frames of imperialist, nationalist and postcolonial history-writing. In her groundbreaking work on Indian feminism, Mrinalini Sinha places Indian women's activism in the context of the 'global event' surrounding the controversy caused by the publication of *Mother India* (1927) – a notorious piece of imperialist propaganda by the American writer Katherine Mayo which sensationally described the degraded state of 'Indian womanhood' for an international

³⁶ Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*; Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*. Hopkins (ed), *Global History*, 3.

³⁷ O'Brien, 'Historiographical traditions', 33. For an example of an earlier approach see William McNeill, *A World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

³⁸ For a critical engagement with Bayly and Osterhammel see Kris Manjapra, 'Transnational Approaches to Global History: A View from the study of German-Indian Entanglement,' *German History*, 32,2, (2014) 274–293, 277; Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2014).

audience spread across five continents.³⁹ According to Sinha's account, the controversy took place in the context of 'a globally articulated imperial structure', whereby the contours of the ensuing 'public crisis' were '[e]ngendered by global historical networks that cut across and beyond various local contexts'.⁴⁰ Other studies highlight trans-local connections that cut across imperial power structures, illustrating that the processes of global convergence may not be exclusively confined to the phenomenon of European imperialism. In *A Hundred Horizons*, Sugata Bose examines the 'interregional' system of cultural and economic exchange of the Indian Ocean World, which he presents as an alternative history of globalisation that shifts scholarly focus from the West.⁴¹ Using a different framing device, a 2012 *Modern Asian Studies* 'Special Issue' uses the concept of 'sites' to explore a range of Asian interactions across the region - the foregrounding of cities, borderlands, and cultural shrines, amongst other locations, across Asia expanding further our understanding of transnational connectivity in the colonial era.⁴² Together, these studies tell the story of global interconnectedness from the point of view of South Asia, demonstrating a level of South Asian agency in the forces of globalisation.

Placing the focus on colonial-era global interconnectedness has enabled scholars to re-tell the story of anti-colonial activism.⁴³ As Maia Ramnath tells us, the revolutionary nationalist Ghadar Movement was built on networks of diasporic South Asians spread across 'East Asia, North and South America,

³⁹ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*.

⁴⁰ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*, 17, 2.

⁴¹ Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2006). See also Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Engseng Ho, 'Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat,' *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History*, 46, 2 (April 2004), 210-246; Sunil Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal. The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁴² Tim Harper and Sunil Amrith, 'Sites of Asian Interaction. An Introduction', *Modern Asian Studies*, 46, 2 (March 2012), 249-257.

⁴³ For a useful review of some of this literature, see G. Ballachandran, 'Transnational Histories and Subcontinental Pasts: A Review Essay,' *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 52, 4 (2015): 533-545.

Mesopotamia, and East Africa'.⁴⁴ For Seema Sohi, this activity does not simply contribute to the history of South Asian anti-colonialism. Rather, it was conceived by its protagonists as part of 'a broader movement against colonialism and white supremacy' in the context of British and American antiradicalism.⁴⁵ This global history of revolutionary radicalism complements and is connected to accounts of the transcontinental 'entanglements' of Indian revolutionaries in the first half of the twentieth century by Harald Fischer-Tiné and Kris Manjapra.⁴⁶ Such activities took place in the context of rich transnational networks comprised of friends, sympathisers and allies tacked together by newspapers, mail, and the telegraph.⁴⁷ The breadth and depth of these connections can be illustrated by an example cited by Fischer-Tiné, who reports that, from 1906 onwards, articles from *The Indian Sociologist*, a journal run by the Indian revolutionary Krishnavarma, were reprinted in an Irish nationalist weekly published in New York.⁴⁸ These activities by South Asian actors and their allies are linked to, and follow similar patterns to, the Asian 'Anti-Westernism' described by Cemil Aydin and, for a lay audience, by Pankaj Mishra in *From the Ruins of Empire*.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*. See also J. Daniel Elam, 'Echoes of Ghadr: Lala Har Dayal and the Time of Anticolonialism', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 34, 1 (2014), 9-23.

⁴⁵ Seema Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5-6. See also Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012).

⁴⁶ Harald Fischer-Tiné, 'Indian Nationalism and the "world forces": transnational and diasporic dimensions of the Indian freedom movement on the eve of the First World War', *Journal of Global History*, 2, 3 (2007), 325-344; Kris Manjapra, *M.N. Roy. Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (New York; London: Routledge, 2010); Michael Goebel, 'Geopolitics, transnational solidarity or diaspora nationalism? The global career of M.N. Roy, 1915-1930', *European Review of History*, 21, 4 (2014), 485-499.

⁴⁷ Elam, 'Echoes of Ghadr'. For a further view of this phenomenon see Leila Fawaz and C.A. Bayly, *Modernity and Culture from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

⁴⁸ Fischer-Tiné, 'Indian Nationalism and the "world forces."'

⁴⁹ Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia. Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire. The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

Global Civil Society, Internationalism and Cosmopolitan Thought

Historians have long studied the transnational networks associated, for example, with humanitarianism and social movements, but these have generally been assumed to be Christian in nature and exclusively Western in origin.⁵⁰ By contrast, within about the last decade, historians have begun to bring non-European actors into the history of what is referred to as 'global civil society.'⁵¹ Studies of Ottoman migrants or South Asian Trade Unions in the interwar years, amongst others, demonstrate how dense, sometimes overlapping transnational associational networks became 'instruments of globalism' in the interwar war years.⁵² During this period, Latin American, Middle Eastern, and Asian women were increasingly affiliated to the three main women's international organisations.⁵³ What Leela Gandhi adds to this picture is an understanding that such political and cause-based networks could also be strengthened by personal relationships, creating wide-ranging 'affective communities.'⁵⁴

The expansion of international civil society in the interwar years was linked to the gradual emergence of intergovernmental organisations from the late nineteenth century onwards. Once understood exclusively as instruments of diplomacy and statecraft, recent work on the League of Nations and the United Nations emphasises their wider socio-cultural functions.⁵⁵ Both

⁵⁰ Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Michael N. Barnett, *The Empire of Humanity. A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011).

⁵¹ Andrew Arsan, Su Lin Lewis, and Anne-Isabelle Richard, 'Editorial - The Roots of Global Civil Society and the Interwar Moment', *Journal of Global History*, 7:2 (2012), 157–165;

⁵² See the following from *Journal of Global History*, 7, 2 (2012): Andrew Arsan, 'This age is the age of association': committees, petitions, and the roots of interwar middle Eastern internationalism, 166-188; Carolien Stolte, 'Bringing Asia to the world: Indian trade unionism and the long road towards the Asiatic Labour Congress, 1919-37', 257-278. Also Thomas Davies, *NGOs: A New History of Transnational Civil Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

⁵³ Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (University of California Press, 2002); 30; De Haan (ed.), *Women's Activism*, Introduction.

⁵⁴ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*.

⁵⁵ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians. The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 9; Susan Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations' *American Historical Review* 122, 4 (October 2007), 1091-1117; Carol Miller, 'The Social Section and Advisory Committee on Social Questions of the League of Nations' in *International Health*

institutions continued the type of work originally undertaken by organisations such as the Office International d'Hygiène Public and various state-sponsored 'epistemic communities', for example, and the 'social' work carried out by the League and the United Nations may be distinguished from their role in mediating inter-state disputes.⁵⁶ Furthermore, although the League has been rightly implicated in attempts to sustain European imperial domination, it also created a space, however limited, within which African, Middle-Eastern and Asian anti-imperial actors could, collectively and individually, develop and stake their claims.⁵⁷ As the only non-self-governing member, India had an 'anomalous' relationship with the League of Nations.⁵⁸ This arrangement was much criticised by nationalists as a sham that served only to bolster British imperial interests but, as has been hinted at, it created an opportunity for Indians (including, as we shall see in Chapters 3 and 4, some nationalists) to establish themselves in the international arena. Referring specifically to the post-World War Two era, Mark Mazower argues that the United Nations, which was originally conceived as an instrument of 'Great Power' domination, enabled the Nehruvian Indian state to lead the way in giving the organisation an anti-colonial tinge as it developed during the period of decolonisation.⁵⁹

Organizations and Movements, ed. Paul Weindling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 154–176; Iris Borowy, *Coming to Terms with World Health: The League of Nations Health Organisation, 1921–1946* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009); Barbara H. M. Metzger, 'Towards an International Human Rights Regime during the Inter-War Years: The League of Nations' Combat of Traffic in Women and Children' in Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine, and Frank Trentmann (eds.), *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire and Transnationalism, c. 1880–1950* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga, 'New Histories of the United Nations,' *Journal of World History*, 19, 3 (September 2008), 251-274. For a contemporary overview see Rachel Crowdy, 'The League of Nations: Its Social and Humanitarian Work', *The American Journal of Nursing*, 28, 4 (1928), 350-352. Crowdy was head of the Social Section until 1931.

⁵⁶ Iriye, *Global Community*, 15, 21.

⁵⁷ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment. Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford; New York, 2007). For a useful review of *The Wilsonian Moment*, which critiques Manela's focus on the Western origins of anti-colonial nationalism, see Vijay Prashad, 'The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism – By Manela Erez,' *Journal of Global History*, 6, 1 (2011), 153-155.

⁵⁸ Stephen Legg, 'An international anomaly? Sovereignty, the League of Nations, and India's princely geographies', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 43 (2014), 96-110.

⁵⁹ Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, Chapter 4.

The global growth of internationalism in the first half of the twentieth century was accompanied by the intellectual practice of 'thinking globally', thereby linking studies of civil society and intergovernmental organisations to the history of ideas.⁶⁰ Recent work considers how the UN was a site where different forms of universalism interacted, making way for narratives of how non-Western forms of 'cosmopolitan' thought contributed to the organisation and its work.⁶¹ According to Sunil Amrith and Glenda Sluga, the contribution of Filipino diplomat Carlos Romulo to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) indicates that the document was in fact 'an amalgam of competing, or converging, universalisms - imperial and anticolonial, "Eastern" and "Western," old and new.'⁶²

Certainly 'the global imagination' was alive in multiple South Asian actors prior to independence, as Sugata Bose makes clear in his contribution to *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones*, a volume he co-edits with Kris Manjapra.⁶³ The book presents a case for the existence of aspirational South Asian cosmopolitanisms that were not only global in perspective but were produced in transnational spaces. This history charts South Asian 'political, intellectual and social connections ... with other colonised peoples worldwide, and with European and American groups who stood on the margins of imperial power, or were critical of it.'⁶⁴ In doing so, *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones* wrests cosmopolitanism from its exclusive association with imperial power

⁶⁰ The phrase is from Iriye, *Global Community*, Chapter 1. For an overview of twentieth century internationalisms see Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (ed.), *Internationalisms. A Twentieth Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁶¹ Amrith & Sluga, 'New Histories of the United Nations.'

⁶² *Ibid.*, 256. This claim is explicitly refuted by Samuel Moyn who denies that anti-colonialism was a human rights movement as part of a wider claim that locates the beginnings of the human rights movement much later. Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), Chapter 3.

⁶³ Sugata Bose, 'Different Universalisms, Colorful Cosmopolitanisms: The Global Imagination of the Colonized' in Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapra (eds.), *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones. South Asia and the global circulation of idea* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁶⁴ Bose and Manjapra (eds.), *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones*, 2.

structures, and instead offers up cosmopolitanisms that were not only South Asian in provenance but anti-*status quo* in possibility.⁶⁵

The transnationally-networked mobility of colonial actors influenced the ways they imagined their political struggles. The communist-inflected activism of the League Against Imperialism and of M.N. Roy, the wartime Ghadar conspiracy, and Krishnavarma's 'India House' organisation, all relied on a cosmopolitan conception of anti-colonialism filtered variously through the lenses of international socialism, pan-Asianism, or solidarity with other exploited groups and their supporters.⁶⁶ At times transnational solidarity was driven by strategic considerations.⁶⁷ However, such activities were also based on genuine convictions about the ways colonisation in South Asia related to the global context. For Manu Goswami the internationalist thought of the Indian social scientist Benoy Kumar Sarkar, itself 'manufactured across a global terrain during an eleven-year political exile' stands as emblematic of the 'multiple internationalist dream worlds' occupied by anti-colonial figures in the interwar period.⁶⁸ Nico Slate's work on Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's activities in the United States in the years 1939-1941 presents her as a forceful advocate of 'coloured solidarity' who 'positioned the fight for *swaraj* (self-rule) within broader global social and economic struggles.'⁶⁹

Nationalism and Feminism in South Asia

As we saw at the outset, Indian nationalist supporters celebrated the international appointments of Indian women after independence as a sign of feminist progress. This reflected a common nationalist refrain that associated women's emancipation with the anti-colonial movement and with

⁶⁵ For the association of cosmopolitanism and imperialism see Peter Van der Veer, 'Colonial Cosmopolitanism' in Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (eds.), *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism. Theory, Context, and Practice* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁶⁶ Fischer-Tiné, "'Indian Nationalism and the 'world forces'"; Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny*; Manjappa, *M.N. Roy*; Elam, 'Echoes of Ghadr'.

⁶⁷ Goebel, 'Geopolitics, transnational solidarity or diaspora nationalism?', 485–499.

⁶⁸ Goswami, 'Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms', 1465.

⁶⁹ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*.

Gandhi and Nehru in particular.⁷⁰ Subsequent studies relating to the status of women in India have shown such hopes to be premature, and Indian nationalist claims to Indian gender equality to be problematic.⁷¹ Indeed, for Indian women, the route from participation in nationalist campaigns to empowerment was far from pre-determined and, as elsewhere in the world, legal guarantees of equality masked social and cultural inequalities that continued to disadvantage women. The *Toward Equality* (1974) report commissioned in India in response to the United Nations' landmark international survey, stated that 'the majority of women are still very far from enjoying the rights and opportunities guaranteed to them by the Constitution.'⁷² The report confirmed, what many of India's 'pioneer women' had always believed, that constitutional guarantees of equality could not be achieved without socio-cultural reform. However, the discrepancy between the elevated position of elite women in high status international roles and the continued inequality faced by the majority of women have brought the charge of tokenism to bear on their appointments.⁷³ According to this viewpoint, the visible prominence of Indian women on the world stage was of mere symbolic value serving to provide the emerging nation state with legitimacy rather than to empower women generally.

As an extensive feminist historiography relating to Indian nationalist women in the domestic context makes clear, the search for feminist heroines in the careers of elite women leaders is a problematic exercise.⁷⁴ More widely, it has become clear from a number of different contexts that female

⁷⁰ B.R. Nanda, *Indian Women. From Purdah to Modernity* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1976); Madhu Kishwar, *Gandhi and Women* (Delhi: Manushi Prakashan, 1986).

⁷¹ Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 226-229. Sujata Patel, 'Construction and reconstruction of woman in Gandhi' in Alice Thorner and Maithreyi Krishnaraj in *Ideals, Images and Real Lives. Women in Literature and History* (Mumbai: Orient Longman, 1999).

⁷² *Toward Equality*, Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (New Delhi, Government of India Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1974), xii, quoted in Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 227.

⁷³ Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru* (London: Routledge, 2004), 264.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Forbes, *Women in Modern India*; Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books, 1986); Sanjam Ahluwalia, *Reproductive Restraints. Birth Control in India, 1877-1947* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

representation is no automatic guarantee of women's empowerment.⁷⁵ In the case of Indian nationalist women, there is the additional problem of disentangling the historical subjectivity of women leaders from the fact of their close connections to Gandhi and Nehru, which casts doubt on their autonomy.⁷⁶ On top of this is their elite status, which has left nationalist women open to the charge of being out of touch with the women whose lives they sought to improve, as Sanjam Aluhwalia's study of the elite-led Indian birth control movement illustrates.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, examinations of the ways gender (in combination with other social markers such as class and caste) structured colonial society shed light on the ways nationalist ideology applied restraints to Indian women by linking their participation in public life to their domestic roles as wives and mothers and by casting them as symbols of suffering and self-sacrifice.⁷⁸ In this process, nationalist women leaders, who themselves reproduced these tropes and, in many cases, vehemently disavowed the label 'feminist', are accused of collusion and of subordinating women's struggles to the wider nationalist movement.⁷⁹ In view of these factors, historians in search of feminist heroes or authentic women's voices have tended to look elsewhere.⁸⁰

Mrinalini Sinha's work asks important questions of the way feminist scholars have judged nationalist women. She warns against measuring women's 'achievements' or 'failures' against a historically specific feminist ideal associated with Western feminism and instead pays close attention to the

⁷⁵ Anne Phillips, 'Quotas for Women' in Mona Lena Krook & Sarah Childs (eds.), *Women, Gender, and Politics. A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 187. There is not, however, to deny that female representation is a prerequisite for female empowerment, even if it is not a guarantee.

⁷⁶ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru; Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was one of Gandhi's Personal Secretaries; Hansa Mehta was a veteran Congress leader whose husband served as Gandhi's personal doctor. For a discussion of this in the context of Pandit's niece, Indira Gandhi, see Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women. Gender, Culture, and Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁷⁷ Aluhwalia, *Reproductive Restraints*.

⁷⁸ Patel, 'Construction and reconstruction'.

⁷⁹ Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*.

⁸⁰ Padma Anagol, *The Emergence of Feminism in India, 1850-1920* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement. Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices* (New Delhi; London: Sage Publications, 2006).

precise social and political context in which the Indian women's movement developed.⁸¹ In contrast to Western movements, Indian women's campaigns were fought 'not in opposition to men but in opposition to the collective identity of communities, defined by religion, caste, ethnicity.'⁸² Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, a veteran of the Indian women's movement, confirmed this in the 1970s: 'Society was not divided into two warring parties, women versus men, rather into two segments, the liberal versus the conservative.'⁸³ Women's activities around the Child Marriage Restraint Act are illustrative of this process, during which Indian women deployed the language of rights, not in the abstract but against conservative customs. Thus, when nationalist women denied the label 'feminist' they were not denying a commitment to women's rights but distancing themselves from forms of Western feminism that served the imperialist civilising mission and were understood as a European corruption.

Sinha's work shows how women's agency created new gendered political and social possibilities for women in the *Mother India* controversy.⁸⁴ If the emancipatory potential of this was squandered during the 'ambiguous aftermath' of the controversy, it is pertinent to note with Maitrayee Chaudhuri the significant role played by conservative forces that countered initiatives by Indian women designed to reform entrenched cultural practices such as child marriage.⁸⁵ In considering the application of the label 'feminist' to this type of activity we must acknowledge that, for colonial era actors, the term had specific connotations linked to the Western-led women's movement and

⁸¹ Sinha, *Specters*. Mrinalini Sinha, 'Gender in the Critiques of Colonialism and Nationalism. Locating the "Indian Women"' in Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar (eds.), *Women and Social Reform in Modern India*, Volume II, (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007), 214. See also Chandra Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,' *Feminist Review*, 30, 1988, 61-88.

⁸² Mrinalini Sinha, 'A Global Perspective on Gender. What's South Asia Got to Do with It?' in Ania Loomba and Ritty A. Lukose (eds.), *South Asian Feminisms*, (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2012), 367

⁸³ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, 'The Women's Movement – Then and Now' in Devaki Jain (ed.), *Indian Women* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Publications Division, 1975).

⁸⁴ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*.

⁸⁵ Chaudhuri, *Indian's Women's Movement*, Chapter 6 and Chaudhuri (ed.), *Feminism in India*, Chapter 3.

nationalist women's disavowal of the term indicates a historically specific tradition of women's rights activism determined by the political and social context in which it emerged. For this reason, it is important to avoid uncritically sweeping up Indian women's activities into a homogenous definition of feminism. However, in attempting to understand this activity, we should also keep in mind Ellen DuBois's recent observation of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya:

She consistently advocated virtually everything with which the term "feminism" is currently associated: independent women's organizations, equal political rights, equal pay for equal work, reform in marriage, divorce and inheritance laws, even birth control and "sex freedom".⁸⁶

Insights drawn from the study of Indian women in the domestic context are of great significance in understanding nationalist women's global careers. They illuminate the background to their global citizenship claims at the League of Nations in the 1930s (see Chapters 3 and 4) and, later, their actions at the United Nations, such as Hansa Mehta's 1946 call for a universal women's charter (Chapter 6) – a document that was to closely mirror the Indian Women's Charter then being produced by the All India Women's Conference (AIWC). Transnational alliances with British women and others were predicated on a shared purpose of 'progress' against 'tradition' even in the face of political differences. As Amrit Kaur's relationship with Eleanor Rathbone, which will be examined in Chapters 3 and 4, illustrates, such relationships were fragile, yet they were, to some extent, productive as nationalist women steered a course between the often conflicting aims of national freedom and women's rights.

Histories of Liberalism and Citizenship

While the link between liberalism and the projects of imperialism and nationalism has long been made, it is only recently that historians have begun to consider the appropriation of liberal ideology by South Asian actors

⁸⁶ Ellen Carol DuBois, 'Introduction: Feminism and the Roots of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's Activism' in DuBois and Lal (eds.), *A Passionate Life*, eBook location 245.

as creative contributions to the global history of ideas and political practices.⁸⁷ In intellectual history, C.A. Bayly's important work, *Recovering Liberties*, describes a process by which Indian liberals did not simply imitate Western ideas but, rather, 'cannibalised, reconstructed and re-authored those ideas.'⁸⁸ The vital insight to be gained from this approach is that ideas are not fixed entities that belong to a particular geographical zone but are historically produced and contingent.⁸⁹ This has significant meaning for the ways we think about ideas in a global context. While postcolonial writers have readily assigned the provenance of rational thought to Europe, this new conception of intellectual history highlights the ways such ideas have been produced in a range of contexts.⁹⁰ As we have seen, Mrinalini Sinha has done crucial work in including Indian women in this history of liberal rights through an examination of their work in India.⁹¹ The present thesis extends the analysis further to consider this theme through Indian women's activities in the global public sphere.

Recent scholarship on citizenship, which has provided historians with a framework for exploring the ways historical actors have engaged with authority in a range of colonial and postcolonial contexts, has greatly increased our understanding of the ways liberalism worked in practice.⁹²

⁸⁷ Earlier histories include Uday Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire. A Study in Nineteenth Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*.

⁸⁸ C.A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties. Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3. For the afterlife of liberal ideas in postcolonial government see C.A. Bayly, 'The Ends of Liberalism and the Political Thought of Nehru's India', *Modern Intellectual History* 12, 3 (2015), 605-626.

⁸⁹ See also Shruti Kapila 'Preface' *Modern Intellectual History*, 4, 1 (2007), 3-6, 5.

⁹⁰ For the postcolonial approach see Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe*. For a useful critique see Sebastian Conrad 'Enlightenment in Global History. A Historiographical Critique,' *American Historical Review*, 117, 4 (October 2012), 999-1027.

⁹¹ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*. See also Rachel Sturman, *The Government of Social Life in Colonial India. Liberalism, Religious Law, and Women's Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁹² Sukanya Bannerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire* (Duke University Press, 2010); Joya Chatterji, 'South Asian Histories of Citizenship,' *The Historical Journal*, 55, 4 (2012), 1049-1071; Taylor C. Sherman, William Gould and Sarah Ansari, *From Subjects to Citizens. Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Emma Hunter (ed.), *Citizenship, Belonging, and Political Community in Africa: Dialogues Between Past and Present* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2016); Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship Between*

One of the important characteristics of this scholarship is that it expands the category of citizenship beyond its purely legal connotations to consider the significance of its 'cultural, imaginative, and affective' attributes.⁹³ It was these elements that made the concept of citizenship available for aspirational public sphere participation and assertive claims-making. In the colonial context, although the notion of imperial citizenship could be apolitical, reflecting a sense of civic service, it also lent 'efficacy and urgency' to anti-colonial critique, as Sukanya Bannerjea has shown.⁹⁴ There is a sense, then, that women's active participation in public life was itself an assertion of citizenship. In the conclusion to *Recovering Liberties*, Bayly states that 'liberalism was a broad field on which Indians and other South Asians began not only to resist colonial rule but engage in debates about the Good Life as would-be citizens of a global republic'.⁹⁵ However, so far, historians have not explored fully the question of how the concept of citizenship was deployed at a global level, nor has the discrete contribution of Indian nationalist women in this context been addressed.

Histories of liberalism from an Afro-Asian perspective have the potential to speak to a wider historiography linked to the history of human rights. In this vast subfield of historical research one dominant theme is that of the celebratory narrative that locates human rights squarely in the Western tradition, with the exact 'take-off moment' of human rights being located variously in the ancient world, the French Enlightenment, or the Second World War.⁹⁶ Anti-colonial liberation movements, according to this narrative, are assigned a supporting role as a 'fulfillment from below' of Western human

Empire and Nation. Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁹³ Bannerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens*, 5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 118. See also Rook-Koepsel, 'Constructing Women's Citizenship.'

⁹⁵ Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 343-4 (emphasis added). See also J. Daniel Elam 'Take Your Geography and Trace It,' *Interventions*, 17:4, (2015), 568-584 and Elam, 'Echoes of Ghadr'.

⁹⁶ M.A. Glendon, *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2002); Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York; London: W.W. Norton, 2007); Micheline R. Ishay, *The History of Human Rights. From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2004)

rights rhetoric.⁹⁷ There are lots of problems with this narrative, not the least of them being the means by which it has been deployed by Western governments to legitimise aggression in the non-West. It also has the effect of making non-Western contributions to the development of human rights at best derivative, if not invisible. However, while the most influential revisionist accounts address the former problem, they serve only to re-state the latter. In *The Last Utopia*, Samuel Moyn devotes a whole chapter to ‘Why Anticolonialism Wasn’t a Human Rights Movement’, in which he separates the claim for self-determination from human rights and argues that ‘anticolonialists rarely framed their cause in rights language before 1945’.⁹⁸ Histories of liberal claims-making by anti-colonial actors, particularly those which took place in the global public sphere, challenge such sweeping statements and have the potential to contribute a more nuanced understanding to the wider history of human rights. Manu Bhagavan brings Indian nationalist figures into the frame, drawing attention to the ‘One World’ ideologies of Jawaharlal Nehru and M.K. Gandhi in advocating human rights in the 1940s.⁹⁹ He also notes the involvement of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Hansa Mehta in promoting these ideas. Yet while Bhagavan locates the roots of this activity exclusively in the Gandhian-Nehruvian nationalist project, the present study focuses attention on the particular perspectives and independent activities of Indian nationalist women, which also included links to the international women’s movement and early associations with the instruments of global governance. One of the implications of this is that it steers away from the tendency to associate human rights with particular movements, cultures, or individuals, as has traditionally been the case, and instead suggests a more global history of rights, based on transnational exchange and interactions across borders.

⁹⁷ Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*.

⁹⁸ Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 87.

⁹⁹ Bhagavan, *India and the Quest for One World*.

The Global Public Sphere

The arena in which nationalist women's activities took place transcended both nation and empire. The term 'global', however, is too broad to be of use in analysing their careers. As an alternative, this thesis utilises the concept of the global public sphere, drawing on and adapting the Habermasian concept of the public sphere from a global historical perspective. In doing so, it seeks to capture the essentially below-state-level nature of their interventions as well as their spatially wide-ranging extent.

In 1962, Jürgen Habermas coined the term 'the public sphere' to describe an imagined space that emerged between the state and the private sphere as an effect of the expansion of trade in eighteenth century Europe.¹⁰⁰ This new public space was an arena for public debate - carried out predominantly in the form of the print publications - through which bourgeois society could express itself. While initially it served as a means of sharing information, the public sphere functioned so as to promote the interests of society to the state. It therefore had an activist and democratising function, albeit one limited to mercantile or bourgeois requirements. For Habermas, 'the public sphere' applied to a specific historical juncture and geographical location. However, theorists have extended the concept to other contexts to refer to all physical and virtual spaces 'where people come together as citizens and articulate their autonomous views to influence the political institutions of society.'¹⁰¹ In the present day, these may include all forms of media as well as civil society - cultural institutions, academic communities, activist organisations, world religions, and business networks.¹⁰² Furthermore, in a globalising world, it has been ventured, this conception of the public sphere may be applied, not just in the 'local' context as described by Habermas, but

¹⁰⁰ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

¹⁰¹ Manuel Castells, 'The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616, 1, (March 2008), 78-93. See also Michael Edwards (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁰² Castells, 'The New Public Sphere', 79.

at the level of the globe.¹⁰³ The twenty-first century 'global public sphere', therefore, refers to a public arena that exists beyond the scope of nation states – a space occupied by communications networks, civil society organisations, and, some argue, instruments of global governance.¹⁰⁴

For social scientists, the global public sphere is associated with the conditions of post-Cold War globalisation. However, as global historians have argued, forms of globalisation have occurred for centuries and in different spatial contexts.¹⁰⁵ Defining globalisation as a process characterised by 'the extension, intensification and quickening velocity of flows of people, products and ideas that shape the world,' A.G. Hopkins has identified its various 'archaic', 'proto', 'modern,' and 'post-colonial' forms.¹⁰⁶ Of interest here is the modern globalisation elaborated upon extensively by Bayly in *The Birth of the Modern World*, which saw the rise of the nation state, European overseas expansion, and industrialisation after 1800.¹⁰⁷ From an international relations perspective, this resulted in a newly internationalised state system marked by international laws.¹⁰⁸ Economically, long-range flows of money, goods, and workers drew distant territories together in a polycentric global system.¹⁰⁹ But change also occurred at a

¹⁰³ Castells, 'The New Public Sphere', 79, 83; Because the term 'global public sphere' remains loosely defined, the definition used here is informed by a number of perspectives rather than reflecting a consensus. See Castells, 'The New Public Sphere'; Ingrid Volkmer, *News in the Global Sphere. A Study of CNN and its Impact on Global Communication* (Luton, Bedfordshire: University of Luton Press, 1999); Ingrid Volkmer, *The Global Public Sphere. Public Communication in the Age of Reflective Interdependence* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014); Milton Fisk, 'Global Public Sphere' in Deen K. Chatterjee (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Global Justice* (Dordrecht; Heidelberg; London; New York: Springer, 2001), 439-441; Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society. An Answer to War* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).

¹⁰⁴ Castells, 'The New Public Sphere'; Arjun Appadurai, 'Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination' in Arjun Appadurai, *Globalization* (ed.), (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁵ Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History*; Peter N. Stearns, *Globalization in World History* (London: Routledge, 2010).

¹⁰⁶ Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History*.

¹⁰⁷ Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*; Hopkins, *Globalization in World History*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, 237.

¹⁰⁹ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence. Europe, China, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, N.J.; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 2000); Erika Marie Bsumek, 'Value Added in the Production and Trade of Navajo Textiles: Local Culture and Global Demand' in Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History*; Patricia Clavin, 'Men and Markets. Global Capital and the International Economy' in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, *Internationalisms. A Twentieth-Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

social level. Steam transport and the telegraph - later the car, the aeroplane and the telephone — created interconnected trans-continental networks that flowed with ideas, information and people.¹¹⁰ As we learn from historians of the subcontinent, many of these networks were forged and populated by South Asian actors, including, significantly, British-educated students who would make up a large proportion of the nationalist elite.¹¹¹

The global public sphere – a supra-national arena where the views of a globally-aware, networked society were expressed through transnational media (print and, by the 1930s, cinema) and civil society organisations – was a feature of the modern globalising world. From the end of the nineteenth century, a third element increasingly came into play in the global public sphere.¹¹² This was global governance, which in the interwar period centred on the League of Nations and associated institutions.¹¹³ The League of Nations Secretariat, for example, was considered to be ‘a truly international bureaucracy, structured by function and not by nationality’, and is viewed by historians as somewhat distinguishable from (although not completely immune to) the League’s state-level politics.¹¹⁴ The Secretariat was closely

2017); Maxine Berg (ed.), *Goods from the East, 1600-1800: Trading Eurasia* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan; 2015); Osterhammel and Petersson, *Globalization*.

¹¹⁰ Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, 10; Tony Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire. Locating New Zealand’s Past* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014); David Lambert and Alan Lester, *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹¹¹ Bannerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens*; Judith M. Brown, ‘AHR Roundtable: “Life Histories” and the History of Modern South Asia,’ *American Historical Review*, 114, 3, June 2009, 587-595; Judith M. Brown, ‘Gandhi – a Victorian gentleman: An essay in imperial encounter’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 27, 2, (1999), 68-85; Sumita Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identities. The England-returned* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011); Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars, and Princes. Indians in Britain, 1700-1947* (London; Dover, N.H.: Pluto Press; 1986); Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain. 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002); Clare Anderson, *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Marina Carter, ‘Slavery and Unfree Labour in the Indian Ocean’, *History Compass*, 4, 5 (2006), 800-813; Joya Chatterji and David Washbrook (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2013), Parts 2 & 3.

¹¹² Although, as Iriye suggests, the League of Nations built on existing structures of global governance, the expanded extent and scope of the League was something unprecedented. Iriye, *Global Community*, Chapter 1.

¹¹³ See Iriye, *Global Community*, 28-36.

¹¹⁴ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 7.

linked to the new global civil society organisations that grew up around the League, some of which established new permanent headquarters in Geneva: 'nations-who-would-be-nation-states, experts seeking jobs, scholars seeking subjects, and lobbies seeking recognition.'¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the lines between the Secretariat and civil society were frequently blurred when League officials, restricted by limited resources, 'drew on the expertise of, and sometimes simply devolved authority onto, a host of swiftly internationalizing civic and voluntary organizations.'¹¹⁶ This was particularly true of the 'technical' sections of the League that dealt with health and social issues, where even state-appointed members of League Committees were frequently drawn from civil society.¹¹⁷ It also applied (and continues to apply) to the 'technical' work of UN, for example the Commission for the Status of Women, as well as to various affiliate bodies such as the International Labour Office (ILO) and the WHO.

Precisely how 'global' was the global public sphere in the early twentieth century? As has been pointed out, there were limits to the geographical spread of modern globalisation and, even today, 'truly global civil society may still be a 'project' or an 'aspiration' rather than an empirically observable phenomenon.'¹¹⁸ It is certainly true that globalisation in all historical contexts has always been uneven, unequal and beset by antagonism.¹¹⁹ However, the public sphere in the early twentieth century may be considered 'global' in two ways. First, it refers to a context in which a globalising system structured everything, even if not everything or everyone was 'globalised'.¹²⁰ Globalisation has never been a fully realised phenomenon. Rather, it is a

¹¹⁵ Pedersen, *The Guardians*; Carol Miller, "'Geneva - the key to equality": inter-war feminists and the League of Nations, *Women's History Review*, 3,2 (1994), 219-245; Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*.

¹¹⁶ Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 7.

¹¹⁷ Miller, 'The Social Section and Advisory Committee on Social Questions of the League of Nations'.

¹¹⁸ Davies, *NGOs*, 3. See also Cooper, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2005), 10, 91-92; Osterhammel & Petersson, *Globalisation*, 5;

¹¹⁹ Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, 1-3.

¹²⁰ Castells, 'The New Public Sphere,' 81-82.

dynamic process 'that transforms economic, political, social and cultural relationships across countries, regions and continents by spreading them more broadly, making them more intense and increasing their velocity'.¹²¹ Secondly, the modern global public sphere was a virtual space, which was conceptualised as global by the historical actors who engaged with it. Newspapers, books and periodicals across seven continents not only reported on events in far-flung locations but also translated and re-printed verbatim published material from elsewhere in the world.¹²² Through this arena, it was understood, individuals and organisations could engage with global opinion and, in so doing, could influence the future of the world.¹²³ At the same time, there were geographic spaces where global civil society was centred at different times. These could be temporary, such as during the San Francisco Conference on International Organisation in 1945, or more permanent. While Geneva was a centre in the 1920s and 1930s, during the Second War, the relative safety and political significance of the United States meant that global civil society activity shifted across the Atlantic.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Indian nationalist women were associated with all three elements of the global public sphere. They spoke - and were reported in the media as speaking - at public events in Europe, Africa, and America, as well as themselves contributing to transnational print publications. At the same time, Indian women operated as members of global civil society through the process of affiliating Indian civil society organisations to international organisations, by making individual transnational connections to existing civil society networks, or by working for global organisations such as Save the Children and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). By the late 1930s, the AIWC was associated with the work of the Social Section of the League and, after the Second World War, Indian nationalist women were deeply

¹²¹ Hopkins (ed.), *Globalisation in World History*, 16.

¹²² See, for example, Sinha, *Specters*, 1-2.

¹²³ This is what Iriye refers to as 'global consciousness'. See Iriye, *Global Community*, 12. See also Glenda Sluga and Julia Horne, 'Cosmopolitanism: Its Past and Practices', *Journal of World History*, 21, 3 (2010), 369-374.

involved with the social and cultural work of the newly-created United Nations. For colonised subjects, the global public sphere offered opportunities for political expression and for public service that to some extent bypassed the restrictions of colonial rule. At the same time, these activities were heavily gendered, reflecting the traditional social concerns of women while perpetuating their exclusion from more 'masculine' leadership roles.¹²⁴ Under these conditions, the participation of Indian nationalist women in the global public sphere during this period enabled them to become below-state level agents of global history, exerting historical force 'from the middle' through civil society.

Gender

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf conducts a thought experiment that muses on the possible life of William Shakespeare's imaginary sister, Judith.¹²⁵ Judith was a fictitious subject created in order to consider how gender operated on the lives of women writers. Indian nationalist women, by contrast, who were the exact contemporaries of the men who led the mainstream anti-colonial movement, provide real-life historical subjects through which to consider the ways gender structured women's public careers in the late colonial context. One (Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit) was even the actual sister of India's first Prime Minister. So while it is acknowledged that 'woman' is an arbitrary and wide-ranging category, it is employed because the category of the 'Indian woman' had meaning in the historical context. It also addresses the present-day concern about how female actors are under-/mis-represented in the historical record.¹²⁶ Gender operated on the lives of the women featured in this study in distinct ways that significantly impacted on the roles they played in public life before and after

¹²⁴ For an examination of this process in a different context see Gisela Mettele, 'The City as a Field of Female Civic Action. Women and Middle-Class Formation in Nineteenth Century Germany' in A. Ricardo López and Barbara Weinstein (eds.), *The Making of the Middle Class. Toward a Transnational History* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2012).

¹²⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin, 2000), 48-50.

¹²⁶ Karen M. Offen, *Globalising Feminisms, 1789-1945* (London: New York: Routledge, 2010), Introduction.

independence. Although it was not unusual for Indian middle- and upper-class women to be educated, as with their counterparts elsewhere in the world, they were not expected to pursue careers. However, the reform and nationalist movements in India created openings for women to contribute to public life through the leadership of voluntary civil society organisations and, more famously, through participation in Gandhian civil disobedience agitations where their supposed capacity for suffering and self-sacrifice made them ideal *satyagrahis*.¹²⁷

Although in Indian colonial society reformers could be male as well as female, social reform was the only means of women participating in public life. By separating the National Social Conference from the Congress, early nationalists reiterated the distinction between political and social work and prevented women social reformers from breaching the gap between them.¹²⁸ Furthermore, within the political nationalist movement there was a creeping sense that social reform as it affected women was the preserve of women only. Jawaharlal Nehru, a supposed supporter of women's emancipation told women that the struggle for their rights was their own.¹²⁹ A handful of exceptional women were able to rise to positions of influence in nationalist politics, yet it is notable that these continued to be predicated on traditional assumptions about women's proper concerns: Sarojini Naidu was lauded as a 'peace-maker'; when Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was appointed as a Minister in the United Provinces government she was given the portfolio of Health and Local Self-Government; after independence, free India's first woman Minister, Amrit Kaur, was Minister for Health. The contours of these gendered assumptions were far from fixed and were considerably re-shaped by the women themselves over the course of the period.¹³⁰ However, they significantly influenced the range of possibilities open to Indian women and the ways they responded to them.

¹²⁷ Patel, 'Construction and reconstruction'.

¹²⁸ Tanika Sarkar, 'Gandhi and social relations' in Judith M. Brown & Antony Parel (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 184.

¹²⁹ Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 193.

¹³⁰ Sinha, *Specters*.

Similarly, gender operated at a global level where women's rights were the preserve of the international women's societies. In the global public sphere women activists tended to be limited to women's rights, peace, and social issues such as those addressed by the League of Nations' so-called *commission sentimental*. It was, therefore, the committees associated with supposed 'women's issues' on which Indian women focussed in their attempts to gain League of Nations representation during the 1930s. To a great degree, women's civil society networks, which often invoked solidarity and purpose through the gendered trope of motherhood, mediated Indian women's participation in the global public sphere. Yet nationalist women had to balance this principle with an awareness of global inequalities that cut across gender. In steering a course between the essential unity of women and geo-political and racial inequality, they pre-empted questions later taken up by 'third world' feminisms.

Gender also worked in other ways. As representatives of a nation-in-waiting, these educated, liberated women challenged widely-held assumptions about Indian womanhood that upheld the colonial civilising claim. By symbolising India's ability to rule itself, the activities of Indian women in the global public sphere were an important weapon in the ideological confrontation between imperialism and nationalism. However, nationalist women in the global public sphere were more than simply gendered symbols. Their interventions were direct, independent, and concrete engagements with the global public sphere that sought to influence global opinion and challenge entrenched power through organisation, participation, and action.

The Cohort

This thesis examines the thought and deeds of Indian nationalist women through episodes from the lives and careers of a small cohort of prominent women who were born over a twenty-year period at the end of the nineteenth century. Sarojini Naidu (née Chattopadhyaya, 1879-1949), the eldest of the

cohort, was a published poet, and a pioneer of women's rights within the Congress movement as well as becoming President of the All India Congress Committee in 1925. Shareefah Hamid Ali (1883-1971), a Muslim supporter of the Congress, was the daughter of an English-educated barrister-turned-Gandhian. She was highly active in the AIWC at both a local and international level, serving as its President in 1935. Amrit Kaur (1889-1964), who derived her title Rajkumari (Princess) from her father's royal lineage in the Sikh Princely State of Karputhala, was a close associate of Gandhi (she acted as one of his Personal Secretaries) and an eminent figure in the AIWC. Hansa Mehta (1897-1995), was a leader of Congress agitations in Bombay, a member of the Bombay Legislative Assembly and a prominent figure in the Indian women's movement at a national level in the late 1920s and 1930s. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit (née Swarup Nehru, 1900-1990) was a Congress activist from Allahabad with connections to the leadership through her father Motilal and brother Jawaharlal. In 1937 she became India's first woman Cabinet Minister as a member of the United Provinces provincial government. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya (1903-1988), was a leading Congress activist, founder member of the Congress Socialist Party and a prominent member of the AIWC.

In this thesis, the aim is not to locate the 'unitary truth' of the lives of elite nationalist women, still less to present them as 'great lives' in the style of traditional historical biography. But by paying close attention to a relatively small cohort it is proposed that a greater understanding of nationalist women's motivations and the thought-worlds they inhabited is possible than a broader survey would offer. In addition, as agents of global history they serve as a device for examining wider historical processes, bringing to the historiography a particular perspective that is otherwise overlooked.¹³¹ The

¹³¹ For some useful reflections on using individual and group biographies in history-writing see David Nasaw, 'Introduction - AHR Roundtable: Historians and Biography,' *American Historical Review*, 114, 3 (June 2009), 573-557; Jill Lepore, 'Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography', *The Journal of American History*, 88, 1 (2001), 129-144; Brown, "'Life Histories' and the History of Modern South Asia'. On how this might be applied in a global or transnational history see Ellen Fleischmann, "'I only wish I had a

main subjects of study were arguably the most prominent and energetic Indian women to operate in the global public sphere in the first half of the twentieth century, but their stories are intertwined with dozens of other colleagues, interlocutors, allies, and supporters who wielded significant influence. The cohort is, therefore, presented as part of an interconnected web that included other nationalist women, anticolonial allies in Britain and America, international and nationally-based women's organisations, and globally active social reformers. Male nationalists, particularly the figures of Gandhi and Nehru, though marginal, remain visible at the edge of frame, as do political opponents.

The transnational activities of Indian nationalist women are of global historical value because they were products and agents of globalisation. Their lives and careers were deeply intertwined with the global interconnectedness that marked the modern period and their transnational activities extended the geographical parameters and ideological scope of the global public sphere. That said, the women in question were never solely global in outlook and operated equally actively in local and national contexts. Indeed, in this study, 'the globe' and 'the nation' are intertwined, producing a narrative based on 'interactions between the local and the globe' rather than dislocated global history.¹³²

Nationalist women made frequent explicit claims to represent the women of India. Socially, however, they are representative of a relatively small group of middle to upper-class, high-caste women who rose to prominence through

home on this globe". Transnational Biography and Dr. Mary Eddy', *Journal of Women's History*, 21, 3 (2009), 108-130; Martha Hodes, 'A Story with an Argument: Writing the Transnational Life of a Sea Captain's Wife' in Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woolacott, *Transnational Lives. Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700-present* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossings in a Global World,' *History and Theory*, 50, 2 (2011), 188–202.

¹³² Hopkins (ed), *Global History*.

the social reform and political nationalist movements.¹³³ While this thesis is not a social history, it is alert to the social factors that shaped Indian women's engagement with the global public sphere. Familial connections to Britain through education and imperial service, as well as high social status, meant that elite Indian women were highly-mobile bearers of social capital both within India and beyond. They were also educated and emanated from families that, to varying degrees, held reformist views. These were significant factors in determining the possibilities open to elite Indian women, whose leadership roles in the national context opened up options in the global public sphere. Furthermore, the global public sphere, especially the social and anti-colonial movements in which Indian nationalist women were active, was, to a great extent, populated by the middle-classes which, given Habermas' association of the public sphere with the norms of bourgeois society, should come as no surprise. The cosmopolitanism described in this thesis, therefore, is undoubtedly rooted in the social privilege associated with educated, westernised families. Other contemporaries, by contrast, from religious conservatives to subaltern classes, were alienated from or actively opposed these processes.¹³⁴

The approach of this thesis draws on the insights of global intellectual history without being limited to the history of ideas. One of the themes addressed in this study is the re-fashioning by Indian women of liberal discourses, but the nationalist women in question cannot be thought of as 'thinkers'. While Indian nationalist women no doubt contributed to the development of rights-based discourses, they were primarily political and social activists whose historical significance relates as much to the way they applied ideas as it does to the evolution of the ideas themselves. Global citizenship was, on the one hand, an abstract concept, but it also meant something substantial that could be enacted.

¹³³ Although as Reena Nanda points out, even within elite nationalist circles, women took up different positions. Reena Nanda, *Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya. A Biography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹³⁴ Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 91-92.

One of the issues associated with approaching global history through these subjects is that, to a great degree, the historical significance of nationalist women relates to the extent to which they contributed to the incremental shifting of agendas, which makes it difficult to measure. Nationalist women were not, for the most part, powerful state actors who dictated policy. Neither were their actions dramatically revolutionary. Rather, they were, more subtly, agents in the gradual evolution of international norms and participants in wide-ranging, transnational conversations that spoke to power as well as society at large. It is on these terms that they should be considered agents of global historical change.

Periodisation and Sources

The events considered in this thesis take place during the period 1900-1952, a timeframe that runs from the start of the adulthood of Sarojini Naidu, the eldest of the cohort, to the end of Hansa Mehta's tenure on the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. These bookends are, however, fairly porous. What are important are the effects of the epochal processes associated with late-nineteenth century global circulations that acted on the women's lives and careers and the momentous historical events that took place of the course of the period. Of particular significance are the South Asian reform movements, imperial migration, the growth of transnational organisations, the decline of European imperialism, the changing nature of Indian anti-colonialism, and the impact of two global wars. The cut-off date of 1952 enables an examination of how the notion of global citizenship manifested in the new context provided by the end of the Second World War and the end of British rule in India, although, as is acknowledged, these manifestations of global citizenship continued well into the 1960s. What emerges, then, is not an encyclopaedic account of Indian women's transnational careers, but rather a series of episodes, the range of which is designed to illustrate the variety and extent of their global public sphere activities.

All historians who deviate from traditional national perspectives are potentially faced with the problem of navigating through and around conventional institutionalised, 'nationally-organised data.'¹³⁵ Global and transnational historians are alert to the dangers of relying on secondary material, but 'where', as Pierre-Yves Saunier asks, 'is the original material that [global and] transnational historians need to answer their questions and stimulate their curiosity and imagination?'¹³⁶ In the case of Indian nationalist women, the sources from which a global history can be constructed are found in a number of traditional as well as lesser-known repositories - state files, private papers, organisational records, and in journal and newspaper collections - their geographical spread reflecting the global perspective of the analysis. Due to their prominence and the organised nature of their historical interventions, records relating to nationalist women leaders are preserved primarily because of their relevance for 'the nation' with globally relevant material being preserved by default alongside that of national import. To a great extent, traditional sources become 'global' simply by the historian adopting a 'global perspective.' Speeches and journal articles, which give a clear impression of political aims and methods, may be written for an audience in India but still contain references to transnational activities, or evidence of a global mindset. Letters to transnational contacts, which illuminate long-range connections and private perspectives, are preserved alongside those to Indian colleagues. Intelligence files compiled by imperial officials in India contain reports of speaking tours elsewhere. Organisational records, with their reports, minutes and newsletters, give evidence of transnational civil society in action.

Beyond nationally-organised material, it is possible to follow the threads of connection to repositories elsewhere where the private papers and organisational records of allies and supporters document Indian women's

¹³⁵ Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 132.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

transnational activities and, furthermore, indicate the wider networks to which they were connected.¹³⁷ Here, Indian women's correspondence to foreign contacts is well preserved and the extent of their global reach is discernible. The records of global governance institutions - the League of Nations, the International Labour Office, the United Nations - document the insistent attempts by Indian women to gain representation at the global level, and what they did when they achieved it. The minuted internal discussions of international women's organisations indicate the impact made by Indian women in these quarters. One of the additional insights that can be gained from a transnational research plan is an appreciation of how sources travelled: copies of AIWC speeches and reports can be found in repositories in Geneva and America as well as in India, reflecting the global strategic intentions of Indian women.¹³⁸

Most of the source material used for this project is in English. This does not mean that the approach to sources is 'language-blind'. It is true that impressions of Indian women gained, say, from the vantage point of the vernacular press in India would be valuable additions to the analysis. A further interesting consideration, beyond the scope of this project, would be the extent to which the activities of Indian women were reported in the press in non-English speaking countries. However, the English language sources tell an extensive story in themselves. Due to a combination of the intrusion of English in colonial India and the multiplicity of vernacular languages, English was the language used, not just in state records but by national civil society organisations and, frequently, between individuals from different parts of India. In the case of nationalist women, most had been educated in English and spoke the language fluently, which meant that many of the historical sources they produced were in English. Sarojini Naidu, for example, claimed she was forced to speak the language of the coloniser by her father and, as

¹³⁷ For example, The Women's Library, London and The Sophia Smith Archive, Northampton, Massachusetts.

¹³⁸ Amrit Kaur's Presidential Address to the AIWC in 1937 is held in the AIWC archives New Delhi, the Women's Library in London, the League of Nations Archive in Geneva and the Sophia Smith Archive in Massachusetts.

one anecdote goes, resisted moves to introduce Hindustani as an India-wide language. According to one colleague, on one occasion as she prepared to address a group of students in Bihar she remarked: 'Gandhiji does not want English to be spoken. I don't know how I am going to speak in Hindustani. I tell you what, when I get up, ask the students to shout "English, English."' ¹³⁹ Others were more supportive of Gandhi's language stipulations but it is notable that even Amrit Kaur who actively encouraged the introduction of Indian languages to the work of the AISC continued to use English in communicating with colleagues. Outside India, fluency in English, of course, not only facilitated transnational relationships, but influenced what types of networks were forged. The ubiquity of the English language in the source material is, therefore, historically significant. In some cases, translations of Gujarati and Hindi personal papers have been consulted. They serve to remind us of the multiple spheres Indian women simultaneously inhabited, emphasising that, in the eye of nationalist women, the idea of 'global citizenship' was not in conflict with local or national affinities.

Organisation of Thesis

The thesis proceeds in a chronological order that reflects the development of Indian nationalist women's interactions with the global public sphere over the first half of the twentieth century. Chapter 2 introduces the 'life worlds' inhabited by nationalist women, drawing attention to the interconnected imperial world in which nationalist women lived and operated. It explores the ideological influences to which they were exposed in this context, focussing particularly on the ideals of cosmopolitan-nationalism and democratic citizenship, and considers in general terms how these impacted on nationalist women's activities against the evolving politics of anti-colonial nationalism in the early twentieth century. After this introduction to the globalised ideological and political context, the subsequent chapters contain more in-depth analysis of how nationalist women became agents of globalising

¹³⁹ Padmini Sengupta, *Sarojini Naidu. A Biography* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1966), 137.

processes through their global public sphere activities of the 1930s and 1940s. Chapter 3 examines a trip taken by Amrit Kaur and others to London and Geneva in 1933 as part of the campaign for women's suffrage. Their campaign in London, and the subsequent visit to the League of Nations, are presented as an important turning point that marks the emergence of democratic citizenship as a mobilising ideology, the strengthening of transnational relationships, and the assertion of global belonging. The subsequent development of these themes in the Indian women's movement between 1933 and 1945 is addressed in Chapter 4. During this eventful period, Indian women enjoyed a raised profile on the world stage due to the transnational alliances they consciously nurtured with global civil society and global governance institutions. Although the Second World War and events internal to India significantly challenged these relationships, the ideals of transnational solidarity and global belonging survived the upheavals. Chapter 5 is concerned with the activities of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit in America in late 1944 and early 1945. At a critical time when world attention was shifting to the post-war future, Pandit forged new alliances with American civil society and presented a globally-framed anti-colonial position on the world stage, thereby contributing to momentous transnational conversations about the emerging world order. In Chapter 6, Hansa Mehta's considerable contribution to the United Nations Sub-Committee of the Status of Women is considered. This work, which Mehta carried out in tandem with her Presidency of the AIWC, was concerned with establishing a global blueprint for women's rights and was strongly linked to global civil society. Chapter 7 examines Mehta's contribution to the history of human rights through her post-colonial career on the United Nations Commission for Human Rights and as a political figure in India. This early foray of independent India onto the world stage is examined in light of the ideals and practices of global citizenship that had developed in the Indian women's movement during the previous decades. With a strong commitment to cosmopolitan ideology and a background in transnational cooperation, Mehta emerges, alongside other state and civil society figures, as one of the most

dedicated advocates of human rights through the United Nation in the immediate post-war period, although her goals were frustrated, primarily by the interests of the two emerging Cold War superpowers. The Conclusion considers the significance of this combined history for our understanding of wider historical processes before exploring some of the historiographical and present day implications of the research.

CHAPTER 2

Becoming Global Citizens: Context, Influences, and Early Beginnings, 1890s-1930s

I am a bad nationalist. I am a nationalist only by the compulsion and the tragedy of the circumstance of my country. I am first and last a human being and I do not recognise divisions of humanity merely because of race or geographic barriers. ... I oppose every separatist movement except for possible transitional purposes.¹⁴⁰

[S]ince we live in very dynamic times, to stand still must spell disaster whether for the individual, the community, the race, or the nation. All of this must make us pause and think as to what contribution we can make, for only by using new means to meet new ends can we move with the times. I myself have no doubt that there is today more than ever need for service to humanity, need to enlarge the scope of this service, need to broaden our outlook so as to take in the ever-widening horizon of world needs.¹⁴¹

When Sarojini Chattopadhyaya (later Naidu) departed Bombay on a steamship bound for Europe in 1895, she was doing something that was both remarkable and commonplace. At sixteen, she was travelling to Britain on a scholarship to study at King's College London and Girton, Cambridge. Even amongst reform-minded families this was a highly unusual step for a girl to take.¹⁴² At the same time, however, by the nineteenth century, the movement of people along colonial shipping lanes was an established practice that had already re-distributed large numbers of Europeans, Africans and Asians across the globe. Mobility was a feature of the age and the passage between India and Britain was a well-trodden path taken by South Asian and European migrants of all classes, from servants to royal families.¹⁴³ By the time Naidu arrived in Britain, a small number of privileged

¹⁴⁰ Sarojini Naidu, 'Presidential Address to All India Women's Conference', *Stri Dharma*, (February 1930), 138-139.

¹⁴¹ Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, *The Concept of Social Service. Its Relation to World Needs and Problems* (London: The National Council of Social Service, 1961), 17-18.

¹⁴² Some highly exceptional predecessors include Pandita Ramabai, Toru Dutt, and Cornelia Sorabji.

¹⁴³ Visram, *Ayah's, Lascars, and Princes; Visram, Asians in Britain; Mukherjee, Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identities.*

Indian students – future doctors, lawyers, engineers, and civil servants – were attending British higher education institutions, joining British subjects from elsewhere in the Empire as well as the indigenous ruling class. Along with Naidu herself, the lives of Naidu's father Aghorenath and her husband Govindarajulu, who both attended the University of Edinburgh, and M.K. Gandhi, a law student in London in the 1880s, were amongst the threads of connection that wove distant parts of the world together during this period.¹⁴⁴ These connections occurred, of course, in the context of imperial domination, yet, for colonial actors, they helped draw attention not just to the inequalities of Empire but also to shared values and to the fact that human lives were woven into an interconnected world system that operated on a global scale.

This chapter explores the historical conditions and ideological influences associated with the development of the global careers of Indian nationalist women. As mobile colonial actors, they were both products and agents of globalisation and the ways they imagined their lives were structured by this sense of interconnectedness. In addition to a cosmopolitan consciousness derived from personal experiences, their worldviews were influenced by globally-circulating universalist ideas based on the concept of common humanity, particularly those promulgated by Indian reformers and European Theosophists. It was, in particular, through the Mazzinian concept of cosmopolitan nationalism that they began to negotiate the tensions between local and global spheres in the 1920s. The figure of Sarojini Naidu is of central importance in this context. Her flamboyant interventions in imperial and global public spaces brought publicity to the cause and pioneered the role of Indian women as global actors.

If cosmopolitan nationalism provided a global framework for imagining Indian self-government, it was through the concept of citizenship that nationalist women constructed their public selves. Indian women's entry into public life was mediated by the ethos of duty and service, which was deeply rooted in

¹⁴⁴ Brown, 'Gandhi – a Victorian gentleman'.

colonial society. The women who came of age in the early twentieth century would appropriate and expand the concept of service in imperial and global contexts according to the shifting demands of the political climate. By the 1930s, they were also increasingly tethering their demands to the concept of individual rights.

Being Citizens of the World: Mobility and Global Interconnectedness

For elite nationalist women, long-range mobility was fairly commonplace, even before their public careers began to demand it of them in the 1920s and 1930s. After her first visit in the 1890s, which lasted for three years before she returned to India, Sarojini Naidu travelled to Europe for medical treatment in 1912-1914. During this period she made important connections with other future nationalist leaders including M.K. Gandhi and M.A. Jinnah.¹⁴⁵ In 1902, Amrit Kaur, a twelve-year-old a member of the royal family of Karpurthala (a state in the Punjab), accompanied her father, Sir Harnam Singh, to Britain when he attended the coronation of Edward VII. For the next six years she was a pupil at Sherborne School for girls in Dorset, and after her return to India in 1908, she travelled back to Europe in a private capacity on at least one occasion before entering public life in the 1930s.¹⁴⁶ Hansa Mehta was a student at the London School of Economics in 1919. She travelled extensively in Europe and the United States of America, and visited Japan before returning to India in 1923 and marrying a British-educated doctor, Jivraj Mehta.¹⁴⁷ At around the same time, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya followed her husband (Sarojini Naidu's brother) Harindranath to London where she attended Bedford College, University of London. Her travels in Europe in 1921 brought her into contact with exiled Indian revolutionaries then resident in Paris and Berlin, including her brother-

¹⁴⁵ G.N.S. Raghavan, *M. Asaf Ali's Memoirs. The Emergence of Modern India. With and Introduction by Aruna Asaf Ali* (New Delhi, Ajanta Publications, 1994). 98-108.

¹⁴⁶ Venetia Griffith, 'The Rajkumari Amrit Kaur' (1964), Sherborne School for Girls Archive (SSG).

¹⁴⁷ Taya Zinkin, 'Hansa Mehta revolutionary: mainly for women', *The Guardian*, 28 February 1964, 8.

in-law Virendranath Chattopadhyaya.¹⁴⁸ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, who was also in Europe in the early 1920s, had her earliest experiences of foreign travel in 1905, the year her brother, Jawaharlal Nehru, started school at Harrow, England.¹⁴⁹



Figure 1: Amrit Kaur (middle row, centre) at Sherborne School for Girls, 1905.
Sherborne School for Girls

The movement of people was a normal feature of the world into which elite nationalist women were born and it was not confined to any particular social class. Travelling with Naidu on the SS Karojola from Durban to Dar-e-Salaam in 1924 were 'soldiers going to India, planters going to E. Africa, a bride going out to be married in Zanzibar, Govt. officers, and all sorts of miscellaneous fellows.'¹⁵⁰ The passengers accompanying her to London in

¹⁴⁸ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Papers, Speeches and Writings by Her, 137, NMML.

¹⁴⁹ Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography. With Musings on Recent Events in India* (London: John Lane, 1936), 15.

¹⁵⁰ Sarojini Naidu to Ranadheera Naidu, 31 May 1924, Makarand R. Paranjape (ed.), *Sarojini Naidu. Selected Letters, 1890s-1940s*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996), 175.

1931 included 'young eager-eyed students going for the first time abroad and filled with excitement', businessmen, delegates for the Round Table Conference and the entire Bhopal royal family and entourage.¹⁵¹ Such journeys took weeks, but if communications were slow, they were efficiently managed and long-distance travellers structured their lives accordingly. 'I find that a boat leaves Mombasa from Aden which can take letters for India next week,' wrote Naidu from the SS Khandall in 1929, as she hastily put pen to paper to catch the post.¹⁵² Whether through personal missives or through the press, the movement of news and information kept colonial actors informed of events elsewhere. Writing to Gopal Krishna Gokhale in Britain from Hyderabad at the end of 1914, Naidu surmised that no news of her friend's health must mean that he was well because any illness 'would have been blazoned abroad with the true journalistic flair for "personal items" concerning the Great Ones of the earth.'¹⁵³

Although travel times were long and distance brought its share of human discomfort, mobile South Asians in the age of steam and the telegraph lived with a sense of being connected to the wider world. Furthermore, many were keenly aware that those connections were becoming quicker and more encompassing. As early as 1920, Rabindranath Tagore had argued that '[t]he most important fact of the present age is that all the different races of men have come close together' and new technologies meant that the world was becoming progressively more connected as the twentieth century advanced.¹⁵⁴ Contemporaries marvelled when, in 1927, the British Theosophist Annie Besant, who was also a prominent Indian nationalist,

created a world historical record in the last weeks of her eightieth year by her visit to the chief cities of Europe by flight from one to the other. She lectured in twenty-one towns in three weeks, and braved all

¹⁵¹ Sarojini Naidu to Padmaja and Leilamani Naidu, 6 September 1931, Paranjape (ed.), *Sarojini Naidu. Selected Letters*, 245-247.

¹⁵² Sarojini Naidu to Ranadheera Naidu, 26 November 1929, Paranjape (ed.), *Sarojini Naidu. Selected Letters*, 234.

¹⁵³ Sarojini Naidu to Gopal Krishna Gokhale, 24 December 1914, Paranjape (ed.), *Sarojini Naidu. Selected Letters*, 101.

¹⁵⁴ Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1920), 100.

manners of dangers in going by different kinds of flying-machines in all kinds of weathers, climates and hours.¹⁵⁵

When two British women flew to India for the AIWC annual meeting in December 1934, the novelty of their mode of transport caused Margaret Cousins, who had first travelled to India by boat twenty years earlier, to remark: 'It had taken them only five days of flying with each night spent in a hotel on land. Surely such journeys are miracles...'¹⁵⁶ Speaking at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Conference in 1945, Amrit Kaur, a child of the Edwardian era, invoked the 'spirit of understanding and world fellowship' on the basis that '[t]he radio, the cinema and the aeroplane have brought the counties of the world very near each other...'¹⁵⁷ The contrast between this sense of interconnectedness and the global conflict they lived through would become a common rhetorical trope for nationalist women in the post-World War era. 'Science has progressed,' remarked Hansa Mehta in 1948, 'but foreign affairs have not kept pace with it.'¹⁵⁸

Mobility and transnational exchange heightened the sense that, over the course of their lifetimes, geographical distance had shrunk. This, according to Sarojini Naidu, engendered a belief in common humanity:

[h]aving travelled, having conceived, having hoped, having enlarged my love, having widened my sympathies, having come into contact with different races, different communities, different religions, different civilizations, friends, my vision is clear. I have no prejudice of race, creed, caste or colour.¹⁵⁹

International travel could also bring a sense of liberation from orthodox conservative opinion, which, while at odds with their own upbringing, was a powerful force in Indian society at large, including in some nationalist

¹⁵⁵ *Stri Dharma*, 10, 12 (October, 1927), 177.

¹⁵⁶ Margaret E. Cousins, 'The All India Womn's Conference at Karachi. Impressions,' *Stri Dharma*, 18, 6 (April 1935), 228, 7AMR/1/9, Women's Library (WL).

¹⁵⁷ *Conference for the Establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. Held at the Institute of Civil Engineers, London, From the 1st to the 16th November, 1945*, ECO/CONF./29, UNESCO, 33.

¹⁵⁸ Hansa Mehta Papers, Second Instalment, Speeches and Writings 22, 4, NMML.

¹⁵⁹ Sarojini Naidu, 'Speech in Madras', Sarojini Naidu, *Speeches and Writings*, (Madras: G.A. Natesan, 1924), 20. See also Kaur, *The Concept of Social Service*, 17; Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Papers, Speeches and Writings by her, File 137, 31, NMML.

circles.¹⁶⁰ While growing up, nationalist women invariably experienced an unusual level of education and freedom that could alienate them from conservative sections of society. When Amrit Kaur returned from her schooling in Britain, she found the social customs of Northern India (where, unlike Kaur, many women observed *purdah*) 'difficult to adjust to after her cosmopolitan way of living abroad.'¹⁶¹ Sarojini Naidu faced similar difficulties. 'There is of course,' Gandhi remarked, 'in her behaviour with men, a freedom which may appear to the strictly orthodox... as going beyond the limits of modesty.'¹⁶²

For Naidu personally, social conventions were, perhaps, also an issue in Victorian Britain where Naidu complained of the pressure of being 'proper and civilized and conventional'.¹⁶³ However, when it came to public life, she appears to have found it easier to thrive abroad than in India. Margaret Cousins described her as 'the most brilliant conversationalist of today' but added that 'it is perhaps only when she is on tour in foreign lands that that gift of hers finds full expression.'¹⁶⁴ Naidu herself reported something similar during a trip to America in 1928:

Curiously enough I feel (I am sorry for it) I can rise to greater heights in international gatherings abroad than in India. It is the *quality* of the audiences and environment that makes all the difference ... and *what* a difference! But one *must* give one's best always to India even though one's own people cannot understand, appreciate, respond to one's best and finest giving.¹⁶⁵

There is a sense, then, that being citizens of the world brought inner conflicts that were difficult to resolve. Despite Naidu's sense of fulfilment in America, the tour itself was a personal wrench because it meant leaving her daughter

¹⁶⁰ For conservatism in Congress see Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, *So I Became a Minister* (Allahabad; London: Kitabistan, 1939), 102.

¹⁶¹ Padma Balasubramanian, 'Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. The Princess' Journey to Gandhi's Ashram', in Rama Jha (ed.), *Woman with a Mission. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur: A Centenary Volume* (New Delhi, 1989), 73.

¹⁶² M.K. Gandhi quoted in Mrinalini Sarabhai (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poetess. Being a selection of letters exchanged between Gandhiji and Sarojini Naidu* (Bangalore: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1998), 157.

¹⁶³ Sarojini Chattopadhyaya to Arthur Symons, 15 July 1896, Paranjape (ed.), *Sarojini Naidu Selected Letters*, 21.

¹⁶⁴ Margaret E Cousins, *Indian Womanhood Today* (Allahabad, Kitabistan, 1941), 157.

¹⁶⁵ Naidu quoted in Arora, 'The Nightingale's Wanderings', 99.

who was at that time convalescing in a tuberculosis sanatorium. '[I]t seems to be written in the book of fate that I must go,' she wrote to Gandhi prior to her departure, but 'I am not very happy at leaving India at such a critical time'.¹⁶⁶ Many years later, after Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit had enjoyed a long, distinguished career in international diplomacy, she wrote a plaintive letter to her brother Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister. 'My success abroad and the praise I received meant nothing to me,' she claimed in a letter lamenting the long years she spent as High Commissioner to the United Kingdom.¹⁶⁷ What she really wanted was to work in India.

For most colonial actors, air passage would remain difficult to arrange and prohibitively expensive, but the possibilities it offered alerted them to the globalising processes through which they were living. At the same time, other factors made the compulsion to think and act globally appear more urgent. The First World War had alerted India women to some of the dangerous implications of modern interconnectedness, just as the next global conflagration would do a generation later. As Amrit Kaur, who had lost a brother in France in 1915, put it in 1942: 'we cannot afford not to look beyond our borders Two successive world wars have ... shown that the actions of one nation have repercussions far beyond its neighbours.'¹⁶⁸ In tandem with these developments was the increasing sense that imperial citizenship was untenable for Indians. The carnage of the First World War greatly undermined imperial prestige, constitutional reforms carried out through the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935 were widely criticised, and the persistence of repressive measures in India in the interwar period caused widespread disillusionment. Most singularly damning was the Jallianwala Bagh atrocity of April 1919 in Amritsar when many hundreds of unarmed civilians were brutally killed and injured by the British Indian Army.

¹⁶⁶ Sarojini Naidu to Mahatma Gandhi, 7 August 1928, Paranjape (ed.), *Sarojini Naidu Selected Letters*, 202-3.

¹⁶⁷ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit to Jawaharlal Nehru [undated, 1962?], Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit Papers, First Instalment, Correspondence Files 1951-1963, NMML.

¹⁶⁸ Amrit Kaur, 'To Women' in G. Borkar (ed.), *Selected Speeches and Writings of Rajkumari Amrit Kaur* (New Delhi: Archer Publications, 1961), 175.

In this context, nationalist women were amongst those who imagined that if global interconnectedness caused conflict and inequality, it might also herald progress. In March 1929, Naidu made the first radio broadcast between America and India with the following optimistic pronouncement:

Today inaugurates one more triumph of scientific skill that defies the barrier of times, defeats the challenge of space and strives to interlink in an ethereal yet enduring bond of instant communication of the New World which Columbus discovered and the Old World ¹⁶⁹

Thinking Globally: Reform and Cosmopolitan Nationalism

The conclusions nationalist actors drew from their experiences of transnational connectedness were influenced by universalist ideas that had long been fashionable in India. Nationalist women were inheritors of these ideas, which came to them in various forms, initially by way of the social and political reform movements of the nineteenth century. Later, they would be refined through exposure to globally-circulating ideas about world brotherhood, nationalism and individual rights in the context of changing political circumstances in India and internationally. But thinking globally began at home in India.

Throughout her political career, Sarojini Naidu fashioned herself as a universalist figure. This public and private persona can be traced directly to her upbringing in Hyderabad at the end of the nineteenth century. Her parents were Bengali Brahmins and although, reportedly, Naidu and her seven younger siblings never spoke the language of their forebears, the atmosphere of the household reflected the reformist and cultural influences of the Bengal Renaissance.¹⁷⁰ Naidu's mother had received an education under the influence of the Brahmo Samaj and wrote poetry, which presumably informed her daughter's decision to pursue a career as a poet at the age of eleven. It is, however, her father who features largest in Naidu's own accounts of her childhood. Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya, after studying

¹⁶⁹ Sengupta, *Sarojini Naidu*, 219.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 13, 20.

for a DSc in Chemistry at the University of Edinburgh, settled in the southern princely state of Hyderabad and pioneered modern education at the Nizam's College. An early advocate of *swadeshi*, a supporter of women's education, and a champion of the reformist universalist principle of the truth of all religions, Aghorenath, his daughter claimed, taught her to think as a 'citizen of the world.'¹⁷¹ The family home was known as a site of debate and learning - a cosmopolitan, freethinking environment that was later idealised by Naidu in a fictionalised account of her childhood:

Among the extraordinary influences that formed her... were the moonlight gatherings that took place every night in her father's garden ... [a] coterie of men of all nationalities and creeds ...: wild young poets, with garlands round their hair intoning their delicious verses, and sage philosophers solving the deepest problems of humanity; saints, who had given up their lives to prayer and mediation on things occult, and astrologers who had studied the secret of the stars; atheists and theologians, princes and paupers, dreamers and alchemists; Hindu pandit, Moslem Mollah and Christian priest.¹⁷²

Hyderabad, Naidu claimed, was 'the most truly cosmopolitan society in India' and as a champion of Hindu-Muslim unity during the tumultuous decades prior to Partition, she credited the Muslim culture of the state's rulers with instilling in her the ideal of brotherhood:

I have been struck over and over again by this indivisible unity of Islam that makes a man instinctively a brother. When you meet an Egyptian, an Algerian, an Indian and a Turk in London, what matters it that Egypt was the Motherland of one and India the Motherland of another? It was this great feeling of Brotherhood, this great sense of human justice that was the gift of Akbar's rule to India.¹⁷³

Naidu's background appears to have manifested as a formidable worldly-wise quality, causing the literary critic Edmund Gosse, who met Naidu in London in the 1890s, to consider her to be 'far beyond a Western child in all her acquaintance with the world.'¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷² Sarojini Chattopadhyaya, *Sunalini: a passage from her life*. MSS Eur A.95, British Library (BL).

¹⁷³ Sarojini Naidu, 'The Ideals of Islam', December 1917, Naidu, *Speeches and Writings*, 63.

¹⁷⁴ Edmund Gosse, 'Introduction' in Sarojini Naidu, *The Bird of Time* (London: Heinemann, 1912), 3.

The concept of shared humanity popular with reformers in India chimed with globally circulating ideas. In 1893, the reformist Bengali monk Swami Vivekananda received international acclaim at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago with a speech that preached tolerance and unity.¹⁷⁵ Also present in Chicago was the charismatic Theosophist leader Annie Besant, who would shortly move permanently to India, becoming President of the Theosophical Society in 1907. Theosophy professed the truth of all religions and aimed at forming the nucleus of a universal brotherhood. A syncretising movement based on distinctly Orientalist conceptions of East and West, Theosophy was a significant influence for a generation of Indian nationalists. It was Besant who chaperoned the teenage Naidu to London in 1895 and, like many nationalists, Jawaharlal Nehru, at the age of thirteen, joined the Theosophical Society under her influence.¹⁷⁶ Theosophy was also linked to Irish nationalism and influenced Irish figures such as W.B. Yeats, with whom Naidu associated in London in the 1890s.¹⁷⁷ Besant, who became the first woman President of the Indian National Congress in 1917, was frequently acknowledged by nationalist women to be an inspiration. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, though too young to remember her brother's Theosophical phase, came across Besant as a teenager:

I shall never forget the first time I heard Mrs. Besant speak. I hung upon her lips spell bound, transported to another sphere and deep within me was born the desire that the gift of speech might also be mine some day. That I also might have the power to move people's hearts.¹⁷⁸

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, who reported herself to have been 'full of a kind of awe' when she first met Besant as a child, regarded the Theosophical leader as 'a political hero.'¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Address by Swami Vivekananda: Welcome Address to the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, September 11, 1893, *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, 36, 2 (2011), 94-95.

¹⁷⁶ In Nehru's case the association was short-lived but he maintained 'the warmest admiration' for Besant herself. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 15.

¹⁷⁷ Collins, *Empire, Nationalism and the Postcolonial World*, 107, 109-110.

¹⁷⁸ Pandit, *So I Became a Minister*, 89-90.

¹⁷⁹ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, 'A tribute to Annie Besant', Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Papers, Speeches and Writings by Her, File 79, 1.

Besant's teachings doubtless left their mark on Naidu, whose work in the social reform movement in the pre-First World War period often centred on Madras, the headquarters of the Theosophical Society. For example, it was Besant who popularised the idea of a 'World Teacher', making a dubious connection (based on a doubtful racial theory) between the historical figures of Christ, Buddha, Zoroaster, and Orpheus and the coming of a 'new age'.¹⁸⁰ Naidu made no such strident millenarian claims but she invoked the idea when she described Gandhi as 'a lineal descendant of all the great teachers who taught the gospel of Love, Truth and Peace for the salvation of humanity.'¹⁸¹ However, although Theosophical teachings that proclaimed the brotherhood of man impressed nationalist women, of more significance was the way Besant and some of her Theosophical followers linked spiritual universalism to political nationalism, as occurred after 1913 when Besant decided 'the time had come for letting my tongue speak freely that which had been burning in my heart, and to which all had led up – the Freedom of the Motherland.'¹⁸² By 1917, Besant had founded the Home Rule League, been arrested and interned by the British authorities for sedition, and been elected President of the Indian National Congress, where she appeared at the annual meeting that year flanked by Sarojini Naidu. The political ideas Besant articulated around this time would make a significant impact on the ways younger nationalist women imagined their place in the world.

Besant's turn to political nationalism created a filter through which the cosmopolitan nationalist ideas of the nineteenth-century Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini were received by the generation of nationalist women that came of age around 1917. Theosophy and nationalism had been in conversation since at least the founding of the Indian National Congress by a Theosophist in 1885 and Mazzinian thought had already impressed nationalist thinkers, including Surendranath Banerjea and Lala Lajpat Rai,

¹⁸⁰ Annie Besant, *The Coming of the World-Teacher. A Lecture given at the Queen's Hall on November 1st, 1925* (London: The Theosophical Publishing House Limited, 1925).

¹⁸¹ Sarojini Naidu, 'Forward', H.S.L. Polak, *Mahatma Gandhi*, (1948) quoted in Sarabhai (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poetess*, 152-3.

¹⁸² Quoted in A.J. Willson, *Mrs Besant and India* (London: Pelican Press, 1917), 8.

with its ideas on insurrectionist republicanism, women's education, and national mission.¹⁸³ Now Besant interpreted the Mazzinian concept of 'special mission' for a new generation, blending the ideas of world brotherhood and national exceptionalism to make an argument for self-determination based on a universalist vision of a unified humanity. According to this vision, humankind was divided into pre-determined nations, each with its unique contribution to make to the whole. In order to achieve peace and unity, every nation had to perform its own distinctive role, something that could only be achieved if a nation was self-governed. As Besant argued:

to render its full service to Humanity [a nation] must develop along its own lines, and be Self-Determined in its evolution. It must be Itself, and not Another. The whole world suffers where a Nationality is distorted or suppressed, before its mission to the world is accomplished.¹⁸⁴

Besant's vision of national self-determination only meant self-government within the Empire, a position rejected in favour of *purna swaraj* (complete independence) by the Congress in 1929.¹⁸⁵ It was also based on a problematic theory of Aryan supremacy that nationalist women came to reject.¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the global framework for imagining national freedom, complete with its claim that Indian nationalism was a force for universal good rather than simply a self-interested movement, provided the basis for nationalist women's claims to global belonging. Naidu, as much as Besant, was an influential proponent of this idea. By 1916, she was a celebrated

¹⁸³ See C.A. Bayly, 'Liberalism at Large: Mazzini and Nineteenth-century India Thought' in C.A. Bayly and Eugenion F. Biagini, *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalisation of Democratic Nationalism 1830-1920* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 365.

¹⁸⁴ Annie Besant, *Shall India Live or Die?* (Madras: The National Home Rule League New India Bookshop, 1925), 27-28. The supremacist idea of Aryan stock determined how European Theosophists interacted with India in ways that make for uncomfortable reading. See, for example, Margaret Cousins' description of Naidu: 'she is the Aryan type from which we can see how easily sprang the whole Celtic race. In appearance, save for her dress she might easily be taken for an Italian, such is the similarity between the root-stock and its children of Europe.' Cousins, *The Awakening of Asian Womanhood*, 119.

¹⁸⁵ According to Jawaharlal Nehru, Besant did in fact support his independence resolutions at the AICC meeting in Madras in 1927, but he also mentions that his conception of independence was much misunderstood at this time: Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 167.

¹⁸⁶ Besant, *The Coming of the World-Teacher*, 22. Many scholars have identified racially inflected outlooks in Indian nationalist figures, including Gandhi, before and after independence. Despite the fact that hierarchical racial theory underpinned Theosophist teachings, nationalist women rejected these ideas and instead were more inclined towards coloured solidarity. See Chapter 5.

national figure – an acclaimed poet who had spoken at the All-India Social Conference and All-Indian Congress Committee meetings and had connections to the emerging generation of nationalist leaders as well as to the recently deceased G.K. Gokhale. That year she published 'The Soul of India', an argument for self-government in response to what she termed 'the Montagu bombardment', in which she argued that '[t]he soul of India, self redeemed and victorious, shall become again the mystic temple of humanity.'¹⁸⁷

Soon after her Presidency, Annie Besant fell out of line with the direction of the Congress. Her opposition to the mass mobilisation methods of Gandhi and her failure to condemn the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 sealed her relative alienation as much as her discomfiting theories of Aryan supremacy and spiritual millenarianism. However, the cosmopolitan-nationalist vision she helped popularise during the First World War would be appropriated, refashioned and remodeled by nationalist women throughout their careers according to the changing political situation. 'There is no place for foreigners in our inner life,' wrote Naidu to Gandhi as antipathy to British rule grew in response to government repression after the First World War.¹⁸⁸ 'And', she continued, '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'.¹⁸⁹ This was an outlook Naidu still maintained in 1930 when she explained to the AIWC annual conference that she was 'a bad nationalist':

I am a bad nationalist. I am a nationalist only by the compulsion and the tragedy of the circumstance of my country. I am first and last a human being and I do not recognise divisions of humanity merely because of

¹⁸⁷ Sarojini Naidu, 'The Soul of India', Makarand R. Paranjape (ed.), *Sarojini Naidu. Selected Poetry and Prose* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2010), 229. This was later published by ed. the Theosophical Society's press, Vasanta Press: Sarojini Naidu, *The Soul of India* (Adyar, Madras: Vasanta Press, 1923). Vasanta is the supposed Sanskrit version of Besant).

¹⁸⁸ 'Letter from Sarojini Naidu to Gandhiji, November 6, 1919' quoted in Sarabhai (ed.) *The Mahatma and the Poetess*, 18.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

race or geographic barriers. ... I oppose every separatist movement except for possible transitional purposes.¹⁹⁰

For nationalist women, cosmopolitan nationalism was a powerful, enduring, and versatile ideological framework through which the nebulous sense of belonging to a unified humanity could be translated into political demands. In 1933, Amrit Kaur delivered a speech to the Fellowship Guild in London entitled 'The Brotherhood of Man'.¹⁹¹ The daughter of missionary-educated parents in North India, and the recipient of an 'Evangelical Christian' education at Sherborne School for Girls, Kaur received the concept of common humanity via a different route from that which influenced Naidu.¹⁹² Appropriately enough, when she made her case for Indian political freedom to an evangelical gathering in London it was in the name of Christian love. Nevertheless, she also presented it as a cosmopolitan-nationalist impulse 'to throw off the fetters which [India] feels are binding her and preventing her from fulfilling her mission in the world.'¹⁹³

Just over a decade later in America, in the radically altered circumstances brought about by the Second World War, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit promoted Indian independence not just as a matter of national freedom, but as a prerequisite for world peace. During a speech made at a dinner hosted by the India League of America, she posited India as a torch-bearer for the struggles 'of suppressed peoples everywhere'.¹⁹⁴ The common aim of India and America, she said, in words reminiscent of Besant's claims a generation earlier, was 'that each nation may develop and grow to their full height, that

¹⁹⁰ Naidu, 'Presidential Address,' 138-139.

¹⁹¹ Amrit Kaur, 'The Brotherhood of Man' in Borkar (ed.), *Selected Speeches*, 57. The Fellowship Guild was a Christian organisation co-founded by the feminist preacher Agnes Maude Royden. See Sheila Fletcher, 'Royden, (Agnes) Maude (1876-1956)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35861>, accessed 18 September 2017.

¹⁹² P. Harnam Singh to Mrs Cox, 18 August 1920, SGA.

¹⁹³ Kaur, 'The Brotherhood of Man', 57.

¹⁹⁴ "India's Case for Independence" Vijayalakshmi Pandit's dinner speech under the auspices of the India League of America, New York, 25 January 1945', Bimal Prasad (ed.), *Towards Freedom. Documents on the Movement for Independence in India. 1945*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 241.

each may contribute out of the fullness of their own heritage towards the general heritage of the world.¹⁹⁵ 'I believe that we can help you in this task, but we cannot help you as a nation of slaves', she added in a pointed reference to the history of race relations in the United States.¹⁹⁶ Thus the concept of cosmopolitan-nationalism envisioned by Besant and others as a framework within which to promote Indian political rights in the context of Empire, was refashioned by Pandit in the 1940s, not just to advance the cause of Indian independence but to posit India as a world leader in the fight for liberty. That this sense of special mission was to become a central plank of independent India's foreign policy was evident from the time of the 1946 UN General Assembly when the Indian delegation, led by Pandit, brought a campaign against South Africa, not solely as a representative of overseas Indians but in the name of universal human rights.¹⁹⁷

Service as Citizenship

The late-Victorian notion of service provided Indian women with an entry point into active citizenship. The concept had been highly influential amongst Indian reformers and European missionaries and, through them, had a particular impact on the women who came of age around the time of the First World War because of the special influence laid on the uplift of women. Educated Indian women, whatever their political standpoint, were themselves products of this tradition of service and reform. They were second- or third-generation reformers, the daughters of educated mothers and reform-minded fathers, whose own education was infused with the ethos of service for the greater good. A further influence was women's rights activists in Britain, whose commitment to civic duty influenced the founders of the major Indian women's organisations: the Women's Indian Association (WIA), the National Council of Women in India (NCWI), the All India Women's Conference (AIWC). Together, these converging traditions not only equipped Indian women with the tools to contribute to Indian society, whether in the context of

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, Chapter 4.

the Empire or the nation, but infused this contribution with the notion of service. In 1946, this was enshrined in the AIWC's 'Women's Charter'. 'Woman', the document stated, 'as an individual and as a citizen has duties to perform not only to herself and her family but to society.'¹⁹⁸ The 'Duties of Women' included in the Charter were the highly gendered notion of service through teaching, nursing, social reform, and the education of children, all of which were associated with the supposedly uniquely feminine 'caring' capacities of women.

The concept of social service was by no means confined to nationalist women. As Sukanya Bannerjee has shown convincingly, the 'deracinated ideal of citizenship' associated with the pro-imperial Cornelia Sorabji was characterised by 'an ethos of duty and service.'¹⁹⁹ Nevertheless, duty and service were central tenets of Indian nationalism. By 1905, the year that marked the beginning of the Swadeshi campaign, Sarojini Naidu, was on the verge of establishing herself as a poet and had begun to make forays into public life as a proponent of social reform. 'I wonder if you can realize how difficult it is for anyone to keep "merely" to the "primrose path" of Art,' she remarked to her literary mentor Edmund Gosse, that year. She continued:

There is a tacit understanding that all talents and enthusiasms should concentrate themselves on some practical end for the immediate and obvious good of the nation. There are innumerable strong foes who would lure you or force you into their own special task. The leader of "religious reform", the prophet of "social progress", the editor of a political journal, the worker in the cause of "female education", the president of a "Home for Hindu Widows", the advocate for the revival of home industries [*swadeshi*]...²⁰⁰

Naidu was involved in several activities 'for the good of the nation', becoming a follower, in particular, of the moderate nationalist G.K. Gokhale, who, through his Servants of India Society, promoted education as a means of instilling national consciousness and a sense of duty. Despite the affected

¹⁹⁸ 'Draft of Indian Woman's Charter', *Roshni*, June 1946, 12.

¹⁹⁹ Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens*, 118.

²⁰⁰ Sarojini Naidu to Edmund Gosse, 4 September 1905 in Paranjape (ed.) Sarojini Naidu, *Selected Letters*, 47-48.

reticence in her letter to Gosse, Naidu took the idea of service seriously, and was awarded a Kaiser-i-Hind Medal for public service in recognition of her flood relief work in Hyderabad, a marker of imperial service, which she later returned in protest at the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.²⁰¹ However, for Naidu in particular, service was not simply a matter of social work. To a large degree, her services to India included her role as a molder of opinion in the domestic and international public spheres. Her talents as a poet were channeled into her career as a public speaker who was renowned for ‘the magic of her voice and the beauty of her words’.²⁰² This role earned her the moniker ‘Nightingale of India’ and, although some described her ‘poetical fervours’ as ‘fine nothings,’ her value to the nationalist movement as a propagandist in the public sphere cannot easily be dismissed.²⁰³ Naidu regarded public service as a duty attached to her social status and she frequently (and a little pompously) used the term *noblesse oblige* to refer to her various roles in public life.²⁰⁴

In 1961, Amrit Kaur received the René Sand Award for Social Service, an international accolade that celebrated her long career in the imperial, national, and international public spheres.²⁰⁵ Her commitment to social service was deeply rooted in her upbringing. Her father, Harnam Singh, was a member of the Karpurthala royal family, held British titles (a knighthood in 1899, ‘Raja’ in 1907) and was a member of the Imperial and Punjab Legislative councils. But this distinguished imperial career is only part of the story. Harnam Singh had been educated under the tutelage of Reverend J.S. Woodside, an American Presbyterian missionary with an interest in girls’ education who was among the founders of Woodstock Women’s School and College in Dehra Dun. As

²⁰¹ ‘Nominal Roll of Ladies recommended to the Government of India for Titles’, Foreign Department, Internal-B, January 1909, File 130; Foreign and Political Department Internal-B, December 1920, File 20, National Archives of India (NAI).

²⁰² Pandit, *So I Became a Minister*, 90. Paroma Roy, *Indian Traffic. Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 136.

²⁰³ Quoted in Roy, *Indian Traffic*, 146.

²⁰⁴ For example, Sarojini Naidur to Gopal Krishna Gokhale, 13 November 1914 in Paranjape (ed.), *Sarojini Naidu. Selected Letters*, 98.

²⁰⁵ George F. Davidson, President, International Conference of Social Work, to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, 8 November 1960, Papers of Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Correspondence, NMML.

an adult he converted to Christianity, renouncing his right to the Kapurthala succession and marrying the daughter of a Bengali Presbyterian convert, also with links to Woodside.²⁰⁶

Both Kaur's parents were prominent figures in imperial society who were active in social reform and elite philanthropic circles. Harnam Singh was a committee member of the Lady Dufferin Fund – an organisation that sought to improve medical conditions for women in India, including by the method of training women as doctors, midwives and nurses.²⁰⁷ He was also an admirer of Gokhale and was among the 'prominent gentlemen of India' who formed the All-India Gokhale Memorial Committee after his death in 1915.²⁰⁸ In 1914, Lady Harnam Singh, Kaur's mother, presided over a meeting of Indian women which met to express sympathy on the death of the Vicereine, Lady Hardinge, during which she publically expressed her appreciation of Lady Hardinge's support for welfare issues.²⁰⁹ She was also a Vice-President of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), an organisation active in setting up hostels for young women in order to provide safe refuge (as well as attending to young women's 'spiritual' and 'moral welfare'). For Amrit Kaur, the YWCA was an important transnational network throughout her life.²¹⁰ During her time at Sherborne School, Kaur often stayed with the YWCA founder Mary Kinnaird and subsequently, in 1933, the assistance of the World YWCA was instrumental in facilitating Kaur's approaches to the League of Nations in Geneva.²¹¹ Later in life, Kaur became President of the YWCA in

²⁰⁶ 'A Christian Indian Prince', *The Review of Reviews*, January 1911, 43, 253. See also 'Sir Harnam Singh Dead', *The Times of India*, 21 May 1930; 'Taluqdars of Oudh: Address to the Viceroy', *The Times of India*, 26 January 1917. Obituary: Lady Harnam Singh', *The Times of India*, 19 September 1924, 9.

²⁰⁷ 'The Lady Dufferin Fund', *The Lancet*, 21 November 1914, 1220.

²⁰⁸ 'The Gokhale Memorial', *The Times of India*, 24 March 1915.

²⁰⁹ 'The Late Lady Hardinge. Indian Ladies Tribute', *The Times of India*, 18 July 1914, 10.

²¹⁰ Ivy Khan, 'Rajkumari Amrit Kaur. The Driving Force Behind Welfare Organisations' in Jha (ed.), *Woman with a Mission*; E. Picton-Warlow, 'Y.W.C.A.: to the Editor of the Times of India', *Times of India*, 20 March 1902, 7.

²¹¹ Una Saunders, Vice President of Worlds' Young Women's Christian Association to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, 29 September 1933, File 27-1 (1933), AIWC.

India, celebrating the organisation as 'an inclusive, worldwide and infinitely varied Christian fellowship.'²¹²

During the years immediately after her return from school in Britain, Kaur's contribution to public life was shaped by her parents' activities. She '[took] her place as an only daughter, sharing in her mother's social work and acting as unofficial secretary to both parents while enjoying to the full the social life of Simla in summer and Lucknow or Jullundur.'²¹³ A typical event was that hosted by her mother at a 'Purdah Club' in 1916, during which Lady Chelmsford spoke of the need for women to perform 'good works' and the missionary 'Dr. Miss Bielby' spoke about home hygiene, a theme Kaur would promote in her later Gandhi-inspired work with 'Harijans'.²¹⁴ It was against this background of missionary-inspired social service through civil society that Kaur first became interested in the ideas of M.K. Gandhi. Like many contemporaries, she first came across the future nationalist leader at the All India Congress Committee meeting in 1915. Further to that, she came into close contact with him around the time of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, during which period the Mahatma stayed at the family residence in Jullundur. Although Kaur reportedly showed an interest in joining Gandhi's ashram, she continued supporting her parents' activities until their respective deaths in 1924 and 1930. After this, Kaur, by now a financially independent woman in her forties, became one of Gandhi's Personal Secretaries, combining this work on the ashram with other work, which included, in large part, leadership of the AIWC.

Gandhi's strong commitment to reform and social service is well-known. For him, *swaraj* was never purely a matter of political independence but rested on the total reform of society. According to this view, social reform, including the uplift of women, was intrinsic to meaningful self-government. Thus, like

²¹² Khan, 'Rajkumari Amrit Kaur.'

²¹³ Dame Emmeline Tanner, 'Rajkumari Amrit Kaur' in *Sherborne School for Girls, 1889-1949* (1949), 105.

²¹⁴ 'Simla Purdah Club', *Times of India*, 14 September 1916.

generations of reformers before him, he was concerned with the 'Woman Question' and was famously committed to rural uplift and 'Harijan' work. Where Gandhi substantially broke with convention was his active encouragement of the mass participation of women in nationalist agitations, drawing on educated, reform-minded women to lead and inspire at a grassroots level. However, despite this encouragement, Gandhi was never more than 'lukewarm' on the subject of women in positions of power, preferring instead to promote women as ideal non-violent *satyagrahis* because of their supposed capacity of sacrifice and suffering.²¹⁵ Sita, for example, the self-sacrificing widow, was upheld as the ideal nationalist heroine. Thus, he challenged social convention only to then reinscribe a gendered division of roles.²¹⁶ Furthermore, for Gandhi, any idea of a social contract between the individual and society was weighted heavily in favour of duty. 'I learnt from my illiterate but wise mother,' he wrote late in life, 'that all rights to be deserved and preserved came from duty well done. Thus the very right to live accrues to us only when we do the duty of citizenship of the world.'²¹⁷ For this reason, his vision of women's participation was not only gendered but rested firmly on the concept of social responsibility. 'We should not give up the ideal of women's duty,' he warned in 1924, 'while espousing the cause of her rights'.²¹⁸ Amongst nationalist women leaders, Sarojini Naidu, the eldest, was the most sympathetic to this formulation. As will be seen, her younger colleagues, even those, such as Amrit Kaur, who most strongly adhered to the Gandhian ethos of service, would lay a greater influence than the Mahatma on the importance of rights. Nevertheless, Kaur's long-lasting connections to international organisations such as the World Health Organisation and the Red Cross after independence should be understood in light of her deep philanthropic heritage.

²¹⁵ Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 192.

²¹⁶ Patel, 'Construction and reconstruction'.

²¹⁷ UNESCO. *Human Rights: Comments and Interpretations*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), 18.

²¹⁸ Quoted in Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi. Prisoner of Hope* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1989), 210.

To a greater or lesser extent, all elite nationalist women participated in different forms of social service, which, for women, provided a socially acceptable means of contributing to public life. Along with Gandhian work in the villages, the prime outlet for nationalist women's social service was their work for women's organisations. In 1917, the WIA was founded under the leadership of Margaret Cousins, an Irish theosophist and suffragist who had previously been imprisoned for stone-throwing in Ireland.²¹⁹ Initially established to promote female suffrage, along with the NCWI (founded 1925) and the AIWC (founded 1927), the WIA also addressed social reform issues such as child marriage, widow remarriage, education property law, labour conditions and health care. All three organisations, for example, played an important role in the campaign to raise the age of marriage which culminated with the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929).²²⁰ Nationalist women were involved with all the national women's organisations. However, it was the AIWC that became the most prominent organisational face of the nationalist women's movement in the 1930s and 1940s, despite its supposedly non-political remit.

Following in the tradition of social reform, Indian women's organisations placed the education of girls as the highest of priorities. Although it quickly expanded its remit, the AIWC was initially established with the single purpose of improving women's educational opportunities.²²¹ One of its core activities was the establishment of the All-India Women's Education Fund, which, amongst other things, maintained the Lady Irwin College, a women's college founded in 1932 under the ethos of education for the sake of public service.²²²

The critical role of education in the development of society was one of the unifying themes of the colonial and postcolonial careers of Hansa Mehta.

²¹⁹ James Cousins and Margaret Cousins, *We Two Together* (Madras: Talbot Press, 1950).

²²⁰ Sinha, *Specters*, Chapter 4.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 176-178.

²²² The motto for this all women's college was (and remains) *Vidya hi seva* (education is service). See M.K. Gandhi to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, 9 June 1936 in M.K. Gandhi, *Letters to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1961), 77-78.

Raised in a progressive environment in the West of India, her own education was encouraged, she wrote, not just by her father, Sir Manubhai Mehta, the Dewan of Baroda and Bikaner States, but also the reform-minded Maharaja of Baroda.²²³ As a child she was one of three girls to attend Baroda College and she earned a degree in Philosophy from the University of Baroda in 1918 before studying at the LSE in the 1920s. By 1923, she had settled on a career in education, attending the Educational World Conference in San Francisco in July that year and, after returning to India, serving on the Schools Committee of the Bombay Municipality and co-founding the AISC in 1927. She would go on to serve as parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Education and Health in the Bombay Legislative Council (1937-1939), as President of the Bombay Provincial Primary Education Board (1939-42), as Vice-Chancellor of SNDT Women's University (1946-1948), and as Vice-Chancellor of the Maharaj Sayajirao Baroda University (1949-1958). Both the universities she served had been established by reformers and one of Mehta's legacies in these institutions was the expansion of women's education and the introduction of a graduate degrees in Social Work, a move linking the colonial-era culture of social reform to postcolonial India.

Citizenship Beyond Empire

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, Sarojini Naidu pioneered some of the ways nationalist women would operate in the global public sphere through print media, radio broadcasts, and transnational civil society. In 1905, under the mentorship of the poet and literary critic Edmund Gosse, Sarojini Naidu began to publish poetry that purportedly brought 'some revelation of the heart of India' to a global audience.²²⁴ Her three volumes of poetry, containing orientalist-inspired imagery of, for example, Indian dancers with 'jewel-girt arms' combined with nationalist exhortations addressed to Mother India ordering her to 'Awake!' represent an early attempt by Naidu to

²²³ Hansa Mehta, *Indian Woman* (Delhi; Baroda: Butala & Company, 1981), 170-171.

²²⁴ Gosse, 'Introduction', 5. Along with *The Bird of Time* (1912), she also published, with Heinemann, *The Golden Threshold* (1905) and *The Broken Wing* (1917). *The Bird of Time* was also published in New York by John Lane in 1912.

intervene in the global public sphere.²²⁵ Naidu's literary career, which she all but abandoned after 1917, was an exercise in cosmopolitan cultural nationalism designed to craft an identity for India in the wider world. Prior to 1919, this was firmly imagined within the context of the British Empire. Her First World War poem, 'The Gift of India', which was published in *The Times* in 1915 laments, but also glorifies, the death of the 'martyred sons' of India who had been 'strewn like blossoms mown down by chance/ On the blood-brown meadows of Flanders and France'.²²⁶

After the disappointment of the Rowlatt Act (1919), which extended repressive civil measures brought in during the war, and the barbarity of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the sense of imperial belonging as imagined by 'The Gift of India' no longer seemed possible for Sarojini Naidu.²²⁷ She became, at this point, both a close ally of Gandhi and an important link between Congress and Muslim Khilafat activists during the non-cooperation campaign. Indicating this shift in perspective, in 1920, she renounced her Kaiser-i-Hind medal in protest at

an almost unbroken record of pledges wantonly violated, repressions cruelly enforced, and humiliations ruthlessly inflicted on a helpless nation [which] has now reached its climax in the dual crime of perjury towards the Indian Mussalmans and blood-guiltiness towards the martyred people of the Punjab.²²⁸

In London that year she exchanged her role as a poet for that of a political firebrand when she entered into a public fracas with the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, by way of a widely reported speech at Kingsway Hall in which she accused the imperial authorities, not only of massacre, but of dishonouring Indian women. 'You deserve no Empire,' she told her audience in a speech that drew an indignant response from Montagu and caused

²²⁵ See 'Indian Dancers' in Sarojini Naidu, *The Golden Threshold* (London: Heinemann, 1905) and 'Awake!' in Sarojini Naidu, *The Broken Wing* (London: Heinemann, 1917).

²²⁶ *The Times* (London), 17 December 1915, 11. 'The Gift of India' was also published in *The Broken Wing*.

²²⁷ For an alternative view of the revitalisation of the nationalist movement in this period see Kama Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image and Text* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²²⁸ Sarojini Naidu, August 31, 1920 in Naidu, *Speeches and Writings*, 12.

outrage in the House of Commons.²²⁹ Naidu's 'feats of eloquence' were already fairly well-known in India but, when *The Times* reported the questioning of the Secretary of State in Parliament over her comments, her value as a publicist outside India was made apparent.²³⁰ The unusual spectacle of an Indian woman at public meetings in Britain, combined with Naidu's powerful accusation that the events in the Punjab 'dishonour[ed] the women of another nation' and betrayed British democracy, not only undermined imperial legitimacy but did so in a way that attracted media and public attention.²³¹

At around the same time, Naidu and Hansa Mehta were amongst those to form a delegation of Indian women to attend the Eighth Congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) in Geneva. The IWSA (later the International Alliance of Women), a moderate suffragist organisation, had been founded by British and American feminists in 1904, and by 1920 comprised twenty-nine affiliated national societies.²³² Since the IWSA's previous Congress in 1913, momentous events had taken place, including the partial enfranchisement of women in sixteen countries. The Geneva meeting was convened in order to consider ways the 'women of the world' might 'march on further.'²³³ With an amended set of goals that extended well beyond the question of suffrage, and with a new focus for action in the recently established League of Nations, the conference exuded forthright optimism and the spirit of internationalism. The inclusion, for the first time, of 'women of the East' (which in reality comprised a specially invited Indian delegation of ten, a two-woman Japanese contingent, and a lone

²²⁹ Quoted in Sengupta, 162.

²³⁰ *Stri Dharma*, 11, 5, (March 1928), 66. 'Mrs Naidu's Allegations', *The Times*, 15 July 1920, 8.

²³¹ Sengupta, 161.

²³² The International Woman Suffrage Alliance, *Report of Eighth Congress, Geneva Switzerland*, June 1920. For an overview of the international women's movement see Rupp, *Worlds of Women*.

²³³ Carrie Chapman Catt, 'Call to the Eighth Congress of the International Women Suffrage Alliance, Geneva, June 6 to 12, 1920' in The International Woman Suffrage Alliance, *Report of Eighth Congress*.

representative from Turkey) signalled, it was claimed, the intention of the European leadership to '[help] raise the status of the women of all races.'²³⁴

Against this conception of Western-led internationalism, members of the Indian delegation, most of whom had come directly from London and the controversy surrounding Naidu's comments on the Punjab, saw the situation differently. Naidu resisted the idea that the Indian women's movement could be co-opted so easily into the women's movement. She criticised what she saw as the misguided approach of European feminists who 'imitated men in a fierce, resentful, revengeful kind of way' when they should have been 'recognizing the strength and sanctity of their womanhood'.²³⁵ She complained that

[f]or a whole week the leading women of 35 nationalities discussed world problems relating to women ...with consummate ability, knowledge, clear grasp of the issues ... and yet not one of them realized the *humanity*, the essential *livingness* behind the problems ...²³⁶

Naidu's contribution to the IWSA Congress was a speech steeped in cosmopolitan-nationalism that laid claim to Indian exceptionalism. She offered what was presented as an alternative, Indian approach to women's emancipation – a fulfilment of India's special mission to the world:

it was left to me to strike the one human note to which every single being in the audience responded with tears . . . acknowledging that Life couldn't be dealt with in a series of impersonal academic propositions but that the *only* valuable, vital contribution women could make to the future was to transmute power into service and uplift the daily commonplace in the region of divine achievements.²³⁷

If she intended to use the speech to highlight East-West cultural difference, she appears to have been successful. 'The effort at understanding between the East and West is harder than any other,' reported one observer, who added, in a patronising tone: 'if the ideas that the audiences gleaned from the most eloquent and moving speeches [by 'the women of the East'] were a little

²³⁴ Chrystal Macmillan, 'Introduction' in The International Woman Suffrage Alliance, *Report of Eighth Congress*, 22. For a list of delegates see *Report of Eighth Congress*, 3-21.

²³⁵ Sarojini Naidu to Jaisoorya Naidu, 16 June 1920 in Paranjape (ed.), *Sarojini Naidu Selected Letters*, 146.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

vague and illusive, the sympathy and goodwill remain tangible and concrete facts.'²³⁸

Nine years later in 1929, the WIA sent a six-woman delegation to the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAWSEC) Congress in Berlin.²³⁹ Again, Naidu made a stirring speech but for Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, the significance of this appearance was not the so much the content but the symbolic significance of Naidu's 'majestic personality and golden eloquence' which, she reported, made 'we who seemed to be otherwise rather statusless, [feel] mighty proud.'²⁴⁰ A major grievance of the WIA delegation was the absence of an Indian flag meaning that at a conference bedecked with national symbols, 'Indians were huddled under the all pervasive British Union Jack.'²⁴¹ In response, the indignant Indian delegation reportedly fashioned an Indian National Congress flag from their saris, enabling Naidu to report to Gandhi that '[t]he east is making a lovely show – Egypt, Turkey, India, Japan, China, and Persia, and for the first time the Indian national flag has found a place among the flags of the world!'²⁴²

Although relations within international women's networks were problematic, they could be practically useful. During the controversy surrounding the publication of Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* (1927), for example, the WIA was able to use the journals of the IAWSEC and the London-based Women's Freedom League both to counter Mayo's imperialist propaganda and to position themselves as credible advocates of Indian women's emancipation to a global audience.²⁴³ Later, in 1945, Chattopadhyaya, as President of the

²³⁸ The International Woman Suffrage Alliance, *Report of Eighth Congress*, 40.

²³⁹ After 1920, the IWSC changed its name to the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAWSEC), which, by 1946, had been shortened to the International Alliance of Women (IAW).

²⁴⁰ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Papers, Articles/Speeches by Her, File 97, 1, NMML.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² Sarojini Naidu to Mahatma Gandhi, 18 June 1929 in Paranjape (ed.), *Sarojini Naidu, Selected Letters*, 229.

²⁴³ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*, 141.

AIWC, wrote to Margery Corbett Ashby of the International Alliance of Women (IAW), urging European feminists ‘to take a clear and strong stand on the question of freedom for all peoples’ and expressing the hope that at least the more conscious women will throw in their full weight on the side of freedom and justice for all.²⁴⁴ The message met with only moderate success with the IAW board passing a resolution in support of ‘democratic self-government’ but failing to condemn imperialism *per se*, even at this late stage. Nevertheless, from the Indian nationalist point of view, the international women’s movement served not only as a means of promoting women’s rights but as a platform for publicising the national cause throughout the pre-Independence period.



Figure 2: The opening of the IAWSEC Congress in Berlin, 1929, complete with ‘flags of the world’ (presumably prior to India’s flag being fashioned from saris). Sarojini Naidu in sari, front right; Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, edging left of frame. Women’s Library, LSE.

²⁴⁴ ‘Copy of letter to Mrs Corbett Ashby from Shrimati Kamaladevi’, 12 April 1945, File 355-1 (1944-45), Part II, AIWC.

Beyond the international women's movement, nationalist women found other ways of engaging with the global public sphere. Naidu's gift for spectacle and public sensation attracted substantial media attention during a tour of South Africa in 1924-25. Four years later, Naidu undertook a six-month speaking tour of the United States of America in 1928-29, where she took the lead in reaching out to international civil society networks and engaging the world's media. By this time she was a prominent figure of international fame. Further to her literary reputation, her Presidency of the Indian National Congress in 1925 had already piqued the interest of the American media with the *New York Times* celebrating her a 'Joan of Arc' who had '[risen] to inspire India.'²⁴⁵

Owing, amongst other things, to the United States' own imperialistic ventures in Asia, there was considerable interest there in British imperial policy. While the British government could count on a generally sympathetic attitude, it was ever sensitive to criticisms of colonial rule that regularly emanated from American liberal circles, especially after the 'internationalisation' of global politics began to undermine the idea of imperial domination after the First World War.²⁴⁶ The India Office had already shown itself ready to intervene in American debates on the question of British imperialism and it was in this context that Katherine Mayo produced *Mother India*, a damning indictment of Indian womanhood that ostensibly justified the British Empire's civilising mission.²⁴⁷ Naidu's visit to America the following year was a direct intervention in the global propaganda wars taking place over the question of European imperialism in the years after its prestige was dealt such a harmful blow by the First World War. She was visited by 'a whole medley of reporters', 'went to tea with the Editor and staff of the "Forum"', and spoke at public meetings across 'the whole continent'.²⁴⁸ Characteristically, Naidu chose to portray her tour in non-political terms:

²⁴⁵ W.G. Tinckom Fernandez, 'A Joan of Arc Rises to Inspire India', *The New York Times*, 14 February 1926.

²⁴⁶ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*, 33.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

²⁴⁸ Naidu to Leilamani Naidu, 1 November 1928; Naidu to Hansa Mehta, 30 November 1928, in Paranjape (ed.), *Saronini Naidu. Selected Letters*, 210, 216.

I go not to refute the falsehoods of an ignorant and insolent woman but to interpret the Soul of India to a young nation striving to create its own traditions in a new world. ... India has an imperishable gift to make to the new world as it has made to the old worlds age after age.²⁴⁹

However, in light of Mayo's portrayal of Indian women as subjugated and oppressed, there was little doubt, either in nationalist and imperialist circles or in the American press, of the anti-imperial propaganda value attached to the visit of educated, emancipated and wholly forthright Indian woman.²⁵⁰

Naidu's presence in America drew attention to the activities of Indian women's organisations in countering 'backward' customs such as purdah and child marriage, undermining the case for imperial legitimacy and shifting the centre of the debate on imperialism in favour of colonial self-rule.

Furthermore, Naidu's tour established and consolidated transnational networks of sympathisers and potential allies amongst the all-important opinion-formers in American and global society. The vital importance of this work was not lost on Naidu: 'I have', she informed Gandhi,

been privileged to establish the most cordial relations with those whose minds and personalities mould and influence public opinion in America. Scholars, writers, politicians, preachers, and men of affairs ... and splendid women who use their wealth, and rank and talent in the service of fine national and international causes for the progress of humanity.²⁵¹

Among these was Jane Addams, the President of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Members of this organisation would become important allies of Indian women the following decade. Links were also forged with representatives of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organisation that would provide support for the Indian nationalist cause in America during the 1940s.

²⁴⁹ Naidu to Gandhi, 7 August 1928, *Saronini Naidu. Selected Letters*, 204.

²⁵⁰ 'India's Poetess to Visit America', *The New York Times*, 14 October 1928, 14.

²⁵¹ Naidu to Gandhi, 19 November 1928 in Paranjape (ed.), *Saronini Naidu. Selected Letters*, 213.

Citizenship: Individual Rights and Collective Organisation

If during the early-twentieth century nationalist women were asserting citizenship through service, they were also quickly becoming mobilised by the ideology of individual rights, which the AIWC-authored Women's Charter of 1946 detailed in full. In 1946, the demand for equal rights was presented to an as-yet-to-be realised 'national government' but, prior to this, Indian women's organisations had made their demands for citizenship in the context of the Imperial state.²⁵² Along with the legal age of marriage, the legal reform of marriage customs was, by the 1940s, an important focus of the AIWC, but the other prominent rights-based issue of the pre-independence period was suffrage.²⁵³

The changing discourse around the issue of suffrage of 1920s and 1930s is a useful indication of the evolution of rights-based claims-making amongst nationalist women during the period. Indian women's bids for enfranchisement were made against the backdrop of the two constitutional reform processes associated with the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935 respectively.²⁵⁴ When Sarojini Naidu asked the Indian National Congress to back the WIA's demand for female suffrage at a special meeting in 1918, she made her case in conservative terms:

We ask for the vote, not that we might interfere with you in your official functions, your civic duties, your public place and power, but rather that we might lay the foundation of national character in the souls of the children that we hold upon our laps, and instill in them the ideals of national life.²⁵⁵

²⁵² Sudhir Chandra, *Enslaved Daughters: Colonialism, Law and Women's Rights* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998). Sudhir Chandra, 'Whose Laws? Notes on a Legitimising Myth of the Colonial Indian State,' *Studies in History*, 8, 2 (1992), 187-211; Padma Anagol-McGinn, 'The Age of Consent Act (1891) Reconsidered: Women's Perspectives and Participation in the Child-Marriage Controversy in India,' *South Asia Research*, 12 (November 1992), 100-18; Tanika Sarkar, 'A prehistory of rights: The age of consent debate in colonial Bengal,' *Feminist Studies*, 26, 3 (2000), 601-622.

²⁵³ Sinha, Chapter 4, especially 180-196; Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 112-119. For a different perspective of this process see Eleanor Newbigin, *The Hindu Family and the Emergence of Modern India. Citizenship and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁵⁴ These are generally referred to as the First and Second Franchise Campaigns. See Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, Chapter 4, especially 93-100 and 106-112. See also Mrinalini Sinha, 'Suffragism and internationalism,' 461-484.

²⁵⁵ Quoted in Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 96.

This highly gendered bid for citizenship reflects the conception of citizenship associated with a sense of belonging and responsibility to the nation, and it was on these terms that the WIA made their case to the Franchise Committee in London. The memorandum they produced argued:

Indian women realise *their* responsibility to the future and know that as the mothers, as those who will guide and train the future generations, they must have the opportunity given them to enable them to make their influence felt in making India a country that is healthy, happy and prosperous.²⁵⁶

It should be noted that this link between political rights and service was very much in keeping with the discourse around the enfranchisement of British women aged over thirty through the Representation of the People Act (1918), which portrayed the right to vote as a reward for war service rather than an inalienable right. However, in contrast to this emphasis on service, by the time of the second franchise campaign of the early 1930s, Indian women's demand for suffrage was made as a natural democratic right and an explicit claim to the legal status of citizenship.²⁵⁷

While India remained part of the Empire, the demand for legal rights could only be made in the imperial context, and by its very nature was inherently constitutional. By the time of the second franchise campaign, this made the suffrage issue problematic for nationalist women who were opposed to imperial rule and who participated in non-cooperation and civil disobedience. Despite the ideological tensions produced by nationalist women's attempts to fuse Gandhian nationalism and women's rights in the imperial crucible, petitions in favour of female suffrage during the 1930s were made on the grounds of rights-based imperial citizenship. While Naidu's own speech to the Second Round Table Conference (1931) spoke only of national liberation, the memorandum which she presented to the Conference with Begum Shah Nawaz on behalf of Indian women specifically made the demand for women's

²⁵⁶ Dorothy Jinarajadasa and Meenakshi Amma to the Chairman and members of the Franchise Committee, 20 November 1918, 7MGF/90/IV/173b, WL.

²⁵⁷ Appendix XIV. 'Memorandum representing the views of a number of Indian Women's Organisations,' *Indian Round Table Conference (Second Session)*. *Second Report of Minorities Committee*, 99-102, ProQuest UK Parliamentary Papers (UKPP).

suffrage in the name of '[e]qual rights and obligations of all citizens, without any bar on account of sex'.²⁵⁸

The contrast between Sarojini Naidu's Congress speech of 1918 and the explicit demand for equal rights made just over a decade later reflects the development of liberal rights-based ideas in Indian politics after the First World War. The 1928 Nehru Report is usually referred to for its relevance to debates within Congress over whether to demand Dominion status or *purna swaraj* (complete independence), or because of its rejection of communal electorates.²⁵⁹ It is important to note, however, that it also signalled the centrality of democratic citizenship in the mainstream nationalist conceptions of *swaraj*. These ideals were adopted in the Fundamental Rights resolution at the Karachi Congress in 1931 – a statement that would, henceforth, be used to bolster Indian women's citizenship claims in the context of empire, nation and globe.

The culture of rights-based ideas that the Congress Fundamental Rights resolution reflects is mostly associated with male thinkers and politicians.²⁶⁰ However, Indian women also contributed to this history. One of the ways they did this was through national and local societies, which, modelled on British civil society organisations, claimed to operate as the organised opinion of Indian women. In the absence of formal democratic rights, women's civil society organisations performed the function of aspirational democratic citizenship. This was reflected in the democratic conventions they employed: annual conferences, voting on resolutions, and elected committees, all, in the case of the national organisations, organised on a centralised All-India basis. These conventions lent moral weight to women's organisations as representatives of Indian women. In reality, much of this democratic ethos was lost in practice when elite women attempted to assert their influence by

²⁵⁸ *Indian Round Table Conference (Second Session), 7th September, 1931 – 1st December, 1931, Proceedings*, 258-264, UKPP; Appendix XIV. 'Memorandum', 100.

²⁵⁹ For example, Chandra et al, *India's Struggle for Independence*, 263.

²⁶⁰ Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*; Bayly, 'The Ends of Liberalism'.

circumventing constitutional procedures.²⁶¹ However, as campaigners, nationalist women understood democratic representation as an important basis for their citizenship claims and took care to emphasise it to imperial or world governance authorities.²⁶²

Perhaps the most forthright in her advocacy of equal rights was Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya.²⁶³ She had been brought up in a liberal reforming household in Madras, was subsequently schooled in political ideas in Indian revolutionary circles, and further encountered feminist discourses through interactions with international women's organisations in the 1920s.²⁶⁴ She understood her own ideological development as part of '[t]he breeze of liberal thought, nationalism, individual freedom and democracy, the right to education and civil liberties' that impacted Indian society at the beginning of the twentieth century causing radical questioning of existing political and social structures.²⁶⁵ If, for Naidu, the fulfilment of individual rights was less important than the goal of national self-determination, Chattopadhyaya, her sister-in-law, embraced democratic citizenship as part of the scientific revolution against 'old-world standards.'²⁶⁶ She saw no contradiction between women's rights and national liberation, viewing them both as part of a democratic tradition established by the French Revolution. However, far from understanding this as an exogenous 'Western' imposition, she saw the 'awakening' of Indian women as part of 'the history of women all the world over'.²⁶⁷ Imperialism, in her Marxism-influenced, historically determinist view,

²⁶¹ See, for example, Amrit Kaur's private admission that some of her behaviour 'may have been unconstitutional!' Amrit Kaur to Mrs Mukherjee, 9 May 1934, F.No.59-II (1934), AIWC. Also Margery Corbett Ashby's assessment of Sarojini Naidu's authoritarianism at a meeting of women in 1935, Margery Corbett Ashby to 'Dearest Love', 1 January 1935, 7MCA/C16, WL.

²⁶² *Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform 1932-33 [Session 1932-1933]. Report*, Volume 1, 1619, UKPP.

²⁶³ Nanda, *Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya*.

²⁶⁴ [Untitled], Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Papers, Speeches and Writings by Her, File 137, 30-34, NMML.

²⁶⁵ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, 'Women lagging behind in Nation Building' (1967), Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Papers, Speeches and Writings by Her, File 32, 1, NMML.

²⁶⁶ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, *The Awakening of Indian Women* (Madras: Everyman's Press, 1939), 1.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

was as much an impediment to progress as feudalism and religion: '[g]enuine redress of the grievance of women can only be realised when India becomes free and never within the framework of British imperialism.'²⁶⁸ Furthermore, India was no less a potential cradle of democracy than the West: '[h]ad India been left to herself, she might have worked out a great democratic revolution for herself after the decline of the Moghul Empire.'²⁶⁹ Chattopadhyaya credited the circumstances surrounding the death of her father, who died intestate when she was a child leaving her mother by default with no inheritance, as '[bringing] home to me the unhappy position of women in Hindu Society.'²⁷⁰ The ideology of citizenship rights provided a framework through which such injustices could be challenged, as Indian women would continue to do through their representations to the Hindu Law (Rau) Committee after 1941, through the drafting of a Women's Charter (1946) and through their efforts to draft a Uniform Civil Code after independence.²⁷¹

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored the evolution of the many meanings of citizenship for Indian nationalist women, and some of the ways they were practiced in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Citizenship could be an abstract sense of identity, which for mobile, well-travelled actors meant belonging at a global level as well as in a local or national context. These multiple layers of belonging could produce tension and inner conflicts but, broadly speaking, they were resolved within a cosmopolitan nationalist ideology that situated the nation as an integral part of the global whole. It was only through self-government (later articulated as complete independence) that the world could achieve harmony and peace. In the war-

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁷⁰ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, 'Reflections After Sixty,' *The Bharat Jyoti*, 23 January 1966, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Papers, Speeches and Writings by Her, File 29, NMML.

²⁷¹ As is well known, these efforts – spearheaded by Amrit Kaur and Hansa Mehta – failed resulting instead in the codification of personal laws such as the Hindu Code Bills of 1955-6). See Chaudhuri, *Indian's Women's Movement*, Chapter 6 and Chaudhuri (ed.), *Feminism in India*, Chapter 3.

ravaged early twentieth century, it was felt, this ideology gave Indian nationalism a distinct global relevance.

In addition to its abstract meanings, citizenship had more concrete connotations rooted in social responsibility and individual rights. These concepts lent citizenship its practical substance and underpinned women's public sphere engagement and political claims. As we have seen, this meant that the practices of citizenship – social service, petition, and engagement with public opinion and civil society networks – could be applied at the local, imperial or global level. This chapter has considered some of the ways Indian women pioneered these practices transnationally in the 1920s. In what follows, we will consider how this history evolved over subsequent decades.

CHAPTER 3

Engagement: Amrit Kaur in London and Geneva, 1933

We constitute one-fifth of the world's women; ... we are systematically studying the problems connected with the position, rights and duties of women and could, therefore, co-operate to international advantage.²⁷²

1933 is recognised as a momentous year in world history, marked by, amongst other things, the withdrawal of Germany and Japan from the League of Nations. Against these events, which ominously foreshadowed the global crisis that came next, the history of the Indian women's movement in 1933 indicates a counter narrative of transnational cooperation. During the Summer and early Autumn that year, Amrit Kaur and a handful of colleagues were in Europe. Their primary purpose was to petition the Joint Parliamentary Franchise Committee in London on the issue of the women's franchise. However, over the course of their visit, their ambitions expanded and in September they travelled to Geneva to campaign for the right of representation at the League of Nations. This chapter examines these activities in London and Geneva as a means of exploring how nationalist women deployed the notion of citizenship in the imperial and global public spheres. In both contexts, Indian women operated in two ways. On the one hand, they petitioned directly the instruments of governance – Parliament in London and the Council of the League of Nations in Geneva. On the other, they conducted campaigns in the public sphere to influence wider public opinion. Existing and newly constituted civil society networks were crucial to this effort.

Political and Ideological Context

1933 was a tipping point produced by a combination of factors. During the previous decade, Congress-led nationalism had been revitalised under the

²⁷² Amrit Kaur, Shareefah Hamid Ali, Ammu Swaminadahn, Keron Bose, 'Submission to President of the the Council of the League of Nations, 27th Sept 1933' quoted in Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, 'Report on activities in Geneva', File 27-1 (1933).

leadership of M.K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.²⁷³ Gandhi's Civil Disobedience campaigns of 1930-32, in particular, had been momentous for women, who participated in nationalist campaigns in dramatically increased numbers during this period.²⁷⁴ Furthermore, the newly-defined stance of the Congress after the declaration of *purna swaraj* in 1929 and the Fundamental Rights Resolution in Karachi in 1931 supplied the Indian women's activities with a clear ideological structure.

An important figure in this nationalist regeneration was Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya who returned from Europe in 1929 'full of renewed enthusiasm, astir with new ideas.'²⁷⁵ Having felt the injustice of 'colonial countries [being] represented by their rulers' at the International Alliance of Women congress in Berlin that year, she then attended the Communist-run League Against Imperialism conference in Frankfurt with her brother-in-law Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, whom she had previously met in Berlin in the early 1920s. Also at the conference were Albert Einstein, Romain Rolland, Madame Sun Yat Sen and 'representatives from several Asian colonial countries like Indo-China and Java, Arabs from West Asian and North African countries, with a sprinkling of negroes.'²⁷⁶ Kamaladevi was greatly impressed by the impassioned rhetoric and 'full throated' renditions of the 'Internationale' and she subsequently drew heavily on internationalist-Marxist thought in formulating her particular anti-colonial worldview.²⁷⁷ This rendered her one of the more radical elements amongst the leadership of the Indian women's movement. At the same time, she was a loyal follower of Gandhi, leading and being arrested for her role in the salt agitation in Bombay in April 1930. Along with Sarojini Naidu's leadership of the Dharasana Salt raid the

²⁷³ Crispin Bates, *Subalterns and Raj. South Asia Since 1600* (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 139-142.

²⁷⁴ Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 125.

²⁷⁵ [Untitled], Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Papers, Speeches and Writings by Her, File 97, 33, NMML.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 36; Chattopadhyaya, *The Awakening*.

same year, Chattopadhyaya's activism played a significant part in encouraging the participation of women in nationalist campaigns.²⁷⁸

During the 1920s, the extent and scope of women's civil society had greatly expanded, with the Women's Indian Association (WIA), previously the only national women's organisation in existence, being joined by the National Council of Women in India (NCWI) in 1925 and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1927. Furthermore, the partial enfranchisement of women by provincial legislatures had given a boost of confidence to the movement, which allowed Indian women to compare their position favourably to women of other nationalities who either had a more limited franchise or, as in the case of American and European women, had been required to campaign more extensively for their rights.²⁷⁹ In addition, the *Mother India* controversy and campaigns around the issues of child marriage and women's education at the end of the 1920s had produced momentum and a sense of mission in the India women's movement. What emerged was a delicate balance between the requirement to counter conservative forces within Indian society and a compulsion to present 'Indian womanhood' to outsiders as the modernised vanguard of social reform.

Further to these developments, during the 1920s and early 1930s a growing internationalist consciousness emerged in Indian women's organisations that cut across the political spectrum. In addition to the Indian women's participation in international conferences, internationalism was promoted on the ground in India. The imperial loyalist Cornelia Sorabji, who was the Honorary General Secretary of the Federation of University Women in India, for example, organised a public event on the teaching of goodwill in schools as a direct response to a call to that effect from the League of Nations Committee on Intellectual Cooperation.²⁸⁰ The NCWI, which was a national

²⁷⁸ Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 129-134.

²⁷⁹ Mukherjee, *Indian Suffragettes*, Chapter 3.

²⁸⁰ Cornelia Sorabji, 'International Goodwill: Its Teaching in Schools', *The Times of India*, 17 January 1928, 13.

affiliate of the International Council of Women (ICW), also served as a link to global civil society in Geneva, where the ICW was a significant presence. This connection familiarised the Indian women's movement with the politics of internationalism. In 1928, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) hosted a meeting of the Bombay branch of the NCWI at which the speaker, Evelyn Gedge, gave a report of recent ICW meetings in Geneva. Gedge relayed details of lectures from League of Nations and ILO officials, including one by Rachel Crowdy, the then Director of the Social Section of the League.²⁸¹ It was precisely this area of League of Nations activity with which Indian women actively sought to become involved in 1933.

A further link to Geneva-based internationalism was the figure of Margaret Cousins, a co-founder of both the WIA and the AWC who was also a member of the first 'Women's Deputation' to the President of the League of Nations in 1928.²⁸² 'Geneva', Cousins wrote in *The Times of India* after this visit, 'is a city to which people from every country in the world come to exchange ideas and to help in making a unified world-consciousness and a resultant world-peace.'²⁸³ Cousins made several attempts to bring the cause of India to the attention of Geneva society, affiliating the WIA to the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAWSEC) and, in 1931, lending the support of the All Asian Women's Conference (AAWC), a pan-Asian organisation she also helped found, to the ongoing international feminist campaign for a universal equal rights treaty.²⁸⁴ Around the same time, Muthulakshmi Reddy was elected as a Liaison Officer between the AAWC and 'Geneva and international organisations.'²⁸⁵ All of this activity was publicised in Indian newspapers and journals informing an

²⁸¹ 'Women's Council at Geneva: Miss Gedge's Lecture, *The Times of India*, 28 February 1928, 7.

²⁸² Margaret E Cousins, 'Women's Movement in Geneva', *The Times of India*, 4 December 1928, 10.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ Mukherjee, 'The All-Asian Women's Conference', 373. The AAWC was a relatively short-lived organisation. Nevertheless it played an important role in developing the international perspective of the Indian women's movement.

²⁸⁵ Margaret E. Cousins, 'Asian Women Influence League of Nations, *The Times of India*, 24 February 1931, 4.

emerging internationalist consciousness amongst publicly engaged Indian women. It was against this background that the appearance of Indian women before the Joint Parliamentary Committee in London took place in the Summer of 1933.

Citizenship and the Constitution: The Women's Franchise Campaign, 1927-1933

The prospect of constitutional reform introduced by the appointment of the Indian Statutory Commission (the Simon Commission) in 1927 forced Indian women's organisations to consider their response. The Commission raised the possibility of improving on the limited franchise women had gained through the provincial legislatures after the first franchise campaign of 1917-1920. However, the political tensions caused by, amongst other things, the Commission's all-British make-up meant that the question of whether the Indian women's organisation should cooperate with it was far from clear cut and, after consideration, the three All-India women's organisations joined the Indian National Congress boycott of the Statutory Commission in protest. Partly as a result of this they were excluded from the first Round Table Conference (RTC) three years later to discuss the reforms. This meant that lobbying for a favourable women's franchise in India was initially conducted only by British feminists and British-appointed Indian feminists. The most vociferous of these was Eleanor Rathbone, an independent MP who took a special interest in the emancipation of Indian women. 'So long as this country is concerned with India', Rathbone wrote '...it cannot be right that British men should be able and expected to express views and exercise influence, while British women are asked to keep their hands off.'²⁸⁶ At the first RTC, Indian women were nominally represented by Radhabhai Subbarayan, the Oxford-educated wife of the former Chief Minister of Madras Presidency, and Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz, the daughter of Muhammad Shafi, a RTC delegate. Both Indian women were members of major Indian women's organisations, yet they acted independently and without their official sanction. In comparison

²⁸⁶ Rathbone to Subbarayan, 8 January 1932, 7ELR/07, WL.

to the nationalist women's intervention that came later, these two women's contributions to the process were heavily influenced by the strategies adopted by British feminists.

The three national women's organisations – the AIWC, the WIA, and the NCWI - formally entered the franchise campaign only after the agreement of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in March 1931 when, again following the lead of Congress, they decided to cooperate. In April, they jointly issued 'Memorandum I' outlining their position on the franchise and making three demands: the removal of sex disqualification, universal adult suffrage, and no reservations of seats – a position that was summed up as 'a fair field and no favour'.²⁸⁷ This was presented to the Second RTC (September to December 1931) by Sarojini Naidu and Shah Nawaz. Of fundamental importance in the Memorandum was the claim that the three national women's organisations represented women of all communities, and, in particular, that there should be no communal separation for women. This position, which privileged individual rights above those of the (religious) community, was designed to distance women from the communal politics affecting the rest of the constitutional talks. However, in doing so, it sacrificed a previous commitment, of the WIA in particular, to affirmative action to ensure women's representation.²⁸⁸

Despite the demands made in Memorandum I, the Second RTC little progressed the question of women's franchise and thereafter, the tenability of the 'fair field, no favour' position was delivered a series of blows from both the imperial state and new positions adopted by male nationalists. First, the report of the Parliamentary Franchise Committee (the Lothian Report) ignored the demands made in the women's Memorandum and instead recommended partial suffrage and reserved seats. For nationalist women,

²⁸⁷ Appendix XIV. 'Memorandum', 99-102. Amrit Kaur, 'Women under the new Constitution' in Shyam Kumari Nehru (ed.), *Our Cause. A Symposium by Indian Women* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1936). For the quotation see Subbarayan to Rathbone, 19 March 1931, 7ELR/07, WL.

²⁸⁸ Sinha, *Specters*, 212-222.

this very much underscored the case for *swaraj*, as the AIWC activist Shareefah Hamid Ali pointed out to the British feminist Eleanor Rathbone:

I really don't think women who think like me will bother now to lay our views before the present govt we shall wait till we get our own govt and then we know that the united views of the educated women of India will not be flouted. You advise us to go in with councils and work from inside. I think it would be most degrading to get elected as a "muslim" only and not as an "Indian."²⁸⁹

Then, however, it was the Congress Party's turn to undermine women's claims when, in September 1932, the Poona Pact signed by Gandhi signalled the acceptance by Congress of both separate communal electorates and seat reservations, two principles explicitly opposed in Memorandum 1. Finally, the White Paper of 1933 recommended a franchise of one woman for every ten male voters – a marginal increase on the existing situation yet well short of the goal of universal suffrage.²⁹⁰

In response to these challenges, the leadership of the Indian women's movement was forced to reassess its demands and arrived, again jointly, at a compromise based on the principle of pushing for women's enfranchisement 'on as large and equitable a scale as possible' and a settlement that would offer women 'opportunities for service in the Legislatures of the country.'²⁹¹ This included downscaling the goal of universal suffrage to universal suffrage only in urban areas, insisting that qualifications determining women's eligibility to vote outside the cities were based on 'literacy' rather than 'wifehood', and demanding that if women had to accept reserved seats they should be elected by joint (i.e. non-communal) electorates.²⁹² While 'organised women' continued to lay claim to individual rights, the new demands amounted to a tactical compromise based on idea that if the women's franchise had to be limited, it was 'progressive', urban-dwelling, educated women that ought to be enfranchised first. This was linked to the wider aims of the women's movement and was based on the assumption that

²⁸⁹ Shareefah Hamid Ali to Eleanor Rathbone, 29 October 1932, 7ELR/18, WL.

²⁹⁰ Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 110.

²⁹¹ 'Memorandum II' (June 1933), quoted in Kaur, 'Women under the new Constitution', 371.

²⁹² *Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform*, 1619 – 1620.

'progressive' voters would return legislators that would initiate reform measures to improve the status of women. As Muthulakshmi Reddy pointed out to Eleanor Rathbone,

[i]t is bad enough to enfranchise a large body of capitalists, landholders, zamindars, who are with a few exceptions, autocrats, are conservative orthodox men and generally opposed to all reforms in society. I do not think that either the women's or the nation's interest will be served by doubling the votes of these rich well-to-do classes. The illiterate and ignorant wife will have to be necessarily guided in the exercise of her right by her husband.²⁹³

It was in order to press the new jointly-endorsed compromise position that Amrit Kaur, Shareefah Hamid Ali, and Muthulakshmi Reddy appeared before the Joint Parliamentary Select Committee in 1933. Although there was again some discussion amongst nationalist women as to whether or not to cooperate with the Select Committee, it offered the opportunity for Indian women, not just to present franchise demands but to assert wider political claims to the British Parliament.²⁹⁴ The Indian women's delegation made two appearances before the Committee. On 29th July, Kaur and Hamid Ali presented two Memoranda to Sub-Committee C outlining the demands jointly adopted by the main Indian women's organisations.²⁹⁵ On 2nd August, Kaur, flanked by Hamid Ali and Reddy, presented a further statement before the Joint Committee. Kaur's evidence stressed the status of the delegation as 'elected representatives of the three main Women's Organisations,' pointed out that these organisations 'have branches spread over the entire length and breadth of India (both British and Indian),' and emphasised the 'democratic nature of the constitution of these organisations.'²⁹⁶ She described the AIWC as socially inclusive: 'We have no subscription for our membership of millions of women, because we want every woman – however poor she may be – to feel that she is taking an active part in our meetings.'²⁹⁷

²⁹³ Muthulakshmi Reddy to Eleanor Rathbone, 31 March 1933, 7ELR/18, WL.

²⁹⁴ Shareefah Hamid Ali to Eleanor Rathbone, 29 October 1932, 7ELR/18, WL; Reddy to Kaur, 20 April 1933, File 27-I, AIWC.

²⁹⁵ *Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform*, 1619 – 1620, 2288-2324.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1617.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

These points justified the demand that the 'very natural desire on our part for a full and free recognition of our inherent right to citizenship ... be conceded if we are to make a valuable contribution to the life of India.'²⁹⁸ This 'inherent right' to imperial citizenship was backed up by the emphasis laid on 'the united stand of the women of India against communal and separate electorates' and the absolute denial of communalism within their ranks.²⁹⁹

As well as setting out the demands of the three main women's organisations, these performances served two further purposes. The first was to emphasise the representative nature and, therefore, the legitimacy of the AIWC, WIA and NCWI, and, by extension, the women acting as their spokespersons. The second - more subtle - was to present Indian women as progressive and united. In doing so, the women's delegation directly and indirectly challenged the legitimising claims of imperial feminists and asserted the ability of Indians to rule themselves. The franchise campaign was, therefore, part of the public discourse taking place between the forces of imperialism and nationalism in the public sphere during the interwar period. At the same time, the Indian women's delegation adopted a self-consciously, socially 'progressive' position in direct opposition to conservative opinion in India and Britain. This not only opened up the possibility of progressive alliances that cut across national boundaries but situated their claims in the context of ongoing, transnational conversations about the social and political meanings of 'progress'.

The Franchise Campaign and the British Committee for the Indian Women's Franchise

Beyond their official engagement with the Select Committee, the presence of the Indian women's delegation in London enabled them to engage with the wider public sphere. This approach was deeply rooted in the culture of British imperial democracy and was based on the assumed importance of

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1619.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

public opinion, represented by organised civil society, in matters of parliamentary reform. According to Eleanor Rathbone, an Independent MP and veteran constitutional campaigner of several decades' standing, '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.'³⁰⁰ In line with this assumption, the dense tangle of sympathetic civil society networks comprised of women's societies, religious groups, peace campaigners, and Indian organisations was central to the Indian women's campaign. Building on previous connections between Indian and British organisations, Kaur, Hamid Ali, and, to a lesser extent, Reddy, used their visit to Britain to nurture existing links and establish new relationships. For their part, British civil society organisations passed resolutions in support of Indian women's enfranchisement, lobbied Parliament, held public meetings, and used contacts in the press to publicise the Indian women's visit. Such networks enabled the Indian women's delegation to explain their demands, assert their right to represent Indian women, and put forward the case for Indian independence - the issue of the franchise acting as a springboard for pressing wider claims.

Amongst the organisations with which the delegation interacted was the British Committee for Indian Women's Franchise (BCIWF), an alliance comprised of members of eleven British women's organisations which claimed to represent over two million British women voters.³⁰¹ The BCIWF was established in April 1933 by Eleanor Rathbone in order to campaign for a more favourable women's franchise in response to the limited provisions of the White Paper, which, like the Indian women's organisations, the BCIWF regarded as insufficient. However, despite this common ground, relations between the BCIWF and the Indian women's delegation were essentially antagonistic, if politely so. At the heart of the relationship was a conflict over who had the right to speak for Indian women. When members of the

³⁰⁰ Eleanor Rathbone to Florence Underwood, 16 September 1933, 7ELR/42, WL.

³⁰¹ Sinha, 'Suffragism and Internationalism,' 466.

imperialy-minded BCIWF gave evidence before the Joint Parliamentary Committee in July, they described the Indian reforms as ‘the only occasion on which organised British women as fully enfranchised citizens have had the opportunity of effectively influencing the destinies of the women of India.’³⁰² Their campaign, therefore, combined an assertion of British women’s own recently acquired, still-precarious status as enfranchised imperial citizenship with the condescending assumption that Indian women would welcome the benefit of British women’s ‘wider political experience.’³⁰³

If not consulted about the founding of the BCIWF for this purpose, the Indian delegation at least had prior warning. In March, Rathbone had written to Kaur to signal her intentions:

I am exceedingly indignant at the proposal of the paper as affecting women. As we rather feared they cut down considerably even the moderate proposals of the Lothian Report. We shall raise a veritable storm among the women’s societies here and I hope Indian women will do the same.³⁰⁴

On learning of Amrit Kaur’s plans to travel to London, Rathbone wrote to arrange a meeting ‘to discuss the matters in which we are both so interested concerning the future status of women in the new Indian Constitution.’³⁰⁵

Nevertheless, when Kaur spoke before the Committee in August she pointedly challenged the BCIWF’s legitimacy:

while acknowledging our immense gratitude to those men and women in Britain who have worked for our cause, we still maintain that it is we organised women of India who, by our experience and inner knowledge of the present conditions in our country, have the primary right not only of voicing the opinion of Indian women, but also of knowing what measures are most suited to ameliorate our conditions.³⁰⁶

³⁰² *Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform*, 2258. For the motivations of ‘maternalist’ British feminists see Sinha, *Suffragism and Internationalism*,’ 464-465; Burton, *Burdens of History*.

³⁰³ *Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform*, 2258.

³⁰⁴ Rathbone to Kaur, 18 March 1933, 7ELR/24, WL.

³⁰⁵ Rathbone to Kaur, 24 March 1933, 7ELR/24, WL

³⁰⁶ *Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform*, 1618.

Given the competing claims of the two groups, the relationship between the BCIWF and the Indian delegation was bound to be uneasy, with the Indian women stressing their moral right to speak for colonised women and their superior knowledge of 'conditions obtaining in India' while BCIWF feminists made much of their credentials as 'old suffragist[s]'.³⁰⁷ Rather than adopt the demands of the Indian women's organisations, the BCIWF advanced their own demands and this led to major disagreements. One area of contention was the so-called 'wife vote' – the enfranchisement of women on the basis of their husband's property – which the BCIWF supported as an expedient to increase the numbers of female voters. The Indian women's organisations, on the other hand, rejected the 'wife vote' on the grounds that it enfranchised women as wives rather than as citizens in their own right and that such a move would enfranchise socially conservative opinion.³⁰⁸

Despite these differences, alliances between nationalist and imperially-minded feminists performed a practical function. What developed was a pragmatic working relationship which gave Indian women access to Rathbone's power and influence as an MP. Although the BCIWF never dropped its support of the 'wife vote', Rathbone did agree to support Indian women's demand for urban adult suffrage, issuing, a 'Supplementary Memorandum' to that effect to the Joint Parliamentary Committee.³⁰⁹ After the delegation had returned to India, Rathbone offered her services in Parliament and urged them to 'let me know if there are any ways in which you think I can help over here by asking question or pressing points which you want pressed.'³¹⁰ Knowing the value of such an alliance, however fragile, for pursuing the interests of Indian women, Kaur, for one, was careful to retain it:

I will keep you informed of anything that we want you to be good enough to do for us. We are grateful for your kind interest and sympathy with us

³⁰⁷ Kaur to Rathbone, 7 December 1933; Rathbone to Kaur, 29 February 1934, 7ELR/24, WL.

³⁰⁸ Reddy to Rathbone, 31 March 1933, 7ELR/18, WL.

³⁰⁹ Rathbone to Kaur and Hamid Ali, 14 October 1933, 7ELR/24, WL

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

even though we may not see eye to eye in the details of our programme.³¹¹

The 'Five Friendly Societies'

A more natural alliance emerged with a second group of British women's organisations, which was supportive of the Indian delegation's specific franchise demands and more sympathetic to their wider political claims. Although the BCIWF claimed to represent 'organised British women', as Rathbone admitted 'English women's societies which have interested themselves in India are just as much divided as Indian women themselves.'³¹² The second group was made up of the Women's International League (WIL), the British Commonwealth League (BCL), the Six Point Group (SPG), the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance, and the Women's Freedom League (WFL). Amrit Kaur termed these organisations, the 'five friendly societies.'³¹³

In contrast to the BCIWF, the 'friendly societies' accepted the political legitimacy of 'organised' Indian women and fully supported their demands. When the India Sub-Committee of the WIL met in February 1933 to frame its response to the White Paper, they 'felt that it would be better to wait until the views of the [Indian] Women's Organisations were known . . . before submitting any independent memorandum [to the Parliamentary Committee] from W.I.L. on the subject.'³¹⁴ The motivations of the 'friendly' women's organisations were varied and complex, including genuine support for the Indian nationalist movement and political rivalry with members of the BCIWF dating back to the pre-1918 suffrage movement. What united them was their defence of the right of the Indian delegation to speak for Indian women.

³¹¹ Kaur to Rathbone, 7 December 1933, 7ELR/24, WL.

³¹² *Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform*, 2258; Rathbone to Subbarayan, 8 January 1932, 7ELR/07, WL.

³¹³ This built on the earlier London Committee of the WIA,: Sinha, 'Suffragism and Internationalism,' 478.

³¹⁴ 'Minutes of W.I.L. India Sub-committee', 9 February 1933, WILPF/4/2, LSE.

To begin with, the relationship between the Indian women's delegation and the 'five friendly societies' hinged on the figure of Agatha Harrison. Harrison, a leading figure in the WIL, was Secretary to the Indian Conciliation Group established with Gandhi's blessing after the Second RTC in 1931 to promote understanding of the Indian national cause in Britain. As well as this affinity with Gandhian thought, Harrison was also a Quaker and member of the YWCA, a worldwide Christian network to which Kaur had been connected since childhood. Quaker associates of Harrison had been instrumental in managing publicity for Gandhi during his visit to Britain for the Second Round Table Conference in 1931.³¹⁵ Since 1930, the WIL had supported the nationalist cause in a number of ways, including lobbying the British government, affiliating with the WIA, and, throughout the franchise campaign, listening to and promoting the claims of 'organised women in India'. The visit of the Indian women's delegation in 1933 provided an occasion for building upon these activities. Upon her arrival in London, Kaur was invited to speak before the WIL India Sub-Committee where she gave 'a very clear account of the opinion of organised women in India on Constitutional Reform, especially with regard to the question of the Women's Franchise.'³¹⁶ The response from the WIL was an assurance that the organisation would 'do all in [its] power to make the point of view of the organised women in India known in this country', which included contacting Linlithgow (the Chair of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Reform), liaising with members of the BCIWF, and organising and arranging publicity for a range of public meetings at which members of the Indian delegation spoke.³¹⁷

The WIL's activities were coordinated with those of the four other 'friendly societies'. The BCL issued an 'Urgency Resolution' in support of the demands of the Indian delegation, which Kaur helped draft, and petitioned to be allowed to give evidence before the Joint Parliamentary Committee.³¹⁸ A

³¹⁵ Geoffrey Carnall, *Gandhi's Interpreter: A Life of Horace Alexander* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

³¹⁶ 'Minutes of W.I.L. India Sub-committee', 20 June 1933, WILPF/4/2, LSE.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ Rajkumari Amrit Kaur Papers, Correspondence, Six Point Group, 4, NMML.

letter in support of this request (which was rejected) was sent to the Committee by the SPG, stating:

Miss Rathbone does not represent the opinion of a large section of British women or of Indian women, and we would beg that you give time to the representatives of the British Commonwealth League to put forward the views held by such a large body of women.³¹⁹

The five friendly societies cooperated despite substantial differences of opinion between members of the different organisations. The BCL, for example, was led by Margaret Corbett Ashby, who was sceptical about Indian nationalism in general and Gandhi in particular. Vera Brittain of the SPG, on the other hand, was a much more sympathetic figure who was a member of the India Freedom League and supporter Indian independence.

As well as lobbying Parliament, the friendly women's organisations helped generate publicity for the Indian women's franchise campaign within their extensive civil society networks. Each organisation had its own mouthpiece publication that disseminated information to its members. In September 1933, the WFL used its organisational mouthpiece, *The Vote*, to urge

every woman who reads this to induce not only women's organisations but every organisation 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.³²⁰

More prized, perhaps, was coverage in the mainstream media and this was also arranged. Soon after Amrit Kaur's arrival in June 1933, Harrison secured her an interview with *The Manchester Guardian* in which she outlined the position of the Indian women's organisations.³²¹ The very favourable article went on to give a pen portrait which described Kaur as 'intensely interested in the welfare of women in India' and 'a keen tennis player'.³²² The same publication reported on Kaur's performance before the

³¹⁹ [Draft] Hon. Political Secretary, The Six Point Group to The Secretary, Joint Parliamentary Committee, 17 July 1933, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur Papers, Correspondence, Six Point Group, 5, NMML.

³²⁰ *The Vote*, 16 September 1933, 7ELR/42, WL.

³²¹ 'Indian Women and Franchise: Demand for Equality', *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 June 1933, 12.

³²² *Ibid.*

Franchise Sub-Committee of the JPC in August, describing her statement as 'a masterly summary of the progressive Indian women's point of view' and in September covered the Indian delegation's farewell party hosted by the WIL.³²³

The publicity secured by Harrison was related to a wider propaganda strategy, adopted by the Indian National Congress in partnership with the India Conciliation Group in 1931, to acquaint the British public with the Indian nationalist movement. Like Gandhi's stage-managed tour of Lancashire industrial mill towns, it also had one eye on the world's media. The women themselves could not expect to command the attention Gandhi, a globally-recognised figure, had received. However, the references Kaur frequently made in press interviews to the fact Gandhi was then undertaking linked the Indian women's campaign to the wider nationalist effort.³²⁴ At the same time, Kaur's appearances in the British press specifically promoted the franchise position adopted by the Indian women's organisations. As with before the Parliamentary Committee, stress was laid on the representative and democratic nature of the three women's organisations. This was backed up by the presentation of Indian womanhood as educated and able. Kaur was described by the *Manchester Guardian* in August as 'a member of a noble Sikh family' and 'a Christian'. 'Having spent many years in England,' the article continued,

she is well able to understand the points of view held here with regard to the problem of India. A woman of distinguished appearance and of great intellectual ability, she produced a marked impression on the members of the Joint Select Committee when she pleaded the case for her country women before them early this month.³²⁵

This contrasted with the cursory mention accorded to the Indian women's franchise campaign in the less sympathetic publications. The coverage of the Joint Parliamentary Committee in the *The Yorkshire Post* the same month, for example, paid no attention to the nationalist women's campaign.

³²³ 'Indian women and the vote', *The Manchester Guardian*, 8 August 1933, 11.

³²⁴ 'If Gandhi should Die', *The Manchester Guardian*, 23 August 1933, 9.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

Instead, the newspaper chose to highlight comments made by a loyalist women's organisation on 'untouchability', thereby affirming the less complimentary popular image of India as a caste-ridden backward society.³²⁶

As Kaur prepared to leave London she gave a speech at a farewell party arranged by the WIL in which she celebrated the spirit of transnational cooperation:

Before we left India ... people said what was the use of sending us to England, since English people knew so little about India and did not care. It is a joy to be able to tell our organisations that there are some women here who do care about India and that we have their entire co-operation.³²⁷

Upon her return to India, Kaur set about consolidating links established in London, creating the brand new role of Liaison Officer on the Standing Committee of the AIWC to ensure 'continuous co-operation with women's organisations in England'.³²⁸ In 1934, it was Kaur herself who was elected to this position. In Britain, meanwhile, the five friendly organisations formed the Liaison Group of British Women's Societies with Grace Lankester of the WIL appointed as Liaison Officer and Betty Archdale of the SPG employed to help with publicity.³²⁹ In writing to Amrit Kaur to relay this news, Daisy Solomon of the BCL additionally promised her organisation's ongoing support and the intention to help draw the AIWC into a wider transnational network of women's groups:

We can assure you that we shall do all in our power to make the Indian women's point of view known as widely as possible over here, both by getting in touch with organisations of women interested in India, and also by means of articles in the press. Our League will, I know, establish contact with the overseas societies of women, and send them the information which you give us, so that they too will be linked in a close bond. Miss Todhunter has sent an account of the All Indian Women's

³²⁶ 'Untouchability. Hygienic Principle of Caste System', *The Yorkshire Post*, 1 August 1933, 9. See also, 'Women's Rights Under New Constitution', *The Times* (London), 2 August 1933, 9.

³²⁷ 'Indian Women Delegates: A Farewell Party. Friendships made in England', *The Manchester Guardian*, 6 September 1933, 12.

³²⁸ Margery Corbett Ashby to Amrit Kaur, 23 February 1934, File 59-II (1934), AIWC.

³²⁹ Daisy Solomon, Honorary Secretary, British Commonwealth League to Kaur, 8 March 1934, File 59-II (1934), AIWC.

Conference to the Australian women's paper, Dawn, and I hope they will publish it.³³⁰

Geneva and Global Civil Society

Despite the positive connections established in London, the Indian women's delegation of Indian women left with no real prospect of a satisfactory franchise settlement. Even the compromise position they adopted had little chance of success and the difficulties in coordinating with the BCIWF drew attention to the imperial privilege that seeped into relations even in relatively progressive circles. Under these circumstances, nothing in London would have challenged the assumption held by nationalist women that Indian women would not achieve equal status until India was independent.

In contrast to the disheartening predictability of the imperial sphere, the prospect of engaging with the institutions of global governance in Geneva was uncharted territory. In 1933, Geneva was a vibrant global city. Home to the League of Nations and the International Labour Bureau (ILO), it also served as an international hub for numerous, permanently-based transnational organisations which lobbied, advised and supported the League, creating a semi-official 'League around the League'.³³¹ The famous interwar 'Geneva spirit' endured all year round through the work of the League Secretariat and numerous conferences and committees, but every September activity levels became frenetic as the city laid host to a large congregation of the international community. The influx was drawn by the annual meetings of the League's Council and General Assembly and included, not just delegates and their support staff but also journalists, activists, and other camp followers. As members of this unofficial corps, Shareefah Hamid Ali and Amrit Kaur entered the throng in September 1933 with the aim of achieving representation for Indian women in the institutions of the League.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ For an excellent sketch of Geneva in the interwar years see Pedersen, *The Guardians*. For the 'League around the League' see also Arsan, Lewis, and Richard, 'Editorial - The Roots of Global Civil Society;' Davies, *NGOs*.

Official representation by women of any nationality in the institutions of the League was extremely limited - a situation Kaur was made aware of from a British perspective by Florence Underwood, Secretary of the Women's Freedom League:

What we do here is to press our Government to include women in the British delegations to the Assembly and to the International Labour Conference. As you probably know we do not get a great deal of success. However, we managed to get a woman included as a substitute delegate to the Assembly of the League, and she finds her way on to various committees during the Assembly. We are not so successful in regard to the International Labour Conference, although we generally manage to get one or two women - more often one - included as a technical advisor.³³²

What women's representation that did occur at the League was strictly gendered, being confined to the 'Women's Questions' work of the ILO and the Advisory Commission for the Protection and Welfare of Children at the League, which hosted the Child Welfare and the Traffic of Women and Children Committees.³³³ These League Committees fell under the jurisdiction of the Social Section, whose work also covered issues such as drug trafficking, refugees, health, slavery and intellectual cooperation.³³⁴ Although members of the Committees of the Social Section were state appointed, the work of this section stood apart from the purely diplomatic functions of the League that, in the year both Germany and Japan ominously walked out of the League, were already severely discredited. For 'social workers' like the members of Indian women's organisations, the social work of the League provided an opportunity to address social issues transnationally while at the same time conferring international prestige on the organisations they represented. For nationalist women, therefore, it potentially served a dual professional-political function of extending the work they carried out through the women's organisations in India while at the same

³³² Florence Underwood, Secretary of Women's Freedom League to Amrit Kaur, 19 August 1933, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur Papers, Correspondence, NMML.

³³³ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 215.

³³⁴ See Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 9; Carol Miller, 'The Social Section and Advisory Committee'. For a contemporary overview see Rachel Crowdy, 'The League of Nations: Its Social and Humanitarian Work', *The American Journal of Nursing*, 28, 4 (1928), 350-352. Crowdy was head of the Social Section until 1931.

time raising awareness of Indian society and lending credibility to the nationalist cause.

India held an anomalous position as the only non-self-governing nation with a seat at the League of Nations - an arrangement which was generally understood to serve the interests of Imperial Britain rather than to represent the discreet concerns of India (never mind give voice to any form of nationalist dissent).³³⁵ Correspondence between the League and India went through the Cabinet Office in London and the appointment of delegates was agreed jointly between the Viceroy and the Secretary of State for India. The nationalist voice at the League was, therefore, officially and decisively frozen out. For their part, Indian nationalists were disparaging as to the form of internationalism the League of Nations represented. Nehru, for example, writing from prison in April 1933, described the League as 'a tool in the hands of the great Powers', the purpose of which was 'the maintenance of the [imperialist] *status quo*.'³³⁶

Despite this pessimistic verdict, pragmatists linked to the Indian nationalist movement saw opportunities in the international space created by the League in Geneva. Members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), connected to Indian nationalist figures through Agatha Harrison, arranged for Gandhi to speak at Victoria Hall during a brief visit to Geneva in December 1931. In October 1932 and again in March 1933, two 'international conferences' were held under the auspices of the WILPF to publicise the situation in India.³³⁷ In September 1933, the same organisers convened a larger event, billed as the 'Third International Conference for India.' Among the speakers at this event were Subhas

³³⁵ Stephen Legg 'An international anomaly? Sovereignty, the League of Nations and India's princely geographies,' *Journal of Historical Geography*, 43, 96-110 (January 2014).

³³⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History. Being further letters to his daughter, written in prison, and containing a rambling account of history for young people* (London: Lindsay Drummond Limited, 1949 (1st Pub 1934)), 683.

³³⁷ Margaret Cousins, 'Appeal for an expression of International Opinion', July 1932, 7MCA/C10.

Chandra Bose, Bhulabhai Desai (on this occasion, Gandhi's authorised mouthpiece), and, newly arrived from the franchise campaign in London, Shareefah Hamid Ali.³³⁸ In an assertive propaganda effort which drew international media and League delegates, the conference publicised examples of British repression and passed resolutions in favour of Indian independence. Furthermore, the Third International Conference – although essentially a fringe meeting in relation to the main event of the official League Assembly - had official ambitions. One resolution demanded that Britain should not appoint the Indian delegation to the League, an action perceived as the first step in ensuring that an authentic Indian nationalist voice be heard in Geneva.

Delegates at the 'Third International Conference' sought informal influence in official circles. Bose, for example, was entertained during his stay in Geneva by Eric Einar Ekstrand, the Director of the Opium Traffic and Social Questions Section in the League Secretariat, who reported that '[i]t was most interesting to hear his descriptions and views and to witness the enthusiasm and perseverance with which he is struggling for his cause.'³³⁹ This informal influence was significant in linking India to wider issues then occupying international opinion in Geneva. Gandhi's brief appearance, the three Indian Conferences, and now the Indian women's campaign for representation linked the non-violent Indian nationalist movement to the wider global pacifist movement, which was particularly active during the international Disarmament Conference of 1932 - 1934.³⁴⁰ Among the issues Kaur and Hamid Ali raised with contacts in Geneva, for example, were nationalist grievances relating to the maintenance of an army in India and the British use of force to repress dissent.

³³⁸ Ellen Horup, 'The Third International Conference for India at Geneva', *The Modern Review*, November 1933, 7MCA/C10, WL.

³³⁹ E.E. Ekstrand to Agatha Harrison, 20 November, 1933, 7MCA/C10, WL.

³⁴⁰ Davies, *NGOs*, 19.

Indian women's activities in Geneva took place against the backdrop of a substantial effort within the international women's movement to increase the role of women at the League. Western women's organisations had long identified possibilities in internationalism, organising, for example, the International Women's Congress in The Hague in 1915, which in some respects foreshadowed the principles of Wilson's Fourteen Points.³⁴¹ After the establishment of the League of Nations in 1919, the new international organisation became, for many feminists, 'the key to equality', the hope of peace, and an important site for feminist activism.³⁴² The international arena was also viewed as the logical 'next step' for women after what appeared to be a portfolio of gains in public life. This view was articulated by the veteran suffragist Millicent Fawcett shortly before her death in 1929:

In comparatively recent years, as their education has advanced and their outlook widened, they have more or less forced men to concede to them the right to share in the control and direction of affairs which were previously considered a masculine prerogative. They have taken their place in industry, in art, literature and science, in municipal government, and are now fighting for a firm foothold in national government and, through national government, for a voice in the conduct of international affairs.³⁴³

Furthermore, women had a particular contribution to make in the international arena, possessing, it was posited, a natural propensity for peace. Fawcett continued:

Women's influence in international policy will always be directed towards the furtherance of peace and the establishment of amicable relations between the nations of the world ... Women, probably more so than men, are strong in their determination to prevent the catastrophe of future wars. That is why they have always supported so wholeheartedly the ideals of the League of Nations.

The idea that women had a particular, gendered contribution to make to world peace was a universal discourse of existential importance for all women's organisations in Geneva, despite differences of opinion as to method and ideology. It was also a narrative entirely familiar to Indian

³⁴¹ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 28.

³⁴² Miller, "Geneva – the Key to Equality."

³⁴³ The Late Dame Millicent Fawcett, 'Can Women Influence International Policy,' *The Times of India*, 19 August 1929, 8.

nationalist women, who readily employed such arguments to legitimise the involvement of women in non-violent Gandhian activities.

The London-based Joint Standing Committee of Women's International Organisations, which represented seven major transnational women's societies, existed exclusively for the purpose of securing positions for women on League of Nations Committees.³⁴⁴ Equal Rights International (founded in 1930 by the British organisation the Six Point Group) lobbied the League for an international Equal Rights treaty. Others, including the International Council of Women campaigned for protectionist legislation while an often fractious alliance of pro- and anti-protectionist feminists campaigned for married women's nationality rights.³⁴⁵ The international women's movement was by no means united in terms of ideology and method and, indeed, there was an increasing amount of private scepticism about the League amongst feminist organisations as the post-World War One period continued.³⁴⁶ Nevertheless, in 1931, the Liaison Committee of Women's International Organisations was formed to streamline the work of women's organisations in Geneva, and within the League Secretariat itself, Gabrielle Radziwill was appointed as Liaison Officer between the League and feminist organisations. Prior to visiting Geneva, Indian women had no independent presence within this framework - neither in the 'League around the League', nor in the League itself. Yet the personal and organisational links that had, by 1933, been established with various Geneva-facing civil society organisations facilitated their campaign.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁴ Founded in 1926. The organisations it represented were: The World's Women's Christian Temperance Union, The International Council of Women, The World's Young Women's Christian Association, The International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, The World Union of Women for International Concord, The International Federation of University Women.

³⁴⁵ Miller, "Geneva – the Key to Equality."

³⁴⁶ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 212-213.

³⁴⁷ As we have seen, the NCWI was linked to the ICW but it had no direct, independent link to the League and ILO at this stage.

The Indian Women's Campaign for Representation in Geneva

The issue of Indian women's representation at Geneva was originally raised by Sir J. Coyajee, a former Council of State member who served on the British-appointed Indian delegation to the League General Assembly in 1930 and 1932. Knowing that the make-up of certain League Committees was under review, Coyajee suggested at the League Assembly in 1932 that Indian women should be appointed to the Child Welfare and the Traffic of Women and Children Committees.³⁴⁸ Coyajee's suggestion reflected the widespread sense, and not only in anti-colonial nationalist circles, that India should play a larger role on the world stage. That this role should be fulfilled by women indicates the strength of the women's social reform movement. Even before Amrit Kaur and Shareefah Hamid Ali appeared in Geneva, this had resulted in a sense amongst League officials that India was undergoing an 'evolution ... in regard to social questions (age of marriage, prostitution, child welfare, etc.)' that made it 'very desirable that India should be brought in touch with this aspect of League work.'³⁴⁹ Thus, officials at the India Office in London found themselves being urged by the League Secretariat in Geneva to press for India's representation on the Child Welfare and the Traffic of Women and Children Committees or, at the very least to promote the idea of 'associating Indian women with the Committees'.³⁵⁰

The prospect of India being represented on League Committees raised the politically-loaded question of who should be appointed. Late in 1932, the AIWC had written to the India Office to '[urge] the adequate representation of Indian women in the League.'³⁵¹ However, the India Office clearly had its own views on who might be a suitable candidate. 'There is, as a matter of fact, an Indian woman in London at present who might be well qualified to represent the Indian point of view in these Committees,' wrote a British official to the

³⁴⁸ W. Turner, India Office to Princess Radziwill, Social Questions Section, League of Nations, 5 December 1932, 11B/669/669, LoN.

³⁴⁹ Radziwill to Turner, 8 December 1932, 11B/669/669, LoN.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁵¹ Turner to Radziwill, 5 December 1932, 11B/669/669, LoN.

League Secretariat.³⁵² No name was mentioned and, as was to become clear to the AIWC leadership in the coming months, the imperial machine had no intention of advancing nationalist women to such positions.

While still in London, Kaur had contacted several friendly British women's organisations with experience of working in Geneva and asked for their help. The response was supportive: the SPG said they would do 'everything possible' to help, while the WFL wrote to the Secretary of State for India to urge him to use his influence to include women in the Indian delegation to the Assembly.³⁵³ Margery Corbett Ashby, who as Chair of the Liaison Committee of International Women's Organisations was an experienced operator in Geneva, warned that 'it is not very easy except by direct pressure on your Government' but declared her organisation 'very willing indeed to address a letter to the Indian Government'.³⁵⁴ However, the greatest and most practical support came from Agatha Harrison. As a member of the WILPF and YWCA, both of which had international headquarters in Geneva, she was well-connected and highly respected in League circles. In addition, she was recognised as an expert in industrial and social welfare. In fact, her particular interest in India stemmed from her participation in the Ministry of Labour's Royal Commission on labour conditions in 1929.³⁵⁵ In Geneva, she enjoyed a close relationship with Ekstrand in the League Secretariat, sometimes working as an unofficial advisor to the Social Section. Motivated by a deep sympathy for the Indian nationalist cause, coupled with a welfare reformer's dedication to social 'progress', it was Harrison who acted as chief facilitator for Kaur and Hamid Ali in Geneva, as a report she made to Gandhi indicates:

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ Florence Underwood, Secretary of Women's Freedom League to Amrit Kaur, 19 August 1933; Florence McFarlane, Hon. Secretary, The Six Point Group to Amrit Kaur, 8 September 1933, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur Papers, Correspondence, NMML.

³⁵⁴ Margery Corbett Ashby to Amrit Kaur, 18 September 1933, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur Papers, Correspondence, NMML.

³⁵⁵ Geoffrey Carnall, 'Harrison, Agatha Mary (1885–1954), industrial welfare reformer and unofficial diplomat,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-47749>, accessed 15 January 2016.

Plans are going ahead for [the] Geneva visit which should be productive of good results. Mrs Hamid Ali will speak at the International meeting on the 19th, and arrangements are being made to see that they are incorporated in all that will be going on during the first days of the Assembly. The Rajkumari [Amrit Kaur] comes on the 25th so that one or other of them and perhaps both will be there for two weeks. I get to Geneva before either of them to make plans.³⁵⁶

The arrival of Kaur and Hamid Ali was marked by a reception, held in their honour by the World YWCA and attended by 'a large audience of men and women of all countries' made up of 'international circles' and 'League people'.³⁵⁷ The invitation to this event explained that the two women 'went to England to give evidence before the Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform. ... They are coming to Geneva for a few days for the express purpose of getting into touch with international thought.'³⁵⁸ Addressing this event, Kaur spoke on the issue of women's suffrage and emphasised the importance of Indian independence, invoking not just the idea of self-government but of the cosmopolitan-nationalist ideal:

I gave a brief summary of our demands and wishes as regards Franchise and our position in the New Constitution and I also tried to give the audience some idea of the spirit that was today animating India, in particular her women, how our country was striving to find her true place in the world comity of nations so that she might have room not only for free and full development within her own borders but also the opportunity to make her real contribution to the solution of international problems.³⁵⁹

Further events followed, including 'various luncheons and afternoon and evening parties' where Kaur and her colleagues 'lost no opportunity stressing the importance of Indian women being represented on all Committees.'³⁶⁰

Networking events also enabled Kaur to make more general nationalist propaganda. Her visit coincided with the 1932-1934 Disarmament

³⁵⁶ Agatha Harrison, 'Report of 9th September, 1933', M.K. Gandhi Papers (Pyarelal Papers), Subject File 317, 148, NMML.

³⁵⁷ Una Saunders, Vice President of Worlds' Young Women's Christian Association to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur September 29 1933; Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, 'Report on activities in Geneva', File 27-1 (1933), AIWC.

³⁵⁸ 'Invitation of the resident Committee Members and Staff of the World's YWCA', 7MCA/C10, WL.

³⁵⁹ Kaur, 'Report on activities in Geneva'.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Conference which gave Kaur the opportunity to relate Indian grievances to a matter of global concern and lent the nationalist movement special moral authority. At a lunch meeting of the Disarmament Committee of the Women International Organisations she brought up several issues including the 'importance of relinquishing the throwing of bombs in every part of the world, with particular reference to the N.W. Frontier Province', and raised the question of the British authorities in India using armed force, against non-violent protesters.³⁶¹ Kaur also skilfully deployed the rhetoric of internationalism that sustained the 'Geneva spirit' in order to legitimise the nationalist project:

We ... stressed, whenever possible, that we Indian women wanted to think and act internationally and though we were fully occupied at the moment with national affairs we did not forget the international spirit was necessary in order to make us better nationalists.³⁶²

Notably, she emphasised the notion of interconnectedness, locating Indian freedom in the larger context of global progress and made the claim, which would later become an anti-colonial refrain in the context of the United Nations at the end of the Second World War, that 'there could not be any world peace if the East was excluded from Geneva.'³⁶³

The 'League people' Kaur sought to influence on such occasions fell into two categories. On the one hand were members of international women's organisations who served on the Joint Standing Committee of International Women's Organisations and the Disarmament Committee of the Women International Organisations. These were potential allies in the campaign to gain official representation and, more widely, they were influencers of public opinion in the global public sphere. The second group of people were League and ILO officials, whom, it was hoped, might support the campaign for Indian women's representation from within. This was particularly important because, despite initial expressions of interest, the India Office itself, probably sensing the nationalist challenge to its prestige, had gone cold

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

on the issue and refused to push the case for Indian's representation from London.³⁶⁴ The official Geneva representatives included Eric Einar Ekstrand and Gabrielle Radziwill in the League's Social Section, under whose jurisdiction came the Child Welfare and the Traffic of Women and Children Committees. These were influential figures in Geneva with the power to facilitate access to senior figures at the ILO and the League.³⁶⁵ In addition to this more or less informal lobbying, Kaur and her colleagues made official deputations to League officials to formally press their claim for representation. Harold Butler, Director General of the ILO was particularly receptive, agreeing that Indian women should be represented on ILO committees and urging Kaur and her colleagues to submit suitable names.³⁶⁶

The case for Indian women's representation on the League's Advisory Commission for the Protection and Welfare of Children was formally made on September 27th when Amrit Kaur and Shareefah Hamid Ali were joined by Ammu Swaminathan, an AIWC member, and Keron Bose of the NCWI. The four women made an official submission to the President of the Council of the League of Nations on the joint behalf of the three national women's organisations.³⁶⁷ The submission, which was delivered in person, expressed the desire of Indian women to help the League's work relating to women and children and made two 'suggestions': first, that Indian women be appointed to relevant committees and, second, that the three main Indian women's organisations be consulted on issues covered by these committees. They based their claim on three arguments: first, that they represented one fifth of the world's women; second, that they were qualified by their awareness of international issues relating to women; and third, that their expertise relating to 'the position, rights and duties of women' could be used to global

³⁶⁴ Turner to Radziwill, 9 January 1933, 11B/669/669, LoN.

³⁶⁵ For example, it was Radziwill who arranged a deputation from the International Council of Women to the President of the League Assembly and the Secretary General of the League in which Kaur was included. See L.C.A. van Eeghen to Princess Radziwill, 27 September 1933, 5A/3614/394, LoN.

³⁶⁶ Kaur, 'Report on activities in Geneva'.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

advantage.³⁶⁸ Underpinning these arguments was their self-representation as progressive, modern citizens – a point Kaur later underlined in a report of her activities in Geneva when she specifically noted that the President of the Council ‘was particularly interested to hear that we were *elected*’.³⁶⁹ With the question of who legitimately spoke for Indian women at issue, the submission succeeded in bypassing the imperial machine and instead emphasised the right of the Indian women’s organisations to speak for India. It was thus a bold attempt to undermine imperial legitimacy in the global public sphere.

Two days after the Indian women’s submission to the President of the Council, Charles Te Water, the President of the Assembly and Joseph Avenol, the Secretary General of the League, received members of the ICW. The women’s delegation was intended to draw attention to the contribution made by women to international issues such as the prevention of human and narcotic trafficking, women’s rights, and world peace.³⁷⁰ At the last minute, Kaur’s name was added to the delegation - her networking in Geneva, it seems, having paid dividends. At the meeting she pointed out ‘how keen [Indian women] were to contribute [their] mite towards the solution of world problems affecting the welfare of women and children in particular.’³⁷¹ From the point of view of the ICW the inclusion of an Indian woman in the delegation lent considerable weight to its claim to represent the world’s women. For Kaur, it was not just an opportunity to make the case for Indian women’s representation before influential League officials, but a chance to chip away at assumptions relating to Indian women at a high level.

With the aggression of Germany, Italy and Japan, America’s continued isolationism, and the imperialist aloofness of Britain and France, the internationalism embodied by the League of Nations was rather embattled in 1933. However, the reception of Indian women indicates that the ‘Geneva

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, [emphasis original].

³⁷⁰ E.A. van Veen, Executive Secretary, I.C.W. to Princess Radziwill, 27 September 1933, 5A/3614/394, LoN.

³⁷¹ Kaur, ‘Report on activities in Geneva’.

spirit' was still very much in evidence. Una Saunders of the World's YWCA flushed with the 'joy and enlightenment which the visit of these last few days has brought to many of us here in Geneva' and described Kaur's work there as 'epoch-making'.³⁷² In London, the WIL Executive noted 'the very warm welcome which had been extended to [Kaur and her colleagues] from all quarters, including the L.N. Secretariat and the I.L.O.' and considered the visit a 'very successful and useful piece of work.'³⁷³ Agatha Harrison, who had done so much to facilitate Kaur's activities, was deeply satisfied, writing to Gandhi of the 'wonder of [the] visit and what it has achieved.'³⁷⁴ Harrison's enthusiasm was, perhaps, buoyed up by the personal attachment that had developed between her and Kaur. Shortly after leaving Geneva, Kaur wrote warmly: 'It has been such a joy to know you and to feel I have in you – and India has in you – a true friend for all time.'³⁷⁵ Harrison, was even more enthusiastic:

Every now and then in life one meets a friend whose presence in a tangled world seems to bring new life and hope. This is what I feel about you Amrit and I am deeply thankful that we have met.³⁷⁶

Shortly after Kaur left Geneva came confirmation that the Council of the League of Nations had invited India to serve on the Advisory Commission for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People, bringing the question of who should represent India on the Commission to a point.³⁷⁷ The importance of Kaur's networking in Europe immediately became apparent. Emilie Gourde, who represented the international women's organisations as an assessor on the Child Welfare Committee, asked the Joint Standing Committee of Women's International Organisations to throw its weight behind the campaign to secure the appointment of an Indian woman. This it duly

³⁷² Una Saunders to Kaur, 29 September 1933, File 27-1 (1933), AIWC.

³⁷³ 'Extract from Minutes of WIL Executive,' 10 October 1933, 7MCA/C10, WL.

³⁷⁴ Harrison to Kaur, 6 October 1933, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur Papers, Correspondence, NMML.

³⁷⁵ Kaur to Harrison, 4 October 1933, 7MCA/C10, WL.

³⁷⁶ Harrison to Kaur, 6 October 1933, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur Papers, Correspondence, NMML.

³⁷⁷ Joseph Avenol, Secretary-General, League of Nations to Secretary of State for India, 19 October 1933 and 3 February 1934, 11B/9040/729, LoN.

did, with Edith Bigland writing to the President of the League of Nations Council in October to press the case and, in December, writing to Kaur to ask for information about possible candidates. 'If we can know their names quickly,' she urged, 'we will do our best to support them.'³⁷⁸ Amongst the League Secretariat, Radziwill 'rejoice[d]' at the appointment of India to the Advisory Commission and expressed the hope that an Indian women 'of the right type and right vision would be extremely valuable for the work of the Commission.'³⁷⁹ Ekstrand also celebrated India's appointment and expressed the hope that

the representative chosen will be a person of high standing and representing the spirit of modern development which characterises the work of so many prominent Indian men and women whom I have had the privilege of meeting.³⁸⁰

Indian women, it appeared, had made an important step towards gaining international recognition.

Conclusion

At a fundamental level, the two campaigns in London and Geneva were contradictory. One pursued the rights of citizenship within the British Empire while the other sought representation within a framework that circumvented the Empire. This reflects a wider contradiction within the Congress-led nationalist movement, which vacillated between cooperation and non-cooperation with the imperial authorities, and indicates the incremental nature of Indian national struggle, the terms of which evolved over time. Taken together, however, the two campaigns illustrate the multiple meanings of citizenship in the careers of nationalist women and the overlapping spheres in which they were mobilised. During the franchise campaign, citizenship was imagined in terms of individual rights. But citizenship also meant active participation in the public sphere and it was the framework of organised civil society that focussed and enabled these efforts.

³⁷⁸ Edith Bigland, Honorary Secretary, J.S.C.W.I.O. to Kaur, 7 December, 1933, File 27-I, AIWC.

³⁷⁹ Radziwill to Kaur, 21 December 1933, 11B/9040/729, Box 4667, LoN.

³⁸⁰ E.E. Ekstrand, Director of the Opium Traffic and Social Questions Sections to Kaur, 11 November 1933, File 27-I, AIWC.

The significance of the franchise campaign in the imperial metropole relates to two separate factors. The first was the way nationalist women mobilised liberal ideology in order to bring new meanings to the concept of individual rights. That their claim that rights resided in the individual regardless of sex, race, religion or nationality was beyond what the British Imperial state was prepared to offer is not, perhaps, surprising. However, it is noteworthy that the position of full adult suffrage adopted by Indian women's organisations put them in advance of many British feminists, who urged compromise, and Indian nationalist men, who capitulated on the principle of communal representation. This locates Indian women as significant actors in the global history of individual rights and foreshadows the roles they played in the evolution of human rights discourses at the United Nations after 1945, which we shall examine in Chapters 6 and 7.

The second significance of the franchise campaign is the opportunity it presented for Indian women's organisations to consolidate and expand transnational relations with British feminist civil society. These connections took on different forms and served various purposes including support of Indian women's franchise demands, the more general promotion of women's rights in India, and the raising of the profile of Indian nationalism. Most novel in these relationships were the possibilities they offered for launching Indian women on the world stage and contacts with British women facilitated the subsequent campaign, led by Amrit Kaur, for Indian women's representation in Geneva. This was the first time Indian women had addressed their claims directly to the institutions of global governance and it marks the beginning of a new engagement with the global public sphere. This engagement carried implicit political significance and seemed to offer an opportunity for circumventing imperial power structures. At the same time, as an example of active participation at a global level, it bolstered the cause of public participation, knowledge exchange and solidarity across borders. Indian women's transnational interactions in Europe, therefore, contributed to

activities that were both nationally and globally focussed. How relationships with transnational civil society organisations and global institutions developed over the subsequent decade is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Consolidation. The All India Women's Conference, 1933-1945

My first and pleasant duty is to extend a most hearty welcome to all our visitors whether from abroad or other parts of India. It is indeed a great personal joy to me to have in our midst Mrs Lankester so well known to all of us as our liaison officer in England with British Women's Organisations. I know with what single-eyed devotion she has served the best interests of our Conference... the News Bulletin which she has published in England every month has always placed the Indian point of view with clarity and strength before the English public.³⁸¹

In many ways, the 'Presidential Address' delivered by Amrit Kaur at the annual meeting of the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) in December 1937 can be read as a classic, late 1930s Gandhian text. In outlining a commitment to *swadeshi*, reform in India's villages, communal unity, the removal of untouchability, and, above all, in arguing for the special suitability of women to the politics of *ahimsa*, Amrit Kaur's speech bears all the hallmarks of the Mahatma's constructive programme, as well as his much-critiqued gender ideology. However, Kaur's 'Presidential Address' is also an exposition of the outward-looking, globally-networked position that Kaur did so much to encourage in the AIWC after her return from Europe in 1933. It is notable, for example, that Kaur casually assumes Indian women to be world citizens who were not only informed about international events, but vocal critics of international injustices. 'With what voice,' she asks,

can we raise a protest against the Italian conquest of Abyssinia or Japanese ruthless aggression in China if we cannot condemn the bombing of villages on the North West Frontier or speak out against imperialistic designs wheresoever they be? How can we deplore the civil war in Spain if we may not condemn those who stir up communal strife in our own country?³⁸²

Furthermore, Kaur's 'Address' rests on the cosmopolitan-nationalist conviction that India had a universally-relevant contribution to make to the world. The Gandhian concept of non-violence, she argued, could be

³⁸¹ Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, 'Presidential Address', *Twelfth Session of the All India Women's Conference, Nagpur, 1937*, 1-2, Countries Collection, 21, 2, Sophia Smith Archives (SS).

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 15.

universally applied to counter what she termed the 'Might is Right' tradition. According to Kaur, Indian women had a special role to play in this process. Violence, she contended, 'has brought mankind to the terrible state in which we see it today' through 'selfishness, exploitation, oppression, imperialism and cruelty'.³⁸³ The message the speech conveys is that by improving their own status, Indian women could actively challenge the 'Might is Right' doctrine and, ultimately, 'raise humanity'.³⁸⁴ Furthermore, in her speech, Kaur explicitly laid tribute to the importance of international cooperation in achieving such an end, specifically welcoming the British feminist Grace Lankester who had served as Liaison Officer between the 'five friendly societies' and the AIWC since 1934.

This chapter examines the attempts within the AIWC to strengthen and consolidate its transnational and global connections in the decade after Amrit Kaur and her colleagues returned from Europe in 1933. The AIWC used contacts in London to continue the franchise campaign by proxy, and to initiate a renewed assault on the issue of child marriage. However, it also moved, chiefly upon the instigation of Kaur, both to internationalise its outlook and to establish more permanent international relations. A new AIWC role of Liaison Officer was created to this end and, from 1934, the practice of inviting influential international figures to the AIWC annual meeting was instituted. Although there were tensions, these networks were of practical importance in raising the profile of Indian women in the global public sphere, providing a platform for advertising Indian women's achievements and publicising their grievances, even under the constrained circumstances of the Second World War. Kaur also continued to lead the campaign for Indian women's representation on the committees of the League of Nations. Despite an early setback, her persistence ensured that, in the interwar years, the AIWC gained a foothold in Geneva.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

These developments took place during a lull in Congress agitations after the end of the 1930-32 Civil Disobedience campaign marked, initially, by an atmosphere of disillusionment brought about by the Government of India Act (1935). Subsequently, the announcement of provincial elections in 1937, in which the Congress cooperated and made a great success of, to some extent altered the character of the nationalist movement making the Congress an agent of governance rather than of civil disobedience.³⁸⁵ Meanwhile, in the international arena, the spirit of internationalism symbolised by the League of Nations was severely embattled as the world descended into a progressively more global conflict and, by 1941, the League itself had ceased to function. At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the mainstream nationalist position changed again with Congress politicians resigning from public office and the organisation withholding support from the Allied war effort in protest at the Government of India's decision to declare war without consultation. This war, therefore, brought renewed civil disobedience and, after the Congress's 1942 'Quit India' resolution, the imprisonment of thousands of Congress activists including the entire leadership. Throughout this period, the AIWC continued to interact with the global public sphere, although the circumstances put pressure on its ability to operate and undermined transnational solidarity.

The AIWC and the Liaison Group of British Women's Societies

Although Amrit Kaur was no longer in London, she continued to intervene in the franchise question by proxy. Early in 1934, the newly formed Liaison Group of British Women's Societies (comprised of the 'five friendly societies') sent a memorandum to the Joint Parliamentary Committee giving unqualified support to claims made by Kaur and her colleagues the previous Summer.³⁸⁶ The memorandum informed the Committee that 'the Women's Movement in India is rapidly gaining in strength and influence,' adding that 'the united opinion of the three leading Women's Organisations should not be lightly

³⁸⁵ Bates, *Subalterns and Raj*, 152-154.

³⁸⁶ Copy of Memorandum sent to Joint Parliamentary Committee, File 59-I (1934), AIWC.

disregarded.’ ‘It would surely be a disaster’, the memorandum added, ‘if the large body of progressively minded women ...was alienated by the Government proposals and their co-operation lost for the successful working of the new Constitution.’ Emphasising the role of women’s organisations in social reform, the memorandum went on to defend the enfranchisement of women as a means of reforming Indian society. Finally, it lent the support of the Liaison Group to the specific demands of the Indian women’s organisations, drawing the Committee’s attention to the ‘determination of these women to avoid the Communal issue, and ... their stand for equal rights of citizenship.’³⁸⁷ This absolute support of the citizenship claims of Indian women’s organisations drew on information shared with the Liaison Group by Kaur and detracted from the alternative stance adopted by Rathbone and the British Committee on the Indian Women’s Franchise (BCIWF). This restatement of the Indian women’s case, Kaur informed her AISC colleagues, would ‘do a great deal of good to our cause especially as the section in England of those in favour of our accepting the wives and widows vote [Rathbone’s BCIWF] is being active.’³⁸⁸

As well as making representations to the Joint Parliamentary Committee, the Liaison Group aimed to give ‘as much publicity as possible ... to the question of Women’s Franchise in India in the new Constitution’ and to acquaint women’s groups and the British public with ‘the remarkable work for social reform that is being carried out by the women’s movement and which is so little realised in this country.’³⁸⁹ To this end, *The Catholic Citizen*, mouthpiece of the St Joan’s Social and Political Alliance, reprinted the AISC resolutions which voiced ‘strong disapproval’ of the proposed constitutional reforms and restated its demands.³⁹⁰ In March 1934, (with deliberate reference to Katherine Mayo’s book) the Women’s International League (WIL) published a pamphlet entitled *Mother India’s Daughters* to promote the

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁸ Kaur to Mrs Mukerjee, 20 February 1934, File 59-II (1934), AISC

³⁸⁹ Grace Lankester to Dear Madam [circular letter], March 1934, File 59-II (1934), AISC.

³⁹⁰ ‘Extract from “Indian Women’s Franchise”, *The Catholic Citizen*, February 1935’, 7AMR/1/9, WL.

franchise demands of the Indian women's organisations. In reviewing the pamphlet, *The Manchester Guardian* noted that it

describes the recent rapid growth of the women's main organisations, summarises the work done at the All-India Women's Conference in January, refers to some of the outstanding personalities among the Indian women leaders, and touches on the great social work many women are doing today.³⁹¹

With a swipe at the approach of the BCIWF, and as a well-aimed counter blow to Mayo's allegations, *Mother India's Daughters* also emphasised to the existence of a progressive indigenous women's movement in India and urged British women to get behind its demands:

Is it too much to ask that British women should do all in their power to support and make known the attitude of those women of India who are working for all that stands for progress in their country, and see to it that the six million women they want enfranchised may be placed on the electoral role in the new Constitution?³⁹²

In May 1934, the Liaison Group began publishing the 'Bulletin of the Indian Women's Movement' to disseminate information about the Indian women's movement to interested parties, including other women's organisations. Information for the 'Bulletin' was supplied by Kaur and included a range of documents including AISC resolutions, reports of the AISC Standing Committee, and accounts of campaigns being carried out by the women's movement in India. In providing detailed descriptions of the work of Indian feminists, the 'Bulletin' promoted the image of Indian women's organisations as dynamic, progressive and widespread, lending weight to the representative claims made by Kaur and her colleagues in London and defending their demands. This ensured that the AISC's case on the franchise issue was heard in and out of Parliament as the reform process rumbled on.

³⁹¹ 'Mother India's Daughters: A New Pamphlet', *The Manchester Guardian*, 26 March 1934.

³⁹² Quoted in *ibid.*

Eleanor Rathbone, MP

The AIWC strategy of continuing the franchise campaign by proxy meant keeping in touch with less sympathetic feminists. The Women's Indian Advisory Council in Britain, chaired by Dorothea Layton had, in conjunction with Eleanor Rathbone and the BCIWF, previously supported the controversial 'wife and widow vote' in 1933 but now appeared to be 'rather hurt' by the close ties between the AIWC and the organisations of the Liaison Group.³⁹³ Kaur was unrepentant, justifying her strategy of favouring 'those associations who are one with us' by noting that the Women's Advisory Council had recently passed sympathetic resolutions, which she claimed as evidence that British women's organisations who had previously ignored Indian women's demands were becoming more supportive.³⁹⁴

In the case of Eleanor Rathbone, Kaur surely held out little hope that the MP would be swayed to abandon the 'wife vote,' an issue on which the two women openly acknowledged they would never agree.³⁹⁵ But she evidently thought that Rathbone, however disagreeable on certain points, might still be of some practical use as the legislation made its way through Parliament. Urging Rathbone to push for joint electorates for women (as opposed to the proposed separate communal electorates agreed to by male nationalists), she wrote in July 1934, 'Do please do your level best to see that we do not come into the communal tangle which is destroying our national life.'³⁹⁶ As she advised her AIWC colleagues: 'Miss Rathbone ... is a woman of ability and power and it will be useful for us to keep in touch with her.'³⁹⁷ This indicates that women's transnational connections could be based on strategic considerations rather than simply on shared political principles, and that the goal of 'progress' produced alliances that cut across the political divide.

³⁹³ Kaur to 'The Members of the A.I.W.C. Standing Committee,' undated [April 1934], File 59-II, AIWC.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁵ Rathbone to Kaur and Hamid Ali, 14 October 1933. See also Kaur to Rathbone, 7 December 1933, 7ELR/24, WL.

³⁹⁶ Kaur to Rathbone, 15 June 1934, 7ELR/24, WL.

³⁹⁷ Kaur to 'The Members of the A.I.W.C. Standing Committee.'

Furthermore, it illustrates that Indian women were not simply passive objects of British feminist attention, but themselves manipulated this interest for their own ends.

Although there was a wealth of pragmatism on both sides, the tentative alliance of Kaur and Rathbone was always fragile and contingent and, after the *Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee* was published in November 1934, divisions came to a head. The *Report*, the official document that framed the Government of India legislation, rejected the compromise demands made by Kaur and her colleagues in July-August 1933. In a letter to Kaur, Rathbone, ever sensitive to (if not accepting of) Indian women's opinions was defensive: 'I hope you don't think ...that more might have been secured if we had backed you up throughout.'³⁹⁸ She admitted that '[t]here are many features in [the Report] which I profoundly dislike' but she maintained her faith in the 'get what we can as we can and [make] it a basis for more' – a gradualist method she had previously applied as a British suffragist. More aggressively, she cast doubt on the faith placed by nationalist women in their male colleagues:

Congress has not troubled (if I am rightly informed) to put up any women candidates in the Assembly elections [so it] does not look as though they were very sound on the woman question.

Kaur, who was sorely disappointed by the *Report* and steadfast in her allegiance to Congress, was predictably riled by Rathbone's letter:

I am *quite* convinced that the British Government listened to British women who stood up for what they thought were our just demands than to us whose cry ... is always a cry in the wilderness.³⁹⁹

Challenging Rathbone's resort to incremental methods and explicitly contradicting her claim to know best, Kaur added:

I am sorry I do not *quite* agree with your theory of "get what you can and make it a basis for getting more." In a free country like yours – yes – but in a subject country – no – because a start on the wrong basis means disaster *ab initio* and can never lead to the ultimate true goal.

³⁹⁸ Rathbone to Kaur, 9 January 1935, 7ELR/24, WL.

³⁹⁹ Kaur to Rathbone, 11 February, 1935, 7ELR/24, WL (emphasis original).

Furthermore, she claimed, 'Congress and all progressive men and organisations are with us' and Congress was 'quite willing to offer seats to women,' although she must have known that not all her AIWC colleagues were similarly convinced.⁴⁰⁰

Meanwhile, members of the more supportive Liaison Committee expressed dissatisfaction that *The Report* 'should go against the expressed wishes of organised women in India.'⁴⁰¹ Despite her comments to Kaur, Rathbone herself continued to chip away in the House of Commons to maximise (as she saw it) the women's franchise as the Government of India Bill passed through Parliament. She also occasionally asked for Kaur's opinion on matters of detail but from Kaur's point of view the franchise campaign was over. 'I suppose we must be thankful for small mercies,' she admitted, but 'the general dislike of the Bill felt by most of us makes us feel wholly indifferent to what we call "minor details".'⁴⁰² Like Gandhi at this point, Kaur retreated from association with imperial politics, a retreat she pointedly underlined to Rathbone: 'I am wholly absorbed in village work. It is fascinating, but so immense that it staggers me!' ⁴⁰³

When it finally passed into legislation, the Government of India Act (1935) set women's franchise at a female to male voting strength ratio of 1:5. This was an increase on the previous provision but there was nothing like the gain sought by the Indian women's organisations.⁴⁰⁴ Moreover, the details of the franchise, which favoured propertied women and introduced communal electorates, represented precisely the type of enfranchisement the women's movement had tried to avoid during the campaign. Most significantly, the process of Parliamentary reform, in which both the opinions of Indian

⁴⁰⁰ For differences between Congress and members of the AIWC at this point see Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 192-194.

⁴⁰¹ Statement of the British Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 7AMR/1/9, WL.

⁴⁰² Kaur to Rathbone, 23 May, 1935, 7ELR/24, WL

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, emphasis original.

⁴⁰⁴ Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 112.

women's organisations and the nationalist voice had been marginalised, had underscored the importance of *swaraj* which, after the Karachi Fundamental Rights resolution, promised women full constitutional equality.

Although interactions with Eleanor Rathbone in relation to the franchise question were strained, more promising terrain for joint action was offered by the issue of child marriage, a societal issue that seemingly somewhat negated political differences of opinion. The Katherine Mayo *Mother India* controversy of 1928-1929 had heightened the tensions around the debate of such issues and had been a major catalyst in encouraging Indian organisations to assertively claim the right to speak for Indian women.⁴⁰⁵ Nevertheless, in 1934, Rathbone made a unilateral intervention with the publication of a book on the subject, *Child Marriage. The Indian Minotaur*, which laid out a number of proposals for making the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) more effective. Aware of the reception of Mayo's *Mother India*, in presenting her own book to Indian women, Rathbone acknowledged that Indian women 'may think it is not for an Englishwoman to make these suggestions', although she remained unapologetic:

I am so old a campaigner in the women's movement that where the sufferings and injustices inflicted on women are concerned, I really cannot remember or bother about national distinctions⁴⁰⁶

For their part, members of the AIWC were fairly receptive to Rathbone's proposals on child marriage sensing that, as an MP, she might be a well-situated ally in a new campaign on the issue. There was general acceptance that the Child Marriage Restraint Act had been ineffective and it was judged that *Child Marriage* contained useful practical ideas. Responding to Rathbone, Kaur politely acknowledged the book's value: 'I personally do not see anything in it that should hurt the feelings of any Indian women'.⁴⁰⁷ At the same time, she was clear in defining the terms of their alliance: 'I know ...

⁴⁰⁵ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*.

⁴⁰⁶ Rathbone to Kaur, 29 February 1934, 7ELR/24; Rathbone to Lakshmi Menon 29 February 1934, 7ELR/30, WL.

⁴⁰⁷ Kaur to Rathbone, 2 April 1934, 7ELR/24, WL.

that it has been inspired by one motive and one motive only – an honest desire to help us both out here and in England primarily.⁴⁰⁸ As long as Rathbone's role could be contained to that of a helper, Kaur was quite accepting of her suggestions. To her colleagues on the Standing Committee of the AIWC, she recommended Rathbone's suggestions with the endorsement 'I have not seen anything that ought to give offence to us and I think we must, in all fairness, concede to the writer's purity of motive.'⁴⁰⁹ Her colleagues were largely in agreement. According to Hamid Ali, 'every single member of the Standing Committee spoke with great admiration and appreciation of [the] book' and the AIWC later included it in its 'Suggestions for forming a Reference Library for Women's Institutions.'⁴¹⁰ However, while it was willing to accept Rathbone's proposals, the AIWC Standing Committee maintained that control over the campaign against child marriage must remain with Indian women. Rathbone's suggestion that an independent anti-child marriage organisation should be set up was ignored with the AIWC instead forming a dedicated Sub-Committee under the leadership of Hamid Ali. Furthermore, Rathbone's offer of funds to set up such an organisation was rejected. 'We feel', Kaur wrote to, 'that we should and must do this work *ourselves*.'⁴¹¹

Visitors 'of influence'

As far as Amrit Kaur was concerned, Eleanor Rathbone might lend both practical assistance and credibility to the Indian women's movement in Britain but she was never more than a strategic partner on specific issues. Longer-term alliances, however, were maintained with members of the Liaison

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ Kaur to 'Members of the A.I.W.C. Standing Committee.'

⁴¹⁰ Shareefah Hamid Ali to Eleanor Rathbone, 18 August 1934, 7ELR/18, WL; 'Suggestions for forming a Reference Library for Women's Institutions', 11A/11646/320, LoN.

⁴¹¹ Kaur to Rathbone, 3 September 1934, 7ELR/24, WL, (emphasis original). However, as Rathbone was made aware, there was internal dissent on this position. Fellow Standing Committee member Lakshmi Menon, for example, complained about members 'who are way on the other side of forty and treat us worse than school children and to this day I do not understand why we should not be ashamed of going to schools run by American & European and English missions and yet feel it below our dignity to accept your kind help.' See Lakshmi Menon to Eleanor Rathbone, 13 September 1934, 7ELR/30, WL.

Committee of British Women's Organisations who, in any case, were more internationally connected. Kaur set about further consolidating these relationships by instituting the practice of inviting international delegates to attend the AIWC annual meeting. Her original vision for the December 1934 Congress in Karachi was to ask the British Liaison Committee to send an elected representative, to invite Eric Einar Ekstrand, the Director of the Social Section of the League of Nations, and to elect a foreign woman as AIWC President for that year. However, after the AIWC Standing Committee's half-yearly meeting this was plan was scaled down to inviting two foreign women as delegates.⁴¹² The women in question were Maude Royden and Margery Corbett Ashby, both women of influence whom Kaur had met in Europe the previous Autumn. Royden, a preacher at the City Temple in London was a Gandhian sympathiser, pacifist, and suffragist who, according to Kaur had 'immense power and no mean following.'⁴¹³ Corbett Ashby was President of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAWSEC), with whom the AIWC would soon be affiliated, and, as a member of the Joint Standing Committee of Women's International Organisations and a delegate on the League of Nations Disarmament Committee, she was a well-known figure in Geneva.

In its future dealings with the League, the AIWC would explicitly draw on their connections with Corbett Ashby to bolster its credibility, indicating that Indian women viewed their relationships with British women strategically.⁴¹⁴ Both Corbett Ashby and Royden had links to Agatha Harrison who helped organise the visit. To her colleagues in the AIWC, Kaur emphasised their qualities as speakers but mainly promoted their presence as a way of enhancing the AIWC's prestige with the British Government, the Government of India and in international circles. 'I cannot tell you how delighted I am that both these ladies are coming,' she wrote to an AIWC colleague on hearing

⁴¹² Kaur to Mukerjee, 26 April 1934, File 59-II, AIWC.

⁴¹³ Kaur to 'Members of the A.I.W.C. Standing Committee.'

⁴¹⁴ Ammu Swaminadhan, Hon Organising Secretary, AIWC to The Secretary General, League of Nations, 24 September 1936, 3A/25995/13900, LoN; Kaur to Harold Butler, Director, I.L.O., 15 February 1935, WN 1000/29/1, ILO.

that the two women had accepted the AIWC's invitation. 'It gives our Conference international status and will have excellent repercussions on Govt's attitude towards us in future.'⁴¹⁵ Remotely from her home in the Punjab, Kaur managed AIWC preparations for the visit and urged 'the necessity of as many delegates as possible coming to Karachi in order to give these ladies a real idea of the strength of the woman's movement here.'⁴¹⁶

Without a doubt, the visit of Royden and Corbett Ashby generated international publicity; some twenty-six British women's organisations sent messages of support via the two British delegates. The reality of the relationship with British organisations was less straightforward. The timing of the AIWC annual meeting meant that it took place just as disillusionment following the publication of the *Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee* on Constitutional Reform was setting in. Kaur had already announced to Agatha Harrison her intention

to appeal to the women not to worry any more about Franchise or anything in connection with our political rights or status, but to concentrate their entire energy towards social reform *and* village uplift, by joining hands with Gandhiji whose work not is of purely non-political nature and will be of permanent value to the country.⁴¹⁷

With the issue of the franchise no longer providing a rallying point, nationalist women were explicitly looking to British feminists 'to mould British public opinion to regard the problem of India as something far bigger and deeper than mere constitution building.'⁴¹⁸ While Royden was supportive and 'in entire sympathy with Indian national aspirations,' Corbett Ashby was less so.⁴¹⁹ 'This meeting has as leaders the extremists,' she wrote to her husband, 'and they are of such strong personality that the other people are

⁴¹⁵ Kaur to Mukerjee, 22 Oct 1934. See also Kaur to Mukerjee, 26 April 1934, File 59-II, AIWC.

⁴¹⁶ Kaur to Mukerjee, 22 Oct 1934.

⁴¹⁷ Agatha Harrison to Maude Royden, undated [December 1934], 7AMR/1/9, WL.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁹ 'Copy of Statement received by Mrs. Lankester, which the signatories wished read at the meeting at Friends House on Feb. 28', 7AMR/1/9, WL.

silent except privately.⁴²⁰ Corbett Ashby disapproved of the nationalist opposition to the Government of India Bill and was scathing about what she saw as the lack of democracy within the Indian women's movement. This did not prevent her from inviting Indian delegates to future IAWSEC congresses - an organisation the AIWC now became officially affiliated too - and for the remainder of the colonial period Indian women attended these meetings. This relationship would always be complex, with shared aims regarding women's rights being set against disagreements about imperial rule. Yet for publicity and networking purposes they served an important function. Furthermore, it gave access to an international forum in which nationalist women could make the anti-colonial case and, importantly, provided nationalist women with international experience that would be utilised after independence.

The AIWC and Geneva, 1933-1939

Having campaigned for Indian women's representation on the Committees of the League of Nations, Amrit Kaur was naturally keen to capitalise on the decision by the Council in October 1933 to appoint India to the Advisory Commission for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People.⁴²¹ Back in India, she pressed members of the WIA, the NCWI and the AIWC to 'jointly demand an Indian woman of our choice be appointed to this Commission.'⁴²² She also encouraged the three main Indian women's organisations to agree on the name of a suitable woman delegate for the ILO conference on labour conditions in mines scheduled for the following June.⁴²³ Over the next few weeks the three organisations agreed six names, including Kaur's, which were duly submitted to the Government of India. Based on correspondence she had previously had with contacts in Geneva, Kaur already knew she could rely on the support of the Joint Standing Committee

⁴²⁰ Margery Corbett Ashby to 'Dearest Love', 1 January 1935, 7MCA/C16, WL.

⁴²¹ Joseph Avenol, Secretary-General, League of Nations to Secretary of State for India, 19 October 1933 and 3 February 1934, 11B/9040/729, Box 4667, LoN

⁴²² Kaur to Rani Lakshimibai Rajwade., 5 December 1933, File 27-I, AIWC. See also Kaur to Ekstrand, 24 January 1934, 11B/9040/729, Box 4667, LoN. The six names were: Rani Lakshimibai Rajwade, Muthulakshmi Reddi, M. Sukjtankar, Shareefah Hamil Ali, Rameshwari Nehru and Amrit Kaur.

⁴²³ Kaur to Rani Lakshimibai Rajwade, 13 November 1933, File 27-I, AIWC.

of Women's International Organisations and of members of the League of Nations Secretariat. In confirmation, Margery Corbett Ashby, an influential figure in on the Joint Standing Committee, wrote approvingly, 'I am sure that [the Government of India] could not make a better choice than you have suggested to it. Naturally,' she added, 'it would be a special pleasure to us here if you yourself were to be appointed.'⁴²⁴

Kaur was extremely encouraged by the support the AIWC received from Geneva. Eric Einar Ekstrand, the Director of the Social Section, took a special interest in the Indian women's case and Kaur addressed him as a mentor who might help ease Indian women's entry onto the world stage. 'Please remember we are inexperienced and have many shortcomings,' she urged, 'but we do want to contribute our mite to the ideals for which the League stands.'⁴²⁵ She was even bold enough to request that Ekstrand delay the meeting of the Advisory Commission in April by several weeks because 'most of our women find it very difficult to leave India in March.'⁴²⁶ Ekstrand replied that it was impossible to change the dates of the Commission, which had been the same since 1926 and had been arrived at only after lengthy discussion.⁴²⁷ But if Kaur's request revealed a lack of understanding of the workings of the League, she was rapidly learning the ropes. The international women's organisations and members of the League Secretariat were quick to offer her information on the workings of League and its committees. Bypassing the India Office and the Government of India, Gabrielle Radziwill, the Secretary of the Social Section of the League, even sent Kaur a collection of League documents on the work of the Advisory Commission directly and asked for information from Kaur on the subject of women and children in India.⁴²⁸ This sort of action indicates the emergence of a global public sphere that, in aspiration at least, operated somewhat

⁴²⁴ Margery Corbett Ashby, President, IAWSEC to Kaur, 23 February 1934, File 59-II, AIWC.

⁴²⁵ Kaur to E.E. Ekstrand, undated [received 20 January 1934], 11B/9040/729, Box 4667, LoN.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*; Ekstrand to Kaur, 23 January 1934, 11B/9040/729, Box 4667, LoN.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁸ Radziwill to Kaur, 21 December 1933, 11B/9040/729, Box 4667, LoN.

independently of state-level politics. Under these circumstances, it seemed to Kaur only a matter of time before one of the Indian women's suggestions was appointed.

The limits to the levels of influence Geneva-based figures could wield were soon evident. Time was not on Kaur's side and neither were the British authorities who were, by now, well-aware of the nationalist leanings of the AIWC. Having been officially informed the previous October of the League's decision to appoint India to the Advisory Commission, the authorities in London stalled and, by 3rd February 1934, had still not accepted the invitation to send an Indian delegate, never mind named a representative.⁴²⁹ From Kaur's point of view, this was not encouraging. As early as the previous December, Radziwill had made the point that the appointment ought already to have been confirmed due to the 'voluminous' amount of documentation the appointee would be obliged to read before the meeting of the Commission.⁴³⁰ Then there was the difficulty of arranging for a delegate to travel from India at short notice, not to mention the longwinded process - involving the Cabinet Office, the India Office, and the Government of India - by which appointments were agreed.

Eventually, on 24th February, the India Office wrote to the League to name its appointment. It was, indeed, an Indian woman but to Kaur's chagrin the appointee was not one of the six names submitted by the Indian women's organisations. Worse still, the woman appointed was Radhabhai Subbarayan, a rival whom the British had appointed to the first RTC and was evidently considered as a much safer option in Geneva. The work of the League's Social Section was hardly high priority for the British political establishment, yet the government was in no way inclined to relinquish influence on the international stage, even when it came to 'social' matters. Subbarayan, who noted this tight grip of the Indian Office on League of

⁴²⁹ Joseph Avenol, Secretary-General, League of Nations to Secretary of State for India, 19 October 1933 and 3 February 1934, 11B/9040/729, Box 4667, LoN

⁴³⁰ Radziwill to Kaur, 21 December 1933, 11B/9040/729, Box 4667, LoN.

Nations work in a letter to her friend Eleanor Rathbone, complained that ‘the Government of India tell me that they have to receive instructions from Whitehall even about this matter!’⁴³¹

Kaur was disappointed and angry, especially when she discovered that Subbarayan had also been appointed to the ILO conference on mining conditions being held that year. Venting her feelings in a letter to Rathbone (apparently not realising that the British MP had very friendly relations with Subbarayan), she wrote

The Govt – I understand the Secretary of State is responsible in the main – goes and appoints Mrs Subbarayan – a woman who has *never* been a working member of any of our organisations and is wholly non-conversant with *any* department of social service out here. Today I see she is to represent India on the League’s Labour Conference also in June. I am sure she has never been inside an Indian Factory or mill whereas we have special women members detailed to study Labour conditions in particular. Can you help to expose this total lack of appreciation of true service in England? It is getting well nigh impossible for us women to go on cooperating with Government when they invariable turn a deaf ear to our very reasonable demands. I wonder whether they really want the women to progress – because that means unity and progress of India?⁴³²

Amongst some in Geneva there was tacit awareness that the India Office had won a tactical victory, with A.C. Chatterjee, the Indian delegate to the ILO, diplomatically remarking that Subbarayan was ‘a good choice but of course not the best.’⁴³³ For others, the political question bore no particular relevance and the tight grip of the India Office maintained over appointments to the Commission was greeted with polite acceptance.⁴³⁴ In India too, there was little sympathy for Kaur’s discontent in the mainstream press with *The Leader* (Allahabad) reporting that ‘there is not an iota of doubt that public opinion will enthusiastically endorse the Government’s choice in inviting Mrs. Subbarayan as India’s representative on the League’s ... Commission.’⁴³⁵

⁴³¹ Subbarayan to Rathbone, 13 March 1934, 7ELR/07, WL.

⁴³² Kaur to Rathbone, 2 April 1934, 7ELR/24, WL. Emphasis original.

⁴³³ A.C. Chatterjee to Princess Radziwill, 27 February 1934, 11B/669/669, LoN.

⁴³⁴ See, for example, Eric Einar Ekstrand to E.J. Turner, 28 February 1934, 11B/669/669; Eric Einar Ekstrand to Mrs Subbarayan, 5 June 1934, 11A/11646/320, LoN.

⁴³⁵ Extract, *The Leader*, 23 February 1934, 11B/669/669, LoN.

Despite being thwarted, Kaur was undeterred. She continued to press for influence in Geneva and persisted in attempting to circumvent Imperial authority over India's relations with Geneva. Although the British government had tried to close off the AIWC's access to the 1934 ILO conference, Kaur argued to her AIWC colleagues that 'there is no harm in our making our views known through our own agency.'⁴³⁶ 'In fact,' she added 'we *should* do so.'⁴³⁷ She therefore, proposed that the AIWC Labour Sub-Committee compose a report on women's labour conditions in Indian mining areas and send it to the ILO in time for consideration by the 1934 conference. This sudden call to action met with a certain amount of indignation amongst her less internationally-minded colleagues, one of whom complained:

I cannot understand why we should submit the memorandum without consulting all persons concerned and that too in such a great hurry when as a matter of fact, our organisation has not been asked to submit any memorandum and we have been totally ignored. I think that it would not be consistent with our self-respect to do so.⁴³⁸

Nevertheless, Kaur persisted, no doubt encouraged by Agatha Harrison who stayed at Kaur's house in Simla in May. That month the AIWC produced a memorandum on mining conditions, with assistance from the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and copies were sent to Geneva in time for the ILO conference in June.⁴³⁹ Determined that the memorandum should hit the target, as well as sending it to the ILO, Kaur sent a copy to Ekstrand: 'Please be kind enough,' she urged, 'to use your influence and help us to get the questions mentioned in this memorandum considered at the International Labour Conference which is shortly to be held.'⁴⁴⁰ Ekstrand was (or feigned to be) unaware of the underlying politics involved and sent the memorandum on to Subbarayan with the comment: 'I expect the Rajkumari [Amrit Kaur] does not know that you have been appointed Delegate to the

⁴³⁶ Kaur to Mukerjee, 7 April 1934, File 59-II, AIWC.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁸ Nalinibai V. Dalvi, Convenor, Labour Sub-Committee AIWC to Mukerjee, 13 May, 1934, enc. In Mukerjee to Kaur, 16 May 1934, File 59-II, AIWC.

⁴³⁹ See Kaur to Mukerjee, 14 May 1934, File 59-I, AIWC.

⁴⁴⁰ Kaur to Ekstrand, 28 May 1934, 11A/11646/320, LoN.

Labour Conference else she would have sent it to you direct instead of sending it to me.⁴⁴¹

The AIWC memorandum on mines in India gave an overview of conditions as they related to women and suggested reforms. Advocating that certain legal reforms relating, for example, to maternity benefits be applied specifically to women, this was consciously an intervention in the international debate then raging in the feminist movement about protectionist legislation.⁴⁴² On one side were equality feminists, led by Open Door International, who rejected any form of discrimination, including positive, and insisted on complete equality between the sexes. Widely perceived as intellectuals who had no understanding of industrial realities, they saw protectionist industrial legislation that imposed unequal restrictions on the conditions of women's labour as discriminatory and argued that it limited women's economic opportunities. The AIWC memorandum represented the opposite position, which held that there were particular biological and social circumstances that applied only to women, which, therefore, necessitated specialist legislation. This protectionist stance brought the AIWC into disagreement with some of their supporters in Britain, including the Six Point Group and St Joan's Political and Social Alliance, who wrote to Kaur asking her to reconsider.⁴⁴³ However, others, such as the WIL were in agreement with the AIWC.⁴⁴⁴ The issue demonstrates some of the complexities of the international feminist movement and indicates that women's organisations often formed strategic alliances based on shared goals despite ideological differences on issues such as protectionist legislation and, as was the case with nationalist women and some of their European allies, imperialism.

⁴⁴¹ Eric Einar Ekstrand to Mrs. Subbarayan, 5 June 1934, 11A/11646/320, LoN.

⁴⁴² Miller, 'Geneva – The Key to Equality', 224-226.

⁴⁴³ Le Sueur to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, 1 May 1934, File 59-I, 80, AIWC.

⁴⁴⁴ Geraldine Forbes has attributed the AIWC protectionist stance to the middle-class character of the Indian women's movement, although the same argument could be made about European feminist organisations whether or not they supported protectionism, Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 174-176.

Amrit Kaur's efforts enabled the AIWC to establish a working relationship with the ILO, despite the British authorities' determination to control official appointments.⁴⁴⁵ 'I am convinced,' she later wrote, 'that it was essential for us to send in *something* to the International [ILO] Conference in order to strengthen our hand for the future.'⁴⁴⁶ Indeed, from 1935 onwards, the AIWC was reporting annually to the ILO, and the ILO was publishing these reports in their publication, *Industrial and Labour Information*.⁴⁴⁷ During the same period, the Indian Branch of the ILO, which reported monthly to the ILO headquarters in Geneva, included news of AIWC activities in its despatches.⁴⁴⁸ In December 1938, these connections were cemented when P.M. Hage of the 'Women's Work' section of the ILO travelled to India and met with AIWC figures. By then, according to Hage, Indian women regarded the ILO as '[t]he only department of the League of Nations, which does good work', although we do not know precisely which Indian women had given her this impression.⁴⁴⁹ The relationship with the ILO brought the AIWC support and prestige, strengthening its authority as advocates of reform in India and giving the organisation an international presence.⁴⁵⁰

Meanwhile, despite frustrations about the way the India Office maintained control over official League appointments, the AIWC continued to pursue its relationship with the Social Section of the League of Nations. In addition to Kaur, other members to the AIWC, including Hamid Ali, Kaur's successor as Liaison Officer, and Lakshmibai Rajwade in her capacity as Convener of the AIWC's Opium Sub-Committee, maintained contact with the League.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁵ Iris Wingate, YWCA Lahore to Kaur, 7 February 1934, File 59-I, AIWC. See also 'Minutes of WIL India Committee, 4 October 1934, WILPF/4/2, LSE.

⁴⁴⁶ Kaur to Mukerjee, 18 May 1934, File 59-I, AIWC.

⁴⁴⁷ See Harold B. Butler, Director, International Labour Office to Amrit Kaur, 8 March 1935, WN/1000/29/1, ILO.

⁴⁴⁸ See, for example, 'Report for May 1935', 62-28 and 'Report for January 1936', 55, , ILO India Branch Reports, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Centre for Modern Indian Studies (CeMIS).

⁴⁴⁹ P.M. Hage to Madame Thibert, 6 January 1939, WN1000/29/5, ILO.

⁴⁵⁰ As Geraldine Forbes has pointed out, the effects of this connection for working class women in India were ambiguous. Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 172-173.

⁴⁵¹ See, for example, Mrs. S. Hamid Ali to Princess Radziwill, 1 February 1935 and Lakshmibai Rajwade to Princess Radziwill, 14 February 1935, 11A/11646/320, LoN.

Amongst the other issues on which the AIWC and the League liaised throughout the pre-Second World War period were sanitation and hygiene, maternity and child welfare, and women's labour issues. On all these topics the League Secretariat shared expertise and knowledge with the AIWC information while AIWC officers responded with reports of their activities and copies of resolutions.

In February 1937, the Social Section of the League convened the Conference of Central Authorities in Eastern Countries in Bandung, Java on the subject of Traffic in Women and Children. India was represented by the AIWC Chairman Mrs S.C. Mukerjee, the United States of America sent Anne Guthrie (one of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's future biographers) as an Observer, and several members of the World's YWCA were in attendance.⁴⁵² On his way to Java, Ekstrand, who was Secretary-General of the Conference, conducted a lecture tour of India upon the invitation of the AIWC.⁴⁵³ Later that year, the AIWC was officially appointed as a 'correspondent member' of the League's Advisory Committee on Social Questions, as a result of which it became the only non-Western organisation to be listed in the League's record of 'Women's International Organisation'.⁴⁵⁴ This connection continued until the League disbanded during the Second World War, establishing an international profile for the AIWC that laid the groundwork for the appointment of Indian women on United Nations committees after the new international organisation was established in 1945.

The Rise of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit as a Global Figure

The Government of India Act (1935) increased provincial autonomy in India and enabled greater Indian participation in political institutions. During the

⁴⁵² League of Nations, *Traffic in Women and Children. Conference of Central Authorities in Eastern Countries*, 13 February 1937, C.22.M.164, LoN; Anne Guthrie, *Madame Ambassador. A Life of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1963).

⁴⁵³ Ammu Swaminadhan to Monsieur Avenol, 10 September 1936, 11A/11646/320; Eric Einar Ekstrand to Dina Asana, 9 February 1938, 11B/29871/26725, LoN.

⁴⁵⁴ Ekstrand to President of the AIWC, 3 July 1937 and Ekstrand to Malinibai Sukthankar, 8 May 1939, 11B/29872/26725; 'Status of Women. Addresses of Women's International Organisations,' 3A/32474/13900, LoN.

elections that took place under the Act, the Indian National Congress won a decisive victory taking control of eight of the eleven provincial governments. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, a successful Congress Party candidate in the UP, was appointed Provincial Minister for Public Health and Local Self-Government, becoming India's first (and the world's second) woman to achieve cabinet rank.⁴⁵⁵

In her own estimation, Pandit's achievement was a significant step for women, whom, she believed, had an important and equal role to play as citizens in the public sphere. Here was an opportunity, she thought, 'to dispel the age-old tradition that woman could not do man's work' in a context that cut across national boundaries and was universally applicable.⁴⁵⁶ Globally-speaking, Pandit's appointment gave credence to the figure of the 'universal woman' as a political actor and, from an Indian point of view, promoted the 'Indian woman' as a modern citizen. Yet, for Pandit, rather than being simply about women's rights, women's empowerment was a matter of political prestige and a weapon in the ideological battle against imperial rule. Thus she portrayed her appointment as a collective honour for Indian womanhood and as an outward sign of the progressive gender ideology of Congress. 'In appointing me to a position so far closed to women,' Pandit claimed at the AIWC meeting in Nagpur in 1937, the Congress was 'demonstrating to the world the equality of man and woman in the new India which is in the making today.'⁴⁵⁷

Being the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, Pandit greatly owed her position to her connections to the Congress leadership. She, therefore, had good reason to link her appointment to nationalist policies, even though, in reality, the

⁴⁵⁵ The first, Margaret Bondfield, was appointed Minister for Labour in the British Cabinet in 1929. Out of a total of one and a half thousand new legislators, Pandit was one of fifty-six women to be elected. The total number of Congress Party women legislatures was thirty-six. Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 195.

⁴⁵⁶ Pandit, *So I Became a Minister*, 23.

⁴⁵⁷ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 'Address to Women's Conference, Nagpur', 28 December 1937, V.L. Pandit Papers, First Instalment, Speeches by Her 1, NMML.

Congress Party's commitment to gender equality fell short of its rhetoric on the issue.⁴⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Pandit's unusually elevated position earned her international attention thanks, in part, to the transnational connections already established by her AIWC colleagues. *The Manchester Guardian* (probably due to the ministrations of the WIL in London) celebrated her appointment and Grace Lankester, the British Liaison Group's Officer who visited the AIWC annual meeting that year, was quoted as being 'impressed by the personality and ability of India's first woman Cabinet Minister'.⁴⁵⁹ In the United States, the *Christian Science Monitor* announced that Pandit's appointment 'typifie[d] changing times' and reported her conviction that

It is not enough that a woman should bear children to carry on the race. She should also ... know how to rear them to enable them to play a worthy part in the life of the nation while herself helping to order such activity.⁴⁶⁰

This suggests a bid by Pandit to progress the gender conventions of Indian society beyond the association of women purely with motherhood in order to legitimate their participation in public life. There was also a teleological sense of progress. Women could not be 'kept back', Pandit was quoted as saying, because '[s]he is as necessary to civilisation as man'.⁴⁶¹ At the same time, she was realistic about the obstacles to equality faced even by eminent women such as herself. She protested journalists' obsession with her appearance and complained about the sexist treatment meted out by the media:

I think of the interviews I have seen my brother give. What straight, clear and intelligent questions are put to him and yet I, who also attempt to do public work, am treated as if my interests were confined to clothes and children and those petty social activities in which the lady of means and leisure engages in order to allay the prickings of her conscience.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁸ Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 192-195.

⁴⁵⁹ 'India's First Woman Cabinet Minister', *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 March 1938. Further publicity followed when she visited the UK in September 1938. This was partly orchestrated by the India League in London. See India League (London) press release, IOR:L/I/1/M82

⁴⁶⁰ 'Woman's Career in India Typifies Changing Times', *The Christian Science Monitor*, date unknown, Countries Collection, 21, 18, SSA.

⁴⁶¹ 'Woman as Nation-builder. Mrs Pandit's Talk,' *The Manchester Guardian*, 2 April 1938.

⁴⁶² Pandit, *So I Became a Minister*, 32.

Although she was an AIWC office-holder, Pandit had remained fairly aloof from its social reform activities in the 1930s, engaging instead in Congress activism. Nevertheless, she played an important role in encouraging an internationalist mindset in the organisation. A keen observer of the international crises of the 1930s, at the AIWC meeting in Nagpur in 1937, Pandit declared it 'immediately necessary for women of every nation to unite and strengthen the causes of democracy and peace of which the woman's cause is a part' and urged that the 'terrible sufferings inflicted in Africa, Europe and China ... inspire all women to further effort'.⁴⁶³ On her return from a trip to Europe the following year, during which she watched German expansionism with horror, her speech to the AIWC in Agra congratulated European women on their efforts 'to form themselves into one unit in order to fight this great calamity' and appealed to Indian women to do the same:

so long as any mother's son is in danger of injustice or humiliation or death, it is the duty of every mother, no matter where she may be, to raise her voice and join her strength to that group which fights to restore peace and justice to a weary world.⁴⁶⁴

Not only did Pandit appeal to the ideal of women's transnational solidarity but she invoked the gendered trope, so widely-held amongst feminist peace activists, of women's biologically-determined propensity for peace. In doing so she positioned herself, practically and ideologically, amid a global network of feminist activists – a position confirmed by her appointment as a Vice-President of the WILPF during the war. Yet for Pandit, women's empowerment was merely an integral part of a wider struggle to 'restore to the world its balance' by wholesale global restructuring. As she urged the AIWC in 1937:

Let us work for equality and freedom for our sex by all means, but let us not forget the more important issue of equality and freedom for humanity, and by joining our forces to those who work towards this end let us help to make the world beautiful to live in.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶³ Pandit, 'Address to Women's Conference, Nagpur'.

⁴⁶⁴ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 'Message from Mrs. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Minister for Local Self Government and Health, U.P., to the annual Women's Conference the Agra Constituency', 18 November 1938, V.L. Pandit Papers, First Instalment, Speeches by Her 2, NMML.

⁴⁶⁵ Pandit, 'Address to Women's Conference, Nagpur'.

This balance of women's rights and anti-colonial nationalism is reflected in the breadth of Pandit's international contacts. During an extended visit to Europe in 1938, much of which was spent with her brother, Jawaharlal Nehru, Pandit developed an eclectic list of contacts. These included the African-American actor activist Paul Robeson and his wife Essie, who became a close friend.⁴⁶⁶ Through Robeson, a Pan-Africanist with an attraction to the Soviet Union, Pandit developed a keen awareness of the global contours of race and colour prejudice. Another contact was Vera Brittain, an ally of the AIWC through her membership of the Six Point Group and the WILPF, who was also sympathetic to Pandit as a supporter of the British Centre Against Imperialism.⁴⁶⁷ In addition, during the war, Pandit, who became President of the AIWC in 1940, acted as a lynchpin in the transnational fundraising efforts of the Indian branch of Save the Children in response to the Bengal famine. In doing so, Pandit relied heavily on her personal credentials, connecting with prominent international figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Soong Mey-ling (Madame Chiang Kai-shek) – both of whom had donated large sums to her fundraising appeal. Thus, owing to her status as one of the most high-ranking political women in the world, in addition to her family connections, Pandit's international links extended beyond the international women's movement centred on Geneva.

War and Solidarity, 1939-1945

The outbreak of the Second World War brought great strain to the transnational connections tended so carefully by the AIWC during the 1930s. The Viceroy's declaration of war on India's behalf without consultation prompted the resignation of the Congress ministries and a policy of non-cooperation with the war effort in which nationalist women took part. As a result, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's celebrated ministerial career came to an abrupt end. As tensions between Congress and the British authorities grew

⁴⁶⁶ Barbara Ransby, *Eslanda. The Large and Unconventional Life of Mrs. Paul Robeson* (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2013), 216-220.

⁴⁶⁷ Brittain, a pacifist, became a lifelong friend and one of Pandit's biographers. See, Brittain, *Envoy Extraordinary*.

amid the suspension of civil liberties, civil disobedience and the imprisonment of Congress leaders, positions were polarised and battle lines hardened.

One of the nationalist arguments used to justify its stance on the war hinged on the claim that the conflict was driven by the imperialist concerns of European powers rather than being a battle for freedom and democracy against Nazism as presented by the Allies. The disjuncture between this line of thinking amongst Indian women and the perspective of their British allies compromised solidarity. By June 1941, the Axis threat was shifting eastwards, and this development was used as a pretext by a group of British women, including some long-term supporters of the AIWC such as Grace Lankester, Daisy Solomon and Margery Corbett Ashby, to publish a public plea to 'the women of India' to throw their support behind the Allied war effort. The plea, printed in the *The Times of India*, appealed to Indian women to reconsider their opposition in the name of the cause of 'human freedom' and democracy.⁴⁶⁸ 'We know how passionately you hate war. We hate war too,' the appeal continued, '[y]et British women have entered on the war in the full responsibility of citizenship ... Side by side with our men we are shouldering the burdens and braving the perils of the struggle.'⁴⁶⁹

The British women's appeal exposed the tensions implicit in the international women's movement in an age of nationalism and imperialism. For many Indian women, especially those with a developed abhorrence of fascism, the question of whether to support the war posed a difficult problem. However, the Congress had determined that support for the war was conditional on full and immediate independence. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, recently released from prison after serving a sentence for civil disobedience, was the first to respond.

⁴⁶⁸ 'Realise India's Peril & Join War Effort. Message to Women', *Times of India*, 12 June 1941, 7. The signatories included a number of veteran suffragists who had involved themselves in the Indian women's franchise campaign, including member of the 'five friendly societies': Violet Bonham Carter, Elizabeth Cadbury, Thelma Cazalet, Margery Corbett Ashby, Lady Hartog, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Grace Lankester, Lady Layton, Daisy Solomon and others.

⁴⁶⁹ 'Realise India's Peril & Join War Effort.'

She answered 'with some diffidence' to the British women, some of whom she considered 'friends whose friendship I value.'⁴⁷⁰ Yet she toed the Congress line and asserted that Indian women could not support the war without first becoming free themselves. She claimed that by insisting on the guarantee of India's independence as a condition for participation in the war, nationalist women were themselves upholding the global cause of freedom. 'We desire equally with you the defeat of Nazism and all it stands for but we cannot fight for your freedom while we ourselves are your slaves,' Pandit's statement concluded.⁴⁷¹ A few days later, an open letter apparently drafted by Gandhi and signed by prominent AIWC members including Pandit, Amrit Kaur and even (the previously anti-Congress) Radhabhai Subbarayan spelt out the the nationalist position yet more starkly:

As we see the reality, it is this. It is a war between the British Empire and Nazis and Fascists for world domination, meaning in effect exploitation of the non-European races. We cannot be in love with Nazism and Fascism. But we may not be expected to be in love with British Imperialism.⁴⁷²

For British women this was a difficult message to receive; even the British Section of the WILFP, the most closely allied of the 'friendly societies', described Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's opposition to the war effort as 'challenging'.⁴⁷³

If the war brought ideological differences to the surface, it also posed practical obstacles to transnational activity. When war broke out, P.M. Hage of the ILO's Women's Work Section was forced to decline an invitation to the AIWC's annual meeting that year, concluding that

⁴⁷⁰ Quoted in WILPF, International Circular Letter No.4/1941, WILPF 3/1, 6, LSE.

⁴⁷¹ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 'A reply to the appeal made by certain British Women to the Women of India', 16 June 1941, V.L. Pandit Papers (Second Instalment). Speeches and Writing by Her, 6, NMML.

⁴⁷² 'Reply to British Women's Appeal' (drafted by M.K. Gandhi and signed by Sarojini Naidu, Rameshwari Nehru, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Amrit Kaur, Rani Lakshimbai Rajwade, Ammu Swaminathan, Radha Subbarayan), 21 June 1941, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 80, 313, <http://www.gandhiserve.org/VOL080.PDF> accessed 8 December 2016. See also 'Women's Reply to British Plea,' *Times of India*, 24 June 1941, 2.

⁴⁷³ WILPF, International Circular Letter No.4/1941, WILPF 3/1, LSE.

the present international situation and the preoccupations which it entails make it extremely difficult for the Office to undertake to be represented at a Conference in a centre so far away from Geneva.⁴⁷⁴

In Britain, it was reported that '[t]he war situation has made it impossible for the Liaison Group of British Women's Societies to respond to the warm invitation from the All India Women's Conference to send a delegate to attend the Annual Session'⁴⁷⁵ Meanwhile, the attempts of Vera Brittain to attend the AIWC conference in 1941, were blocked when authorities refused her an exit permit from the UK. This prompted Pandit, as the then President of the AIWC, to publicly protest against what she characterised as an obstruction to transnational understanding:

The decision was unfortunate. At this critical period in the relationship between the people of India and those of England, human contacts are important. Miss Vera Brittain would have forged another link in that chain of friendship between our peoples which this organisation has been trying to create.⁴⁷⁶

Vera Brittain supported the nationalist cause throughout the war so her attempt to travel to India is not surprising. However, even signatories of the 'British Women's Appeal' maintained relations with the AIWC throughout the war, evidently viewing the war and the divisions it exposed as a temporary obstacle. In December 1941, six months after the 'Appeal', a second message was sent which, while reiterating that '[o]ur first energy must go to fighting the evil forces of Nazism and Fascism', expressed the desire

to link up our efforts with yours to plan and build a new world from this strife to which you and we must equally contribute even if communications become more difficult. Please believe in our continued friendship; our joy at bridging the miles that separate us and our hope that next year one of us may be with you.⁴⁷⁷

In June 1943, when the Congress was effectively silenced by the imprisonment of the leadership and thousands of activists after the Quit India agitation, seventy British women signed a further appeal, this time addressed

⁴⁷⁴ P.M. Hague to Dr. Mrs. Malinibai Sukthankar, 5 December 1939, WN100/29/6, ILO.

⁴⁷⁵ M. I. Corbett Ashby and Dorothea Layton to Dear Madam, 15 December 1941, enc. 'Copy of Message,' MCA/C11, WL.

⁴⁷⁶ Quoted in Vera Brittain, *Testament to Experience. An Autobiographical Story of the Years 1925-1950* (London: Gollancz, 1957), 281.

⁴⁷⁷ Violet Bonham Carter, Jean Henderson, Margery Corbett Ashby, 'Message to A.I.W.C.', 18 December 1941, 7MCA/C11, WL.

to the British Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for India, urging the British government to employ 'the method of consultation and negotiation' to end the political deadlock with the Congress.⁴⁷⁸ Two years later, the Liaison Group of British women's societies, working, it claimed, in cooperation with the AIWC, again lobbied the British Government to demand the release of Congress leaders from prison so that they might 'take their rightful place in national and international affairs.'⁴⁷⁹ This support from women who, in many cases, had no particular sympathy for anti-colonial nationalism shows the value of transnational connections for Indian women in making their voices heard.

From India, the AIWC made substantial efforts to remain connected to their international networks, repeatedly extending invitations to their annual meetings and sending reports and resolutions to their supporters abroad.⁴⁸⁰ In spite of Indian nationalist opposition to the war, they assured their European contacts of their sympathy. 'Believe me,' stated Hamid Ali in a letter sent to London at the time of the Battle of Britain, 'to whatever schools of thought my countrymen belong we are all united in our great sympathy with England in its hour of trial.'⁴⁸¹ For others, sympathy was magnified by personal concerns: 'Sorry to hear of the renewed air attacks on England', wrote Kulsum Sayani, the AIWC Secretary in May 1944. 'My eldest son is studying medicine at Glasgow. I quite realize a mother's anxiety.'⁴⁸²

Outside Europe, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya traveled to North America in 1940 later declaring the WILPF, whose branches she made contact with, as

⁴⁷⁸ "'End Deadlock in India" British Women's Plea To Premier,' *The Times of India*, 5 June 1943, 5. See also draft letter, 16 March 1945, 7MCA/C12, WL.

⁴⁷⁹ 'British Women's Appeal for Women and Children in India and Pakistan', undated, 7MCA/C12, WL. The Liaison Committee established in 1934 now consisted of only four of the original organisations: BCL, SPG, WFL, WIL.

⁴⁸⁰ Kulsum Sayani to Vera Brittain, 25 May 1944, Vera Brittain Papers, Box 94, McMaster University Archive (MUA).

⁴⁸¹ Begum Hamid Ali to Vera Brittain, 19 August 1940, Vera Brittain Papers, Box 94, MUA.

⁴⁸² Kulsum Sayani to Vera Brittain, 25 May 1944, Vera Brittain Papers, Box 94, McMaster MUA.

'the only organization that gave her hope and faith.'⁴⁸³ In addition, the AIWC continued to supply its members with international news. *Roshni* carried articles entitled, for example, 'Leningrad Women', 'Chinese Women's Role in the War,' and 'American Feminism Enters a New Phase.'⁴⁸⁴ Unsurprisingly for an organisation the aims of which included the pledge to 'stand for international goodwill and world peace,' the plans concerning a future world being discussed by the 'Big Three/Four' at Dumbarton Oaks and Yalta during 1944-1945 were subjected to great critical interest.⁴⁸⁵ By now, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit had travelled to the United States of America where, with the support of American civil society organisations, she embarked on a propaganda campaign to promote the Indian national cause.

Conclusion

During the 1930s and early 1940s, nationalist women within the AIWC sought to transform the organisation into an outward-looking, internationally-networked entity. Their relationships with British organisations raised their profile in Britain and internationally, challenged widespread assumptions about Indian women, and enhanced their prestige on the world stage. Links to world governance institutions in Geneva involved them in the globalising processes of transnational knowledge exchange, giving support to domestic programmes relating to women's rights while providing a platform for promoting a political anti-colonial message. Indian women's international networks, which members of the AIWC actively nurtured in this period, were, therefore, defined by multiple purposes. This produced a combination of solidarity and tension, the latter of which came to a head in the polarised conditions that emerged after the outbreak of the Second World War. This should alert us to the complexity of international opinion in the interwar period, which was not simply drawn along the axis of imperialism and nationalism, but contained multiple perspectives and intersecting concerns.

⁴⁸³ WILPF, 'International Circular Letter No. 3/1946, November 1946.

⁴⁸⁴ See, for example, *Roshni*, July 1944, AIWC.

⁴⁸⁵ See, for example, 'Dumbarton Oaks to San Francisco, *Roshni*, March 1945.

As we have seen in this chapter, the AIWC, despite substantial disillusionment, continued to operate within the imperial system during this period, pressing, for example, its franchise demands on Parliament via its proxies in London. There was a sense also that relationships with British women were desirable in gaining the AIWC prestige with the imperial authorities. Increasingly, though, the AIWC was moving, psychologically and strategically, beyond Empire. The networks the organisation tapped into included actors that were relatively sympathetic to the idea of Indian political autonomy. On this basis, nationalist women in the AIWC looked to its civil society contacts to raise awareness of nationalist goals, and for statements of political support, which, to some extent, it received. These strategies lacked the drama of civil disobedience agitations, but they carried out the subtler work of influencing opinion and building international prestige.

For nationalist women in the AIWC, global governance institutions in Geneva represented an opportunity to pursue the goal of international influence in a context that to some degree circumvented imperial structures. Although independent representation on the committees of the League eluded them, the AIWC acquired consultative status to the League of Nations and established a direct line of communication to the ILO. Several years in advance of political independence, these assertions of the right to participate in global governance were *de facto* exercises in global citizenship. The significance of this activity is twofold. Without doubt these pre-war interactions with global governance paved the way for the notable presence of Indian women at the UN after 1945. More broadly, they remind us that beyond the high-level politics of the period, which were dominated by men, lay the important transnational civil society interactions of Indian women that contributed to India's international presence as it emerged from the period of colonial rule.

CHAPTER 5

Breaking America: Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's Propaganda Tour, 1944-45

'[E]verything in this country is accomplished through public opinion'⁴⁸⁶

'[I]t would be well if everyone would listen carefully to what this extraordinary woman had to say as a private citizen of the world.'⁴⁸⁷

In the early hours of 8th December 1944, an American military transport plane touched down at La Guardia airfield, New York. On board was Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, now a forty-four-year-old Congress activist and former President of the All India Women's Conference (AIWC). Like many nationalist activists in India, she had spent much of World War Two in prison, where, still, twenty-eight months after the Quit India Declaration, most of the Congress leadership and thousands of grassroots activists remained. Even now, even in the United States of America - in fact, particularly because she was in the United States - the British imperial machine kept a close eye on her activities. Officially, the purpose of her visit was personal, allowing Pandit, a recent widow, to spend time with her daughters who were studying at Wellesley College, Massachusetts. But the British authorities were sceptical, believing that she would undoubtedly engage in embarrassing propaganda that might encourage American support for Indian independence and undermine the British-American alliance.

This chapter examines Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's visit to the United States in 1944 and 1945, which, indeed, turned out to be political as well as personal. During this time, Pandit, something of a celebrity figure due to her extraordinary career achievements and family connections, intervened in public debates

⁴⁸⁶ Richard J. Walsh to J.J. Singh, 1 May 1943, Papers of Richard J. Walsh (RJW), Series 2, Box 21, Folder 29, Pearl S. Buck Archive (PSB).

⁴⁸⁷ Dorothy Norman, 'First Lady of India', *New York Post Magazine*, 19 December 1944, Part 14, Group II, Series A, Folder 001439-009-0333, ProQuest History Vault NAACP Papers (hereafter NAACP).

through a series of civil society events and public appearances, most of which were picked up by sympathetic sections of the press. Her appearances drew attention to 'the India Question' - a live issue in American politics which intersected with wider debates about civil liberties, democracy, and freedom in the context of American domestic and foreign policy. Pandit's entry into American public life was facilitated by a network of civil society supporters with extensive connections that reached as far as the White House. This put the British authorities on their guard and they monitored her every move through agents operating through the British Embassy in Washington.

In April 1945, with the Second World War coming to an end, the San Francisco Conference on International Organisation was convened to draft the charter of what became the United Nations. Pandit was a significant presence around the Conference periphery at this time, operating unofficially as 'sole spokesman' for India in direct protest at the official Indian delegation, which had been appointed by the British. At this important 'global event', Pandit's campaign was a bid to make the Indian nationalist cause heard amid the clamour of state and non-state voices that sought to influence the future of the world.

The 'India Question', the United States, and Public Opinion

The British authorities were first alerted to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's intentions to travel to America in April 1944. Richard J. Walsh, who, as proprietor of John Day Company, was Nehru's publisher and a known Indian nationalist sympathiser, had approached the Indian Agent-General, Sir Girja Shankar Bajpai, in Washington to propose that she visit the country for a combination of personal, humanitarian and professional reasons. The death of Pandit's husband, Ranjit, three months earlier, shortly after his release from prison had put her under great strain, Walsh pointed out, and a trip to America would enable her to spend time with her daughters, as well as allow her to help raise funds for famine relief in India and complete work on her autobiography. Despite the ostensibly innocuous wording of this proposition, Bajpai quickly

despatched a telegram to Delhi: '[British] Ambassador and I would advise against permitting Mrs Pandit to visit this country ... once she is in the U.S.A. she will certainly indulge in embarrassing propaganda.'⁴⁸⁸ Thus forewarned, when Pandit applied for a passport in July, the imperial machine whirred into action with her case passing from the Home Department, the External Affairs Department, the U.P. Government (Pandit's home state), and eventually the Viceroy in India before being referred to the Secretary of State for India in London and, through him, back to the British Embassy in Washington.⁴⁸⁹ It was not until September, after much discussion, that Pandit was granted permission to travel.

The cause of this bureaucratic excitement was the potentially pivotal importance of the 'Indian Question' in the relationship between Britain and the United States. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's personal interest in India was no secret and had been publicly signalled in 1942 by correspondence with Nehru and by the involvement of his representative Colonel Louis Johnson in the unsuccessful Cripps mission to India in April that year.⁴⁹⁰ There was a strong sense that American public opinion had the power to influence the President, who could, in turn, put pressure on the British regarding India. As one senior figure in India noted:

Mr Gandhi knows very well that public opinion in the U.S.A. was a fairly potent factor affecting British policy, towards India in general and Congress in particular, in the past and he would doubtless like to restore that, for him, happy state of affairs.⁴⁹¹

Indian nationalists had long courted public opinion in the United States. Nehru's autobiography, which provided a comprehensive statement on the nationalist position in an accessible form, had been published by John Day

⁴⁸⁸ Copy of Telegram, Halifax Washington to Govegenext, New Delhi, 23 April 1944, File 61/44 – Poll.(9), Correspondence File, NAI.

⁴⁸⁹ This discussion can be traced through File No. 61/44 – Poll (9), NAI and IOR:L/I/1/M82, BL.

⁴⁹⁰ Kenton J. Clymer, *Quest for Freedom. The United States and Indian Independence* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1995), Chapter 3; Zachariah, *Nehru*, 113-114.

⁴⁹¹ Quoted in M.G. Hallett, Governor United Provinces, to John Thorne, Home Member, Viceroy's Executive Council, 13 July 1944, File No. 61/44 – Poll.(9), Correspondence File, NAI.

Company in 1941 and was selling well. More direct was Gandhi's statement to the American public, made by way of an interview with Preston Grover of the American Associated Press in June 1942. In this interview, Gandhi specifically challenged Allied claims, implicating not just imperialist policy but American race segregation:

The Allies have no moral cause for which they are fighting, so long as they are carrying this double sin on their shoulders, the sin of India's subjection and the subjection of the Negroes and African races.⁴⁹²

A few weeks later, Gandhi sent, via the sympathetic American journalist Louis Fischer, a letter to Roosevelt himself, appealing for the President's 'active sympathy'.⁴⁹³ For the nationalist leadership, America was by now a legitimate, even vital, site for pro-Independence activism.

Gandhi's comments were directed at the heart of the Allied justification for the war. The wartime alliance between Britain and America was predicated on a joint mission based around to the carefully worded 'common principles' outlined in the Atlantic Charter. The document, signed by Roosevelt and Churchill several months before the formal entry of America into the war, outlined a set of loose commitments to 'rights', 'self-government', 'freedom' and a new, peaceful post-war world order. Despite Churchill's statement that the principle of self-government applied only to the Nazi-occupied nations of Europe and certainly not the colonies of the British Empire, the Charter nevertheless offered supporters of Indian independence an opportunity. The Atlantic Charter contained no mention of India but in outlining the principles that would frame 'a better future for the world,' it contained an acknowledgement that a new world system was possible, perhaps, indeed, inevitable. Furthermore, the Atlantic Charter legitimised the language of rights in a global context, providing the nationalist cause with clear grounds for claiming an independent status within any new system that might emerge, whatever Churchill's interpretation.

⁴⁹² M.K. Gandhi, 'Interview with Preston Grover', 10 June 1942, CWMG, Vol. 83, <http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL083.PDF>, accessed 12 June 2016.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*



Figure 3: American wartime poster. Norman Rockwell, 1894-1978. *Ours -- to fight for: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, freedom from fear.* UNT Digital Library.

As Indian nationalists were aware, the authorities in America were engaged in propaganda campaigns of their own. America's image as the champion of freedom was carefully sustained through, for example, now iconic Norman Rockwell posters depicting the 'Four Freedoms' (of Speech, of Worship, from Want, and from Fear) as 'Ours ... to fight for'.⁴⁹⁴ Furthermore, both before and after America entered the war, the British Information Service, ever wary of the influence of American civil society, had fought their own propaganda campaign out of the British Embassy in Washington to encourage public support for America's entry into the war. This campaign by British agents in the United States has been described as 'one of the most diverse, extensive,

⁴⁹⁴ Rockwell, Norman, 1894-1978. *Ours -- to fight for: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, freedom from fear*, UNT Digital Library. <http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc265/>, accessed June 8, 2016.

and yet subtle propaganda campaigns ever directed by one sovereign state at another,' illustrating the importance the British attached to American public opinion.⁴⁹⁵

British Imperial officials were active figures in the British propaganda machine in America with matters relating to 'the India Question' being overseen by Sir Frederick Puckle, previously the Director-General of the Government of India's Department of Information, who was now operating as special advisor on Indian affairs in the British Embassy in Washington. To counter the charge made by Gandhi and others that British imperialism contradicted Allied war aims, British agents in America released a flow of information designed to emphasise the development of self-government in India and made claims suggesting that independence would be discussed after the more pressing business of the war was completed.⁴⁹⁶ As part of this propaganda effort, anti-nationalist Indians made lecture tours of the country to emphasise the disunity of India – a common argument used by the British to portray their continued presence in India as a stabilising force. At the same time, in contradiction to this argument, the Agent General for India in January 1943 suggested that independence had in fact been offered in the Cripps proposal.⁴⁹⁷ Taking a different tack again, a damning book by Beverley Nichols, *Verdict on India* (1944), portrayed the Congress as Hindu supremacists and Gandhi and Nehru as high caste fascists. Although this pro-imperialist propaganda was, in essence, incoherent, the confusion resulting from it created a challenge for supporters of Indian nationalism who attempted to present a clear message to the American public.

⁴⁹⁵ Nicholas John Cull, *Selling War. The British Propaganda Campaign Against American "Neutrality" in World War II* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

⁴⁹⁶ Clymer, *Quest for Freedom*. See, for example, *The development of self-government in British India*, UNT Digital Library, <http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc312/>, accessed June 8, 2016.

⁴⁹⁷ 'India's Right to Freedom' [undated], Part 14, Group II, Series A, Folder 001439-009-0333, NAACP.

The Propaganda Value of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit

In the eyes of officials in India, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit presented a particular threat to British propaganda. According to one Government of India official

we could hardly do anything better calculated to defeat our propaganda efforts in America about India, and incidentally H.M.G.'s propaganda efforts through Sir Frederick Puckle, than to go out of our way to let Mrs. Pandit go to that country.⁴⁹⁸

Pandit's personal appeal featured highly in this bureaucratic calculation. Her reputation as the sister of Nehru and a female Cabinet Minister brought her international fame. A prominent and experienced Congress activist, who, according to one official, was 'fortunate not to be in jail or severely restricted', she was also a formidable communicator. Grudgingly, officials noted her personal talents and knew her to be 'educated, attractive, charming when she wishes'.⁴⁹⁹ Unconcealed in the exclusively male reckoning of the imperial bureaucracy was a misogynistic suspicion of her 'undoubted feminine charm' and a wariness of the potential "'sob-stuff" appeal' created by the recent death of her husband.⁵⁰⁰ Certainly gender was an important factor in her effectiveness as a propagandist and British officials sensed the symbolic value attached to an educated, liberated, and decidedly 'modern' woman acting as a spokesperson for Indian independence. Pandit's very presence in America, it was understood, challenged racist assumptions in general and the 'civilising' justification for imperial rule in particular. According to Imperial officials, Americans were particularly susceptible to the nationalist message because they were 'easily swayed by soap-box oratory about freedom and liberty and rights'.⁵⁰¹ After all, America's own anti-colonial struggle against the British featured prominently in its sense of national identity. During a war fought in the name of freedom, this history was particularly significant, as Bernard Perlin's wartime propaganda poster, *1778, 1943: Americans always*

⁴⁹⁸ E. Conran-Smith, 'Memo,' 18 July, 1944, File No. 61/44 – Poll (9), NAI.

⁴⁹⁹ Quoted in M.G. Hallett, Governor United Provinces, to John Thorne, Home Member, Viceroy's Executive Council, 13 July 1944, File No. 61/44 – Poll.(9), Correspondence File, NAI.

⁵⁰⁰ Report 5th March 1945 and Memo 7th July 1944, File 61/44 Poll(9), NAI.

⁵⁰¹ Quoted in Hallett to John Thorne, 13 July 1944.

fight for Liberty (1943), which juxtaposed depictions of American revolutionary soldiers with contemporary 'G.I.s', illustrates.⁵⁰²



Figure 4: American wartime poster. Bernard Perlin, 1778, 1943: *Americans will always fight for liberty*. UNT Digital Library.

The proposed timing of Pandit's visit also presented a problem. Although President Franklin Roosevelt was sympathetic to Indian nationalism, he could be relied upon to support Britain in waging war. However, imminent Presidential elections raised the prospect that less sympathetic opponents might capitalise on criticisms from Pandit regarding Roosevelt's India policy. The stakes were ominously presented by the Deputy Secretary in the Home:

It should also be remembered that the USA will soon be in the throes of a Presidential Election, and of the sticks the Republican Party are likely

⁵⁰² Bernard Perlin, 1778, 1943: *Americans will always fight for liberty*, Washington D.C. UNT Digital Library.

to use against the President will be his Indian policy – the sort of line Drew Pearson took in the recent message insinuating that Roosevelt had become a lackey of the British. A propagandist like Mrs Pandit would be certain of a considerable hearing in these circumstances even among circles which might otherwise be indifferent to the Indian Question.⁵⁰³

If Pandit could provide ammunition to Roosevelt's opponents, amongst whom resided isolationist, anti-British and, anti-Allied sentiments, her presence in America might even endanger the wartime alliance.⁵⁰⁴

As Government of India officials quickly realised, however, the question they faced was far from clear-cut. There was little doubt that Pandit was 'an enemy, willing to traduce H.M.G. and the Government of India in every way possible in the U.S.A.' but the official mind was also sensible of the potential capital that might be made - across the Empire as well as in the United States - of any refusal to grant her a passport. Whether they allowed her to go to America or restricted her movement, Pandit was a propaganda liability. Much official discussion, therefore, centred on the relative danger that 'govt [sic] will be held up as unfeeling persons who stood between a widow and her young children' against 'the damage she could do by poisoning American opinion' during an actual visit.⁵⁰⁵ But finally, on the recommendation of Viceroy Wavell, a passport was granted.⁵⁰⁶ Reporting this to a friend in September 1944, Pandit wrote: 'I do not intend to stay away very long but have made no plans yet. You can imagine how much I am looking forward to seeing the girls.'⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰³ Note by Vishnu Sahay, 18 July 1944, File No. 61/44 – Poll (9), NAI.

⁵⁰⁴ On isolationist opposition to Roosevelt's pro-interventionist policy see Cull, *Selling War*, especially Chapter 1 and Chapter 5.

⁵⁰⁵ Note by Vishnu Sahay, 18 July 1944; Note by D. Pilditch, Director of Intelligence Bureau, File No. 61/44 – Poll (9), NAI.

⁵⁰⁶ Secretary of State for India to Governor General, New Delhi to, 8 September 1944, File No. 61/44 – Poll (9), NAI.

⁵⁰⁷ Extract of intercepted letter dated 26 September 1944, 'Daily Digest', Home Department, 4 October 1944, File No. 61/44 – Poll (9), NAI.

Civil Society Connections

When Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit arrived in the United States, British surveillance officers were not the only people alert to the presence of ‘the most distinguished visitor to us from India since Tagore’.⁵⁰⁸ Indian nationalism had long enjoyed support in America amongst a range of civil society actors. These included the Committee on African Affairs, a Pan-Africanist organisation led by Paul Robeson and WEB du Bois, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, and, most instrumentally for Pandit’s visit, the India League of America and the National Committee for Indian Freedom (NCIF), a Washington-based organisation that had broken away from the India League in October 1943.⁵⁰⁹ Set in this context, Pandit’s campaign in America was allied with global ‘progressive’ forces against imperialist, racist or otherwise entrenched inequalities. In these circles, Indian independence was presented as ‘of the greatest consequence not only to India but to everyone who believes in the “Four Freedoms” everywhere.’⁵¹⁰

As Pandit was to discover, American civil society was a dense web of interlinked causes and interests. The figures she drew support from were united in their support for ‘freedom’ and their disapproval of imperialism but they were drawn from a range of backgrounds. Prior to Pandit’s arrival, significant groundwork had been done by the India League of America, which had established connections with the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Chinese nationalists, and sinophiles. In addition, prominent India League members proposed an alliance with the powerful interventionist and *Time* magazine publisher, Henry Luce. Luce’s wife, Clare Boothe Luce was a critic of imperialism and, in 1943, had given her name to the Luce-Celler Bill in the United States Congress, a piece of legislation designed to end the racially-defined exclusion of South Asians from American citizenship. The India

⁵⁰⁸ Pearl Buck to Dear Friend, 12 February 1945, Part 14, Group II, Series A, Folder 001439-009-0333, NAACP.

⁵⁰⁹ Anup Singh to Walter White, Part 14, Group II, Series A, Folder 001439-009-0333, NAACP.

⁵¹⁰ Norman, ‘First Lady of India’.

League of America, led by the businessman J.J. Singh, was heavily involved in the lobbying campaign around this issue.⁵¹¹

Pandit's closest relations with American civil society actors were with Jawaharlal Nehru's publisher Richard Walsh, and his wife Pearl Buck. The couple had acted as unofficial guardians to Pandit's teenaged daughters since their arrival in the United States in 1943 and had been charged with managing the girls' privacy and financial arrangements (which included advancing royalties from Nehru's autobiography).⁵¹² Buck, the daughter of American missionaries to China, a Nobel Prize for Literature winner, and a well-known opponent of imperial rule in Asia, had spoken at the India League of America's Independence Day Dinner in January 1943 in a speech that railed against the 'myth of the white man's burden' and upheld the equality of all races.⁵¹³ In addition, making use of her prominence, the India League had regularly pressed Buck for contributions to its mouthpiece *India Today*. She was also in touch with the AIWC who sent her updates of conditions on the ground in India.⁵¹⁴ Both Walsh and Buck joined the India League in 1944 as part of a process initiated by its President, J.J. Singh, to '[expand] the League and the League's activities', with Buck becoming Honorary President.⁵¹⁵

Neither Buck nor her husband were simply figureheads in the pro-Indian nationalist movement in the United States. In addition to Walsh's publishing work, the couple had previously argued for American intervention in India through the East and West Association, an organisation dedicated to cross-cultural exchange which they founded in 1942. In September that year, they

⁵¹¹ On J.J. Singh see Robert Shaffer, 'J.J. Singh and the India League of America, 1945-1959: Pressing at the Margins of the Cold War Consensus,' *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 31, 2 (Winter 2012), 68-103.

⁵¹² See for example, Richard J Walsh to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 6 October 1943, Record Group 2, RJW, Series 2, Box 22, Folder 15, (PSB).

⁵¹³ Pearl Buck 'Full text of Address by Pearl. S. Buck at India Independence Day Dinner, Hotel Biltmore, New York City', 26 January 1943, Papers of Pearl S. Buck (PSB), Series 2, Box 13, Folder 10, PSB.

⁵¹⁴ See Anup Singh to Pearl Buck, 30 December 1943; Urmila Mehta, Hon. General Secretary, A.I.W.C. to Pearl Buck, 28 January 1944, PSB, Series 2, Box 17, Folder 2, PSB.

⁵¹⁵ J.J. Singh to Richard J. Walsh, 17 June 1944, PSB, Series 2, Box 13, Folder 10, PSB.

had organised an advertisement in *The New York Times* calling on Roosevelt (and Chiang Kai-shek) to initiate the process of Indian independence. Additionally, through their Famine Relief Committee they had organised significant fundraising efforts directed at the Bengal catastrophe as it unfolded in 1943.⁵¹⁶ In May 1943, Walsh set out to J.J. Singh a comprehensive strategy for promoting Indian independence in America. Pointing out what British officials also understood, he told Singh that ‘everything in this country is accomplished through public opinion’ and he recommended releasing a stream of information about India to the press.⁵¹⁷ ‘Out of such information,’ he argued, ‘interest will grow and out of interest public opinion.’⁵¹⁸ His conviction was that American public opinion could be reached by generating human interest in the cause of Indian freedom: ‘They must be led to feel the people of India are human and interesting and that we can understand and like them.’⁵¹⁹ Thus, in Walsh and Buck, Pandit found strategically savvy friends and supporters who were dedicated to Indian independence, based on a commitment to racial equality.

Other American supporters of the India League were Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union, who served on the Executive Committee, and Walter White of the NAACP, who served on the National Advisory Board. The civil society network emanating from these connections was of direct benefit to Pandit’s campaign. Walter White of the NAACP and Pearl Buck lobbied the White House in tandem to gain Pandit access to Eleanor Roosevelt.⁵²⁰ When Pearl Buck sent out invitations to the India League’s Independence Day dinner in Pandit’s honour, she was able to utilise the

⁵¹⁶ Advertisement: ‘India. The Time for Mediation is NOW,’ *The New York Times*, 28 September 1942, 9, RJW, Series 2, Box 20, Folder 5, PSB.

⁵¹⁷ Richard J. Walsh to J.J. Singh, 1 May, 1943, RJW, Series 2, Box 21, Folder 29, PSB.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁰ Walter White to Eleanor Roosevelt, 28 November 1944, Part 14, Group II, Series A, Folder 001439-009-0333, NAACP.

mailing lists of several sympathetic organisations, including the NAACP, that were informally affiliated with the India League through their personnel.⁵²¹

Beyond these networks of cause-based societies, Pandit also took part in the Pacific Relations Conference in Hot Springs, Virginia – a conference organised by the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR), an American-based think tank that advised the American government on foreign policy.⁵²² Rockerfeller-funded and influential, this internationalist body functioned as a below-state-level forum for debate comprised chiefly of academics and other experts.

New Beginnings: A Global Message

The central theme of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's propaganda in America was the linking of the Indian anti-imperial struggle to the wartime fight for democratic values against authoritarian Axis regimes. 'India's desire for independence is more than a matter of merely wishing to become a nation', she explained, boldly in a newspaper interview shortly after her arrival. 'What is actually at stake is the whole question of freedom itself.'⁵²³ Furthermore, Indians were portrayed, not merely as supplicants begging for their rights but as the vanguard of democracy. Only nationalist leaders, she claimed could 'offer a solution either for conditions in India, or for the world at large.'⁵²⁴ To illustrate this point, and also to mitigate the effect of Congress's opposition to the war effort, Pandit highlighted the anti-fascist credentials of the nationalist leadership. Unlike the British government, she argued

the Congress Party – including such individuals as my brother and myself, as well as others of our co-workers – had made repeated requests to combat fascism – not only as early as Japan's attack upon Manchuria in 1931, but as far back as the beginning of the rise of fascism in Italy, in the twenties.⁵²⁵

⁵²¹ Pearl Buck to Dear Friend, 12 Jan 1945, Part 14, Group II, Series A, Folder 001439-009-0333, NAACP.

⁵²² Dayna Barnes, 'Think Tanks and a New Order in East Asia. The Council of Foreign Relations and the Institute of Pacific Relations During World War II', *Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 22, 2 (2015), 89-119, 94.

⁵²³ Dorothy Norman, 'First Lady of India'.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*

She had visited Europe in 1938, she told her audiences, and borne witness to the unfolding crisis. Furthermore, she insisted, she had clearly recognised the errors of appeasement, and was incredulous that '[w]e who saw the inevitable consequences of those policies are today deprived of a voice in saying how the future shall be remade.'⁵²⁶ This assertive cosmopolitan-nationalism, then, posited Indian freedom as beneficial, not just to India, but to the whole world.

A further theme of global wartime political discourse was the necessity of establishing a peaceful post-war order. First hinted at in the Atlantic Charter, this idea had grown and, in October 1943, Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union, and China signed the Moscow Declaration on General Security which committed the signatories to the establishment of

a general international organization, based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all peace-loving States, and open to membership by all such States, large and small, for the maintenance of international peace and security.⁵²⁷

A year later, at Dumbarton Oaks, the 'Big Four' agreed to substantial details relating to the principles, purpose and organisational structure of such an organisation.⁵²⁸ At Yalta in February 1945, the 'Big Three' (now without China) decided on the issue of voting procedure and further re-iterated their commitment to 'a general international organization to maintain peace and security' and their belief that this step was 'essential, both to prevent aggression and to remove the political, economic and social causes of war through that close and continuing collaboration of all peace-loving peoples.'⁵²⁹ The prominence given in global public discourse to the establishment of a secure peace provided the background for the second core theme of Pandit's campaign. Imperialism and colonial rule were the cause of world wars, she

⁵²⁶ "'India's Case for Independence'" in Prasad (ed.), *Towards Freedom*, 243.

⁵²⁷ 'The Moscow Declaration on General Security', *The Yearbook of the United Nations*, 1946-47, 3. <http://www.unmultimedia.org/searchers/yearbook/page.jsp?volume=1946-47&bookpage=3>, accessed 21 December 2016.

⁵²⁸ *The Yearbook of the United Nations*, 1946-47, 4-9. <http://www.unmultimedia.org/searchers/yearbook/page.jsp?volume=1946-47&bookpage=4>, accessed 21 December 2016.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

argued. Therefore, there could be no lasting peace unless dependent nations gained their freedom.

Pandit's trip to America in late 1944 was sanctioned by M.K. Gandhi who, like Pandit, but unlike most of the Congress leadership at that time, had been released from jail. However, it is interesting to note that in an interview shortly after her arrival Pandit partially distanced herself from Gandhi, describing his philosophy as 'a product of his own time' in contrast to the more progressive and internationalist 'dream of present-day India.'⁵³⁰ The ideas she promoted reflected those of her brother but, until June 1945, Nehru remained in jail and unavailable for consultation. As a representative of Congress, therefore, Pandit was operating independently and without brief.

Due to the ministrations of well-connected supporters, Pandit's presence did not go unnoticed in the American press. On 9th December 1944, her arrival was announced by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. On 11th, *The New York Herald Tribune*, recognised for its internationalist stance, published a controversial piece criticising the British and Indian governments for their handling of the Bengal Famine, and on 17th December ran an article that described the condition of India as 'quiet but sullen' and emphasised the anti-fascist credentials of the Congress.⁵³¹ *The New York Post* ran a long article by the India League Board member Dorothy Norman which advised 'it would be well if everyone would listen carefully to what this extraordinary woman had to say as a private citizen of the world.'⁵³²

In addition to press coverage, Pandit's supporters arranged receptions and tea parties in her honour in order to introduce her to American civil society, thereby granting her access to much sought-after public opinion. Soon after her arrival, she shocked a British Information Service informant with her

⁵³⁰ Norman, 'First Lady of India'.

⁵³¹ His Majesty's Ambassador, Washington to Secretary of State for India, 20 January 1945, IOR: L/I/L/M82.

⁵³² Norman, 'First Lady of India',

'dangerous' talk at an event hosted by Pearl Buck, where she reportedly criticised the deployment of American soldiers in India and accused the British Government of engineering the Bengal Famine.⁵³³ Along with politics, there was another dimension to her activities. Despite her family connections, the death of her husband had raised financial issues and, although she was in the position to draw on advance royalties from Nehru's book, her expenditure reflected elite transnational norms and included the cost of educating her daughters in America.⁵³⁴ Since at least as early as November 1943, the New York-based public relations company, Clark H. Getts, had been offering to represent her on the lucrative lecture circuit, and within a few weeks of her arrival in America Pandit had signed up with Getts for a country-wide speaking tour in February and March 1945. '[T]he payments are satisfactory,' she reported to her friend Padmaja Naidu (Sarojini's daughter), 'and help us all to live'.⁵³⁵

The Campaign: January – March 1945

Early in January 1945, Pandit took up a semi-official role as a member of the Indian observer delegation at the Pacific Relations Conference in Hot Springs, Virginia – an appointment which had been secured by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, a loyalist Indian politician who was, nevertheless, a family friend. The conference, which, in 1945, met specifically to discuss the future of Japan and post-war security in the Pacific, offered Pandit the opportunity to bring an Indian nationalist perspective to influential foreign policy experts from Allied as well as Asian countries. It served as a public relations exercise where she could lay claim to the ideals of self-determination and individual rights and bring international pressure to bear on Britain. While the British delegate, Sir Andrew MacFadyean, stuck to the line 'that the Atlantic Charter still stood as the declaration of intention of the United Nations', Pandit pushed

⁵³³ Report from Director, Intelligence Bureau, 18 December, 1944, File No. 61/44 – Poll (9), NAI.

⁵³⁴ It was, however, suspected, though not proven, by Indian intelligence sources that Pandit had received funding from the Indian businessman B.M. Birla to fund her trip. See G. Ahmed, 20 March 1945, File No. 61/44 – Poll (9), NAI.

⁵³⁵ 'Extract from a letter dated 22-3-45', File No. 61/44 – Poll (9), NAI, 51.

for action and urged that the principles of both the Charter and Roosevelt's 'Four Freedoms' be applied to Asian countries.⁵³⁶ Even though India was non-self-governing and was represented at the conference only by an observer delegation, participation in the Pacific Relations Conference gave Pandit legitimacy. As far as the British government was concerned, the Indian delegation was unofficial and, therefore, a sort of pseudo-national entity. But for those who desired an independent India it could be imagined and promoted as a proto-state level intervention.⁵³⁷ This form of representation not only lent moral weight to the struggle for independence but indicated what a free postcolonial India might look like. It is striking that India was represented at the conference by a woman, suggesting that the new world imagined by anti-imperialist nationalism was one of gender, as well as racial, equality.

Because of the critical importance of the American wartime alliance with Britain, this below- yet also proto-state level type of activity had the potential to cause high-level tension. Knowing of Eleanor Roosevelt's sympathy for India, Pearl Buck, who along with NAACP leader Walter White, made approaches to the First Lady on the matter, wrote to express her hope that Pandit might be invited to the White House. 'I know that, of course, it would not be possible for the President to do this,' Buck submitted, 'but perhaps his restrictions do not apply to you.'⁵³⁸ Pandit and Mrs Roosevelt, a person Pandit would later describe as a long term friend, did eventually meet at the end of January, but not before *The Times of India* had reported (inaccurately) the latter's supposed 'inability to receive Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit at the White House.'⁵³⁹ Meanwhile, Pandit publicly criticised President Roosevelt's

⁵³⁶ 'Post-War Treatment of Japan', *The Times of India*, 9 January 1945, 8.

⁵³⁷ For the British view of the 'Indian delegation' see India Office memo to Mr Patrick (undated), IOR:L/I/1/M82, 70.

⁵³⁸ Pearl Buck to Eleanor Roosevelt, 9 November 1944, PSB, Series 2, Box 20, Folder 2, PSB. See also Walter White to Eleanor Roosevelt, 28 November 1944, Part 14, Group II, Series A, Folder 001439-009-0333, NAACP.

⁵³⁹ 'White House's "No" To Mrs. Pandit', *The Times of India*, 4 January 1945, 5; 'The USA Should Ask Britain to Concede India's Independence', Editorial, *Bombay Sentinel*, 30 January 1945 in Prasad (ed.), *Towards Freedom*, 134.

silence on the issue of Indian independence and declared India to be 'greatly disappointed in America.'⁵⁴⁰ The equivocal position in which the American administration found itself, as well as the crucial role played by the media in American politics, was indicated by comments made by Joseph Grew, Under Secretary of State. Grew, a former Ambassador to Japan, publically responded to Pandit at a news conference by stating the government's interest in 'all developments in the Indian situation' and affirming the United States' 'close ties of friendship both with the British Government and with the people of India.'⁵⁴¹

Pandit's meeting with Eleanor Roosevelt was part of a flurry of activity in New York and Washington at the end of January 1945. The timing of this activity was significant because it took place as President Roosevelt made his way to meet Stalin and Churchill at the Yalta Conference, where they would discuss the details of a future international organisation to maintain world peace. The Yalta conference coincided with celebrations for Indian Independence Day, which had, since 1930, been marked on 26th January. Two large events were planned in the United States to mark the occasion. The first, an 'India Independence Day Dinner', was held on 26th under the auspices of the India League of America at the Hotel Commodore in New York. The second was a free public meeting organised by the NCIF which took place at the National Press Club Auditorium in Washington on 29th. What shape would the new world system as planned by the great powers take, asked the publicity for the India League event. 'Is it to be really new or will old ideas merely be dressed in new names?'⁵⁴² In this context, a free India was considered to be, not just the essential outcome of the Allied commitment to self-determination, but, potentially, 'a tremendous force for good' and the source of 'the solution for the whole problem of the Pacific and of a discontented Asia.'⁵⁴³ Speeches

⁵⁴⁰ 'U.S. Attitude to India. Mrs. Pandit's Criticism', *The Times of India*, 30 January 1945, 7.

⁵⁴¹ '[Grew] Gives Assurance on India,' *The New York Times*, 30 January 1945, 8.

⁵⁴² 'Advance summaries of addresses to be delivered at India Independence Day Dinner', South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), <https://www.saada.org/item/20120712-730>, accessed 26 August 2015, 2.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*

from Pearl Buck, the Chinese writer Lin Yutang (who was also published by John Day Company), J.J. Singh and others repeatedly invoked the principles of 'freedom' and 'democracy', condemned British imperialism as the enemy of freedom, and demanded that the Atlantic Charter be applied to India.⁵⁴⁴ The war must fulfil its rhetorical purpose, the speakers argued. 'Let us see', remarked Lin Yutang presciently, 'that the results of this war are not only a shifting and a rearrangement of spheres of influence.'⁵⁴⁵

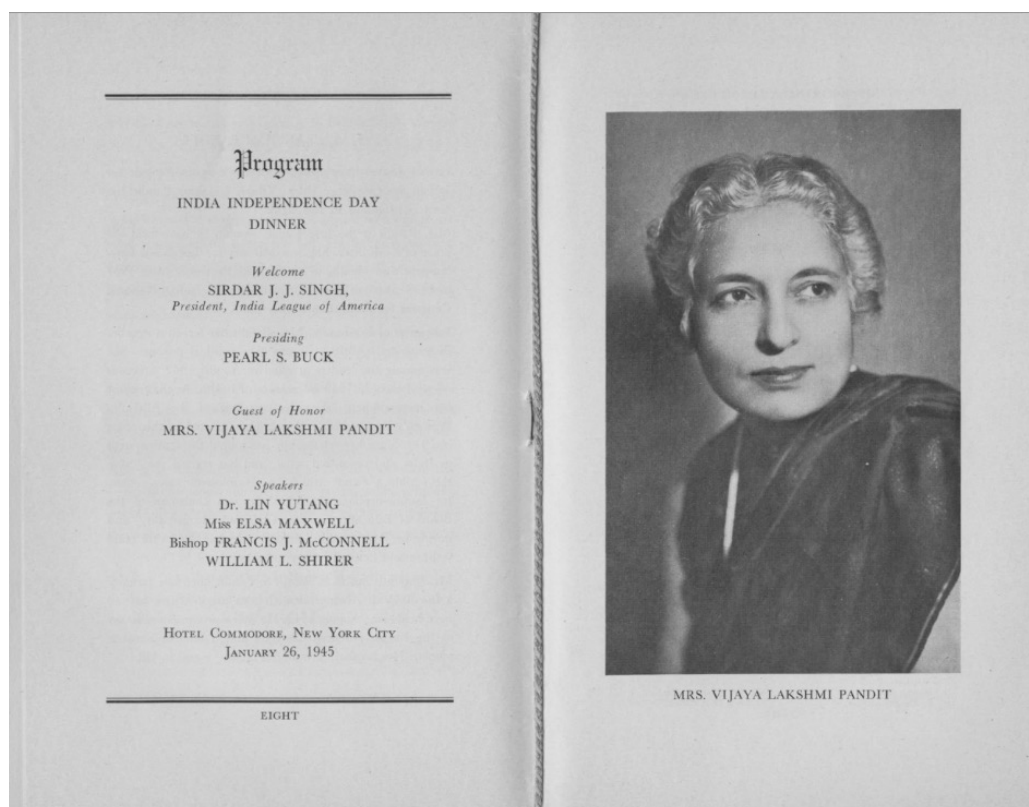


Figure 5: Page from programme of the India League of America's Independence Day Dinner, January 26, 1945, Mahesh and Ishwar Chandra Papers, SAADA.

Pandit herself, in whose honour the Independence Day Dinner was held, made great use of the occasion to expand on these themes in an address that wrested moral superiority from Britain and claimed it for the nationalist movement in India. Just as the right to self-determination was universal, so too, she asserted before an elite, East Coast audience of around a thousand,

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-6.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

was the struggle for freedom in India nothing less than a universal struggle for 'the freedom of the whole human race.'⁵⁴⁶ India stood, she claimed, for

the democratic ideal, for the freedom of all peoples for justice and equality between man and man and between nation and nation, for free thought, and free expression, in a word, for the Four Freedoms⁵⁴⁷

By contrast, she pointed out, the British in India had locked up political opponents, banned public meetings, and suspended free speech.

The speech in New York was designed to encourage American public opinion to put pressure on the government to oppose British imperialism, using the ideals of freedom and a better global future to reinforce the message. The Washington Independence Day celebration organised by the NCFI, where Pandit delivered the same message to another one thousand-strong audience, was a more overtly political event that passed a resolution specifically calling on the United States Government

to represent to the British Government who are our allies the desirability of the immediate release of ten thousand political prisoners who have been imprisoned in India without any trial and further to follow up the necessary preliminary to help achieve India's constitutional freedom now in accordance with the Atlantic Charter principles. We believe such action is necessary for speedy victory in the Far East and achieving lasting peace.⁵⁴⁸

The Independence Day dinners, together with similar civil society events such as the annual dinner of the Save the Children Federation in New York on 30th January, a gala-dinner at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel held in Pandit's honour by Henry Luce, and a reception hosted by the Chinese consulate, boosted Pandit's profile in elite internationalist circles. Her occupation of this globally-aware, progressive ideological territory was further extended at smaller events across the country where she lectured on topics such as 'Four Freedoms for Asia', 'Why India Wants Independence', 'The Hope for World Betterment', and 'The Coming Indian Democracy.'⁵⁴⁹ In a radio broadcast on

⁵⁴⁶ "'India's Case for Independence'", 240.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁵⁴⁸ 'Celebration of Indian Independence Day in Washington DC,' reported in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in Prasad (ed.), *Towards Freedom*, 247-8.

⁵⁴⁹ RJW, Series 2, Box 24, Folder 6, PSB.

CBS, arranged by the NCIF in January, Pandit drew explicit parallels between America and nationalist India, describing the Indian National Congress as 'a political party which stands for a system of democratic freedom for India', emphasising its commitment to equal rights and anti-fascism:

No organization anywhere in the world was so clear and emphatic on the subject of Fascist-Nazi aggression as the Indian National Congress, which has consistently condemned it from its very early beginnings, and at a time when the British Government, under Mr. Chamberlain's leadership, was openly friendly to these regimes.⁵⁵⁰

On a well publicised radio show, 'America's Town Meeting,' at the beginning of March Pandit debated the question 'Are Colonial Empires a Threat to World Peace?'⁵⁵¹ On this occasion, she formed a team with the foreign affairs advisor and sinologist Owen Lattimore against an opposition made up of Churchill's private secretary, Robert Boothby MP, and the radio commentator John W. Vandercook. This was a debate that deliberately pitted anti-colonial and imperialist global perspectives against each other in pursuit of broadcasting excitement. The participants obliged, and none more so than Pandit, who paired the progressive ideology of democratic rights with anti-colonialism and lambasted the 'effete and worn out system' of the British Empire.⁵⁵² Her claim that colonial empires were, indeed, not just 'a danger to world peace' but also 'to the progress of humanity' challenged the superiority of European imperial powers (represented on this occasion by a 'ponderous and condescending' MP) and undermined their international prestige.⁵⁵³

Sections of the British establishment felt this liberal challenge to imperial moral authority keenly. In London, the head of the Ministry of Information, Brendan Bracken, complained to the India Office that Pandit had even been allowed to visit America, forcing the Secretary of State for India, Leo Amery,

⁵⁵⁰ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 'India and America', *The Voice of India*, March 1945, Countries Collection, Box 21, Folder 18, SSA.

⁵⁵¹ 'Advertisement,' *New York Times*, 1 March 1945, 37.

⁵⁵² 'Copy of a report dated 5-3-45', File No. 61/44 – Poll (9), 47, NAI.

⁵⁵³ Quoted in Bhagavan, *The Peacemakers*, 30; 'Copy of a report dated 5-3-45'.

to justify to the War Cabinet the decision to grant her a passport.⁵⁵⁴ Having observed, during a visit to the United States the previous year, that even the presence of Pandit's teenaged daughters had roused 'publicity highly unfavourable to Britain,' Bracken was alert to reports in the American press about Pandit herself and reported the matter to the Prime Minister.⁵⁵⁵ In the House of Commons, the Conservative MP Major General Sir Alfred Knox, a known opponent of Indian independence, demanded to know whether Amery was taking steps to 'counteract any harmful effects that [Pandit's] statements may have on public opinion amongst our allies.'⁵⁵⁶ Reports on the ground in America were more circumspect, noting that 'Mrs Pandit has conducted herself in public with dignity and decency', yet there was little doubt in the official mind that her liberal, democratic rhetoric represented a challenge to the imperial *status quo* in global terms.⁵⁵⁷

The ideological battle-lines were obfuscated by anti-Congress attempts to appropriate the language of 'progress' in order to reclaim imperial authority. In these circles, the standard imperialist rebuttal of Congress-led Indian nationalism that depicted India as too religiously divided for self-government, was conceivably given a boost by the discourse of self-determination promoted in the Atlantic Charter. This was so because the principle of minority rights could also be applied to Muslims in India, thereby casting the Congress as overbearing aggressors. In fact, a tussle over the meaning of the concept of 'freedom' materialised when Pandit repeated the traditional Congress universalist line claiming a national, secular unity of purpose at the Independence Day celebrations in January. 'The problem of India is not a problem of the Hindu and the Moslem and the Untouchable,' she said, adding that the 'the problem of India [i.e. colonialism] applies to the 400 million

⁵⁵⁴ 'Visit of Nehru's sister and nieces to U.S.A. Memorandum by the Secretary of State For India', 3 January 1946, IOR:L/I/1/M82, BL. For Bracken's complaint see India Office memo to Mr Patrick (undated); and 'Copy of Letter from Private Secretary to the Minister of Information to the Prime Minister's Private Secretary', 19 December 1944.' IOR:L/I/1/M82, 70, BL.

⁵⁵⁵ 'Copy of Letter from Private Secretary.'

⁵⁵⁶ 'Parliamentary Notice', 21 February 1945, IOR:L/I/1/M82, 41.

⁵⁵⁷ His Majesty's Ambassador to Secretary of State for India, 20 January 1945.

Indians, whatever caste or creed they belong to.⁵⁵⁸ When this claim was made again, a few days later in Washington, it was reported by news agencies as a denial of religious difference in India, which, in turn, exposed Congress nationalism to the accusation that it overlooked minority rights.⁵⁵⁹ To anti-Congress opponents, such as 'The Muslim Correspondent' of the (Calcutta) Statesman, this amounted, not to support for national freedom, but to 'the perpetuation of tyranny and the prostitution of democracy at the altar of Hindu Absolutism.'⁵⁶⁰ In taking this position, pro-British agents were, of course, contradicting the Churchillian line that the principles of the Atlantic Charter did not relate to the colonial question. Nevertheless, imperialist propaganda in America applied this argument, with one speaker describing Britain as 'reluctant to leave India until she is satisfied with minority positions in the country'.⁵⁶¹

Reception

Notwithstanding the efforts of the British propaganda machine to undermine her message, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's campaign succeeded in generating publicity for the Indian nationalist cause, although it is difficult to measure the reception of this message in quantitative terms. Pandit's radio broadcasts, she claimed, resulted in 'long distance calls from all over the States ... [and] also hundreds of letters of appreciation.'⁵⁶² There were, after all, sections of American society that were sympathetic to her message and, as a British intelligence agent pointed out, many in her audiences 'needed no convincing of the inherently evil character of the British Colonial system.'⁵⁶³ Her public appearances, therefore, played a role in sustaining a liberal, anti-colonial discourse in the American public sphere. The contest, though, was about

⁵⁵⁸ "'India's Case for Independence'", 242.

⁵⁵⁹ 'Washington meeting of the National Committee of India's Freedom', extract from India Office News Summary, 4 February 1945, IOR: L/I/1/M82, 45, BL.

⁵⁶⁰ 'Muslim Reply to Mrs. Pandit', extract from India Office News Summary, 4 February 1945, IOR:L/I/1/M82, 44.

⁵⁶¹ See Boothby's remarks reported in 'India's Plea for Freedom Debated. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Parliament Member Speak Here', *Los Angeles Times*, 5 May 1945, A8.

⁵⁶² 'Extract from a letter dated 22-3-45,' File No. 61/44 – Poll (9), 51, NAI.

⁵⁶³ 'Copy of a report dated 5-3-45.'

more than rhetoric. It is true that the Indian nationalist cause evinced much sympathy amongst the American public, and that Pandit was highly successful in capitalising on this.⁵⁶⁴ She was probably quite justified in boasting that in public debates she 'squashed [her] opponents flat', but translating this into political capital was another matter.⁵⁶⁵

Pandit's propaganda campaign was forced to contend with the difficulties inherent in any attempt to construct transnational solidarity at a time of war, and with the particular complexities of the American-Indian relationship. A major issue which undermined support for the nationalist cause, was Congress opposition to the war effort. As Francis Puckle, the Government of India representative, noted, 'Americans may be interested in the abstract in Indian independence, but in the concrete it comes a long way behind winning the war.'⁵⁶⁶ Although Pandit was generally careful to emphasise the official Congress line that it would support the Allied war effort in return for immediate independence, on some occasions she gave the impression that the outcome of the war had little bearing on India so long as they remained under imperial rule.⁵⁶⁷ Puckle condescended that there were two sides to Pandit: the 'restrained and fairly sensible' speaker he encountered at the Pacific Relations Conference and the more militant persona that appeared at the Independence Day events where informers criticised her for being 'more anti-British than pro-Indian'.⁵⁶⁸ Seemingly, Pandit was most credible, according to Puckle and his interlocutors, when she spoke of 'freedom' in abstract terms. When she spoke of specific nationalist grievances she was accused of 'display[ing] a surprising lack of sense of proportion.'⁵⁶⁹

The fact was that, for American interventionists, execution of the war was not so much an unfortunate by-product of the alliance with Britain, but a positive

⁵⁶⁴ Richard J. Walsh to V.L. Pandit, 22 June 1945, RJW, Series 2, Box 24, Folder 6, PSB.

⁵⁶⁵ Extract from a letter dated 22-3-45'.

⁵⁶⁶ Puckle to Patrick, 31 January, IOR:L/I/1/M82, BL.

⁵⁶⁷ 'Copy of a report dated 5-3-45.'

⁵⁶⁸ Puckle to Patrick, 31 January.

⁵⁶⁹ 'Copy of a report dated 5-3-45.'

policy for spreading American influence, including the ideals of democracy. To this way of thinking, Indian nationalists, by making support of the war conditional on Indian freedom, were employing an incompatible hierarchy of priorities, even if the general aim – that of achieving global ‘freedom’ (however loosely defined) – was the same. For many Americans, at least in the short term, the alliance with Britain was too important to risk a rift over colonial policy. No doubt, too, was American nationalism, with its exceptionalist claims to the forces of democracy and freedom, unreceptive to competing anti-fascist claims, made enthusiastically (and not a little dogmatically) by an Indian woman. Despite their earlier concerns, by February 1945, British officials seemed confident that ‘Mrs Pandit, by taking the line that she is not interested in the war, but only in Indian independence, has got on the wrong side of the American public.’⁵⁷⁰ In effect, commitments to abstract cosmopolitan principles were undermined by the combined power of wartime pragmatism and national self-interest.

The San Francisco Conference on International Organisation, April – June 1945

Whatever the complexities involved in hitching the Indian independence struggle to the global liberal project at a time of war, by the Spring of 1945, the changing international situation provided fresh opportunity. With the war in Europe all but complete, and with Japanese power collapsing in Asia, representatives of fifty countries (the forty-six countries to have declared war on Axis powers, plus four additional states) began putting into action proposals agreed by the ‘Big Three/Four’ at Dumbarton Oaks and Yalta. This resulted in the San Francisco Conference on International Organisation (25th April to 26th June 1945). The purpose of the conference was to bring into being, by means of what would become the United Nations Charter, a new international organisation designed to maintain peace and security in the post-war world. Just as at the League of Nations in an earlier era, India was to be represented at the conference by a national delegation, but its

⁵⁷⁰ ‘Note by Mr Joyce,’ 9 February 1945, IOR:L/I/1/M82, BL.

members were appointed by the British-led Government of India under the direction of Whitehall.

Indian nationalists across the globe vehemently criticised the British-appointed Indian delegation, which was widely characterised as being comprised of British 'stooges'. Amongst the nationalist voices in India that protested the omission of 'representative' delegates at San Francisco was the AIWC, which found transnational expression through its links to the Liaison Group of British Women's Societies established by Amrit Kaur a decade earlier. In solidarity, the Liaison Group organised a public appeal to the British government demanding that the nationalist leadership be released from prison so as to be available to attend the San Francisco conference: 'At a time when plans are being made for the post-war world,' the appeal stated, 'we share the Indian Women's concern that their trusted leaders should take their rightful place in national and international affairs.'⁵⁷¹ In America, the National Committee for Indian Freedom, supported by the India League, launched a campaign to discredit the official Indian delegation and jointly appointed Pandit as 'sole spokesman for the cause of India', describing her as 'obviously the most representative Indian in America at present.'⁵⁷² Thus, as the international community and the world's media descended on San Francisco, Pandit led a campaign for Indian independence based on a newly-pertinent message. Not only did she bring into service the language of human rights, freedom, and democracy that had become ubiquitous during the war, but she specifically linked the issue of Indian independence to the declared objective of the United Nations international organization – that of maintaining world peace. The arguments, language and tactics she employed did not depart significantly from her previous appeals to American opinion. However, the future-oriented context of the San Francisco

⁵⁷¹ 'British Women's Appeal for Women and Children in India and Pakistan' [draft, approved 9 March 1945], 7MCA/C8, WL.

⁵⁷² 'None with Credentials Made Offer to Represent India', *The Times of India*, 22 March 1945, 7; 'U.S. Citizenship for Indians', *The Times of India*, 5 March 1945, 10.

Conference provided, not just a focus, but a newly fertile context in which to advance her claims.

Many years later, Alger Hiss, the American Secretary-General of the Conference wrote an account of the San Francisco meeting that described the Americans - Roosevelt, Cordell Hull and Edward Stettinius in particular - as 'chief architects of the United Nations', with Britain and the USSR, and to a lesser extent, China and France, being assigned prominent, yet supportive, roles.⁵⁷³ From this familiar 'top down' perspective, even the official delegations of the smaller powers were little more than decoration; the broader civil society that gathered in San Francisco at the time of the Conference, comprised of activists, lobbyists and other camp-followers, did not merit so much as a mention. Unlike many of these more marginal actors, the 'Great Power' originators of the United Nations did not envisage the organisation as a utopian project.⁵⁷⁴ The priority for the leading Allies was to peacefully preserve their global dominance. For this reason, the San Francisco Conference was strictly oriented towards the goal of creating a new international organisation and the agenda limited to discussions relating to the drafting of the United Nations Charter. The Conference, officials categorically stated, was not a peace conference. Nor was it concerned with specific issues. In briefing the press, the United States State Department explicitly singled out the case of India as something that would not appear on the agenda.⁵⁷⁵

Whatever the official function of the San Francisco Conference, its history cannot be confined to that of Great Power-level interactions nor to the official proceedings of the meeting.⁵⁷⁶ To be sure, these were significant and

⁵⁷³ Alger Hiss, *Recollections of a Life* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1988), 129-137.

⁵⁷⁴ Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, Chapter 4.

⁵⁷⁵ 'In the Nation. What San Francisco Is and Is Not to Be', *The New York Times*, 22 March 1945, 22.

⁵⁷⁶ For American civil society organisations at the San Francisco Conference see Elizabeth Borgwart, 'Race, Rights, and Nongovernment Organizations at the UN San Francisco Conference in Kevin M. Kruse and Stephen Tuck, *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York; Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012).

dramatic. The seats left vacant by the absence of a Polish delegation (because the USSR and the Western Allies could not agree on a Polish government), for example, bore ominous portents of Cold War international relations. Eventually, the Conference produced a Charter that brought the United Nations Organisation into being. However, the 'extremely voluminous' communications received by the Conference from non-official organisations, ranging from African American campaigners, and Free Palestine activists to Serbian Christians, Spanish Republicans, and American fascists, is a testament to the level of non-official civil society engagement that marked the occasion.⁵⁷⁷

The San Francisco Conference was a global public event, attended by an 'orgy of diplomatists, film stars, press agents, liquor salesmen, and Lithuanian bishops' and reported on by the 'twice as many people wearing press badges as delegates.'⁵⁷⁸ Officials may have viewed the 'deluge of appeals, suggestions and comments' they received as based on a 'misconception' of the function of the Conference.⁵⁷⁹ But non-official civil society actors - national, transnational, and global - recognised the occasion as an opportunity to influence the political agenda. Pandit was one of the most visible exemplars of this activism, announcing at a public meeting that

[T]he future does not belong to the three or four or five powers. It belongs to you and me and to our children, and we are going to fight for the future. And we are going to ensure that, in the future, man may live and may prosper and may contribute towards the building up of a better order.⁵⁸⁰

This was based on no illusions as to the official function of the Conference. Rather it was a fundamental challenge, at the level of civil society, to the *status quo*.

⁵⁷⁷ 'Mrs V. Pandit's Memorandum. Likely Rejection', *The Times of India*, 8 May 1945, 4; 'Big News and Little News: Contrasts at San Francisco', *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 May 1945, 4.

⁵⁷⁸ 'Big News and Little News.'

⁵⁷⁹ 'In the Nation. What San Francisco Is and Is Not to Be'.

⁵⁸⁰ 'Address by Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit at public meeting of National Committee for India's Freedom', 27 April 1945, IOR:L/I/1/M82, BL.

Back in India, Gandhi's views on the Conference were recorded in a statement to the press on April 17th. Noting the professed aim of creating an international organisation to maintain world peace, he declared: 'an indispensable preliminary to peace is the complete freedom of India from all foreign control.'⁵⁸¹ He also drew a wider significance from the issue of Indian independence, claiming that it would 'demonstrate to all the exploited races of the earth that their freedom [wa]s very near', and further argued that 'the camouflage of Indian representation through Indians nominated by British imperialism' was 'worse than no representation'.⁵⁸² However, while Pandit's campaign rhetoric chimed happily with the tenor of Gandhi's statement, it is notable that Pandit's activism in San Francisco did not receive any substantial support from him. Notwithstanding his earlier appeals to American opinion, Gandhi now thought nationalist propaganda efforts would be more profitably directed at Britain. Indeed, he held out little hope for the goal of international cooperation that the Conference represented and warned of a peace 'which threatens to be prelude to war bloodier still if possible.'⁵⁸³ Thus, when Pandit sent a telegram requesting that Gandhi endorse her request for funds from G.D. Birla, one of the Congress's biggest financial supporters, to finance her campaign in San Francisco, he replied simply: 'Not interfering'.⁵⁸⁴ Birla, meanwhile, rejected her request on the grounds that 'no advantage can accrue to India by propaganda in America'.⁵⁸⁵ Pandit's decision to continue, despite this opposition, marks her independence from Gandhi.

It was activism such as Pandit's that helped define the San Francisco Conference as a civil society event. Unperturbed by official pronouncements

⁵⁸¹ M.K. Gandhi, 'Statement to the Press', 17 April 1945, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 86, 189, <http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL086.PDF>, accessed 24 June 2016.

⁵⁸² Gandhi, 'Statement to the Press'.

⁵⁸³ M.K. Gandhi, 'Cable to Eleanor Roosevelt', 16 April 1945, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 85, 422. <http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL085.PDF>, accessed 24 June 2016.

⁵⁸⁴ M.K. Gandhi, 'Cable to Vijaylakshmi Pandit', 26 February 1945, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 86, 183, <http://gandhiserve.org/cwmg/VOL086.PDF>, accessed 24 June 2016.

⁵⁸⁵ G.D. Birla to Vijayalakshmi Pandit, 24 February 1945, File No. 61/44 – Poll (9), 41, NAI.

on the limits of the Conference agenda, Pandit presented her campaign, not as an attempt to derail the stated objective of the meeting, but as a means of helping the Conference to succeed in achieving the 'real and enduring peace' it aspired to.⁵⁸⁶ In order to do so, she argued, it was imperative that the Indian delegation be made up of 'representative' figures rather than British-appointed 'stooges'. Thus, what the India Office regarded as an attempt to smear the official Indian delegation, was presented as a bid to enable India to 'take her rightful part in the building up of that new structure which will give happiness and security to the human race.'⁵⁸⁷ With hindsight this can be interpreted as a proto-state level intervention that foreshadowed future independent India's foreign policy. At the time, however, when the future of India remained unclear, it was a rallying call for below-state level activism that challenged existing global power relations. For humanity to live harmoniously, Pandit urged, 'it [wa]s not enough that your leaders should sit in conclave and piece out the world and decide who should be suppressed and who should have their freedom.'⁵⁸⁸ Rather, it was incumbent on ordinary, global citizens to 'raise voices' to influence the future of the world.⁵⁸⁹

The Conference opened amid 'flash bulbs and flowers' at the San Francisco Opera House on 25th April.⁵⁹⁰ Two days later, Pandit addressed a large public meeting hosted by the NCIF, which 'was overfilled within 15 minutes of the opening of the doors' with '[l]iterally hundreds of people ...milling around outside trying to get in.'⁵⁹¹ Pandit gave a fifteen page speech demanding Indian independence in the name of universal peace and freedom, and the meeting concluded with the following resolution:

It is the sense of this public meeting of the citizens of San Francisco that immediate concession of freedom be granted to India and to all other

⁵⁸⁶ 'Address by Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit at public meeting of National Committee for India's Freedom', 27 April 1945, IOR:L/I/1/M82, BL.

⁵⁸⁷ 'Extract form a letter from Mr. R.T. Peel (India Office representative with the Indian Delegation at San Francisco), IOR:L/I/1/M82, BL; 'Address by Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit at public meeting of National Committee for India's Freedom', 27 April 1945, IOR:L/I/1/M82, BL.

⁵⁸⁸ 'Address by Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.'

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁰ 'Flash Bulbs and Flowers,' *Newsweek*, 7 May 1945, 55.

⁵⁹¹ 'Mrs. Pandit at San Francisco', *The Voice of India*, June 1945, V.L. Pandit Papers, 1st Instalment, Printed Material, Subject File No. 1, NMML.

subjugated and enslaved peoples. This is an inescapable pre-requisite for the success of the United Nations Conference, and the maintenance in the future of peace, and a genuine world organization.⁵⁹²

Just as Indian nationalist activists had done in the context of the League of Nations Disarmament Conference in Geneva twelve years earlier, Pandit's campaign generated publicity for the nationalist cause by hitching it to a 'global event'. This included, not just public meetings, but a speech at the California State Assembly, a debate before a two thousand-strong audience at the famous Friday Morning Club, and an address at the San Francisco Women of Achievement dinner, as well as radio appearances, cocktail parties and meetings with sympathetic Conference delegates. In so doing, as a member of civil society, Pandit became part of that event and influenced the evolution of discourses that came to shape the new world organisation.

Central to Pandit's civil society activism was the role of the press and her campaign made good use of the 'two thousand five hundred press, radio and newsreel representatives' present in San Francisco to cover the conference.⁵⁹³ Her purpose was announced on 26th April when she gave a press conference for 'more than 400 newspapermen from all over the world', just prior to the NCFI public meeting at the Scottish Rite Auditorium. She continued to make statements to the press throughout the conference, concluding on 18th June with a press conference and reception at the Mark Hopkins Hotel.⁵⁹⁴ According to the leader of the official Indian delegation at San Francisco, Sir Arcot Ramaswami Mudaliar, she 'ha[d] chosen a very bad moment from the publicity point of view, since the press are all so taken with the Conference itself that they have very little space to devote to Mrs. Pandit.'⁵⁹⁵ However, the documentary evidence suggests otherwise with her activity levels, and the unusual spectacle of a female Indian public figure, in themselves, making Pandit's propaganda campaign a media story. A

⁵⁹² 'Address by Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.'

⁵⁹³ <http://www.un.org/en/sections/history-united-nations-charter/1945-san-francisco-conference/index.html>, accessed 4 September 2016.

⁵⁹⁴ 'Mrs. Pandit at San Francisco'.

⁵⁹⁵ 'Extract from a letter from Mr. R.T. Peel'. For a detailed account of British establishment's impressions of Pandit's performances, see Ankit, 'In the Twilight of Empire'.

Reuters report described '[f]iery energetic Mrs Vijayalakshmi Pandit,' as 'so well-known a figure, recognizable by her white or black sari, that citizens flock after her in the streets to get her autograph or snap her picture'.⁵⁹⁶ 'The other day,' the reporter claimed, 'a crowd even ignored the Hollywood star, James Cagney, in a restaurant and trooped around her table to get her signature.'⁵⁹⁷ *Newsweek* identified her as one of the three 'liveliest women to attend the conference' and reported that 'Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, sister of the imprisoned Jawaharlal Nehru, ...in creamy sari and melodious English denounced India's representatives at the conference as British agents.'⁵⁹⁸ Writing to Pandit from the East coast, her friend Richard Walsh, was delighted by the publicity:

I have talked with French, British, American and Indian correspondents who have returned and have told me about the press conference. Yesterday Mr. Sheth gave us a glowing account of the meeting at the Scottish Rite Auditorium. There have also been some newspaper stories here and some radio comment. I congratulate you on a magnificent job.⁵⁹⁹

One reason Pandit received publicity was the fact that she was a woman. She did not explicitly tie her campaign for colonial freedom into a feminist campaign for gender equality. This she considered unnecessary due to a conviction that a more fundamental inequality lay in the imperialist world order, and an assumption that the new world order would automatically herald an era of more equal gender relations. But for contemporary observers the spectacle of a woman operating as 'sole spokesman' for a national cause, even in an unofficial role, was worthy of note. In one newspaper account Pandit was described as one of the 'three quick-tongued [women] representatives of the British Empire'.⁶⁰⁰ That Pandit's unofficial status and her fundamental opposition to the British Empire should be overlooked in order to emphasise her sex indicates how remarkable her

⁵⁹⁶ Reuters' review, printed in *Statesman*, 14 May 1945, quoted in Prasad (ed.), *Towards Freedom*. 253.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁸ 'Flash Bulbs and Flowers'.

⁵⁹⁹ Richard J. Walsh to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 25 May 1945, RJW, Series 2, Box 24, Folder 6, PSB.

⁶⁰⁰ 'Flash Bulbs and Flowers'.

presence was considered to be. That the article was printed alongside a cigarette advertisement aimed at 'successful men and lovely women' is no less revealing of contemporary gender expectations. Meanwhile, her activities were noted by feminist and other women's groups resulting in her being honoured by the San Francisco Women of Achievement 'World's Women of Fame' luncheon and an invitation to the National Women's Party local meeting. That Pandit should have been so celebrated because she was a woman indicates the limited role played by women generally in international politics. Only four of the fifty signatories to the United Nations Charter on the 26th June were women but even this was an historic achievement.⁶⁰¹

The centre-piece of Pandit's campaign in San Francisco was a memorandum, submitted on 2nd May to the Secretary General of the Conference, with the aim of bringing the case for India's independence before the Conference delegates. The memorandum demanded from the Conference 'an unequivocal acknowledgment and declaration of a Free India' and, further, an end to 'alien imperialism' in Asia.⁶⁰² Identifying imperialist rivalries as the real cause of the both World Wars, Pandit posited colonial freedom as the only realistic means of safe-guarding world peace. There would be 'no real peace on this earth,' she maintained, 'so long as [the colonized people of Asia] are denied justice.' In this way, she claimed, Indian independence, which was made to stand for colonial freedom everywhere, was a precondition of the peaceful global future to which the San Francisco Conference was theoretically dedicated.

Pandit's submission was not limited to the language of world peace. Significantly, she also sought to give renewed impetus to the concepts of 'freedom' and 'democracy' that had sustained the wartime alliance, but which had been subsumed somewhat by the rhetoric of 'peace' as the war drew to

⁶⁰¹ McCarthy, *Women of the World*, 155-156.

⁶⁰² 'Memorandum. Submitted by Madame Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit,' San Francisco, 2 May 1945, V.L. Pandit Papers, Second Instalment, Subject File 1, NMML.

a close. Making reference to the Atlantic Charter, 'the problem of India' was conceived of, not just as 'a cancerous menace to the prospects of lasting concord and harmony among nations', but as 'an acid test of the principles on which the hopes of the Conference are postulated'.⁶⁰³ Knowing the limited scope of the official Conference agenda, Pandit cannot have been surprised when the memorandum was rejected on the grounds that it was 'not germane'.⁶⁰⁴ However, the memorandum brought substance to and created publicity for the wider campaign.

Official Conference discussions relating to the setting up of a new trusteeship council (eventually created by Chapter XII of the United Nations Charter) to replace the League of Nations mandate system, provided further opportunity for publicity. At stake, Pandit claimed at a press conference on 20th May, were 'fundamental principles affecting the *bona fides* of the projected international organization as well as ... the future of hundreds of millions of dependent peoples now held in bondage [by] European imperialistic powers'.⁶⁰⁵ With the Conference divided over whether the objective of trusteeship was the 'self-government' or 'independence' of the trust territories, Pandit launched a blistering attack on the concept of 'self-government' which she described as 'an ancient weasel word... deliberately designed and has long been used in India and elsewhere to offer the shadow but never the substance of independence to subject peoples.' 'Nothing less', she asserted, 'than an unequivocal pledge of independence by the United Nations will avail to purge the world of unending exploitation and enslavement of millions of human beings.' Returning again to the wartime conception of freedom, she compared imperial power to the occupation of Western Europe by Nazi Germany. 'One would have supposed,' she remarked, 'that France, the Netherlands and Great Britain herself, which themselves came so near to enslavement would have learnt better'.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁴ Alger Hiss to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 11 May 1945, V.L. Pandit Papers, Second Instalment, Subject File 1, 13, NMML.

⁶⁰⁵ 'Statement by Mrs Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 20 May 1945', V.L. Pandit Papers, Second Instalment, Subject File 1, 17, NMML.

On the face of it, the British delegation remained aloof in the face of Pandit's campaign, with Antony Eden, then British Foreign Secretary, merely reiterating the Cripps offer of 1942 (which had been rejected by Congress) and declaring Britain's commitment to national freedom. Eden's statement that the Cripps proposals would be carried out as soon as Indians could unite (a reference to the divisions between the Congress and the Muslim League), however, was just the type of conditional commitment to independence to which nationalists protested. It gave Pandit ammunition to repeat nationalist grievances against the Cripps proposals and further draw attention to the continued incarceration of political prisoners in India.⁶⁰⁶ Meanwhile, the official Indian delegation, staged a clumsy attempt to discredit Pandit by planting a stenographer attached to the delegation at a press conference to ask awkward questions anonymously – a stunt quickly uncovered by Pandit's campaign and denounced privately by imperial officials as 'show[ing] a most lamentable lack of judgment'.⁶⁰⁷ For those intent on maintaining British imperial prestige before a global audiences such tricks only played into the hands of Pandit's 'tiresome' publicity.

At the end of June 1945, the San Francisco Conference produced the *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice* – a document providing for a new international organisation, the primary purpose of which was 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'.⁶⁰⁸ Pandit described the Charter, which also contained commitments to 'human rights', 'equality' and 'freedom', as 'an historic step forward in international relations' which amounted, she felt, to a considerable improvement on the initial proposals put forward by the 'Big Four' at Dumbarton Oaks. However, she remained skeptical as to the attitude of the United Nations towards colonial freedom and could not detect, in the case of

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁰⁷ 'Extract from Private & Secret letter from Sir John Colville to Mr. Amery dated 30th April, 1945', IOR:L/I/1/M82, BL.

⁶⁰⁸ *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>, accessed 4 September 2016.

British politicians, 'any departure from their traditional torism in respect either of India or of their attitude to imperialism and colonialism in general.'⁶⁰⁹

By the time the ceremonial signing of the United Nations Charter took place on 26th June, Congress leaders in India, had, in fact, been released for talks with the British to discuss the Wavell Plan - a notable, if faltering, step towards the transfer of power to Indians. However, in declaring that the Congress Party was committed to 'the freedom not only of India, but of Burma, Malaya, Indo-China and other countries of Asia,' Pandit publicly put the British government on notice, warning that nationalist India would brook no attempts to re-establish European imperial control over territories occupied by Japan during the war.⁶¹⁰ In addition, although tentatively welcoming the formation of an Executive Council made up of Indians as proposed by the Wavell Plan, Pandit indicated that if nationalist India had been officially represented at San Francisco 'the voice of India would have been heard differently, and ... more effectively on such issues as independence, trusteeship, the rights of small nations, etc.' Pandit evidently considered the work of the San Francisco Conference to be only partly complete and held to a vision of a more equal world order in which the dominance of the larger powers was diminished. Anticipating the role independent India would play in international affairs, a project in which she herself would be an important player, Pandit's campaign in San Francisco suggested that India might become a champion of the 'smaller' nations on the world stage.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered some of the ways Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit operated as 'a private citizen of the world' in the United States of America in 1944-45. She represented the Indian nationalist cause, but in operating

⁶⁰⁹ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 'Press Conference, Mark Hopkins Hotel, June 18, 1945', *The Voice of India*, June, 1945, V.L. Pandit Papers, 1st Instalment, Printed Material, Subject File No. 1, NMML.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*

through interactions with civil society she became part of a transnational, progressive network of below-state-level actors who sought, like the Congress, to re-order the power structures of the globe. It is true that amongst these actors were proponents of American imperialism, such as Henry Luce, whose vision for a new world clashed with the Indian nationalist opposition to Western global domination. However, in the main, Pandit's connections were to those who challenged white racial supremacy and sought a more equal global future, such as Pearl Buck, Richard Walsh, and African American groups. Central to these activities was the idea of harnessing public opinion through civil society and the media. These interactions cut across national borders drawing our attention to the ways Indian nationalism operated outside the nationalist-imperial binary in practical terms.

The San Francisco Conference on International Organisation acted as an important focus for global civil society and Pandit was a visible presence. While this brought little by way of resolution to the 'India Question', it contributed to the range of progressive voices, inside and outside the conference that challenged old hierarchies of power. This included representative from the NAACP who, as official 'consultants' within the American delegation campaigned on behalf of the colonised within the Conference. Interventions such as Pandit's lent weight to the the critique of Western imperialism and bolstered hopes of a more equal world.

Ideologically, Pandit's campaigns in America reveal the development of Mazzinian cosmopolitanism in Indian nationalist thought. Her refashioning of India's mission in the world in the new post-war context, which posited India as a champion of the 'enslaved people of Asia,' foreshadowed India's early interactions on the world stage as an independent power. The development of this strand of Indian foreign policy, seen in India's campaign against the Union of South Africa in the UN General Assembly in 1946 and in the Asian Relations Conference of 1947, is usually attributed to Jawarharlal Nehru. Yet

for the time being, Nehru was reduced to the role of spectator, his first telegram to his sister after his release from prison reading:

DARLING UNABLE WRITE TO YOU SINCE RELEASE OWING
CONTINUOUS TRAVELLING RUSH OF WORK STOP LONGING GO
KASHMIR BUT TIED UP HERE FOR FORTNIGHT STOP SITUATION
HERE FULL OF DIFFICULTIES BUT CARRYING ON STOP ALL OF
US FULL OF ADMIRATION FOR YOUR SPLENDID WORK IN
AMERICA.⁶¹¹

While in prison in 1942-1945, Nehru had written *The Discovery of India*, a book in which he outlined his vision for the future in which free Indians would 'lose their narrow nationalism and exclusiveness', 'open their minds and hearts to other peoples and other nations, and become citizens for this wide and fascinating world.'⁶¹² Yet while Nehru wrote these lines from an isolated prison cell in India, it was his younger sister who was already promoting this vision on the world stage.

⁶¹¹ File No. 61/44 – Poll (9), 58, NAI.

⁶¹² Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1949), 523.

CHAPTER 6

Arrival: Indian Women at the United Nations, 1945-46

The Charter of the United Nations states that it stands for the equality of men and women. But that equality will not just come naturally. It will not come to all unless women still buckle to in order to wrest a final victory for their recognition as citizens, as just human beings, relegating the question of sex to those purely human relations where nature will see that it is never forgotten.⁶¹³

Our nationalism may create trouble. Our narrow ideals may bring wars. Woman should therefore free man as well as herself of that narrow, sectarian idea and make him realise that he is not merely citizen of this country but citizen of the whole world.⁶¹⁴

In a photograph of the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Status of Women (SCSW) taken in May 1946, the group appears as an exemplary triumph of postwar, internationalist modernity.⁶¹⁵ Seven women, dressed in contrasting styles that reflect both their various origins and a measure of global homogeneity, are seated amid the plush, 1930s-era facilities of Hunter College, New York. On the right of this tableau, Bodil Bergrtrup, the Danish Chairman, addresses her colleagues. Beside her are Marie-Hélène Lefauchaux, a heroine of the French Resistance, Minerva Bernardino, the flamboyant feminist from the Dominican Republic, and Angela Jurdak, a Lebanese graduate of the American University in Beirut. On the corner sits the Polish diplomat Fryderyka Kalinowska, another survivor of Nazi occupation, next to the Chinese educator, Way Sung New. Bordering the far left of frame, armed with an extensive file of ideas, is the All India Women's Congress (AIWC) President and Indian nationalist activist Hansa Mehta. The image speaks of diversity, interconnection, and a hopeful future – an international group of experienced, educated women representing the promise of universal gender equality in the new world order. After decades of

⁶¹³ Anonymous, 'The International Alliance of Women' *Roshni*, September 1946, 39-41.

⁶¹⁴ Hansa Mehta, 'The Role of Woman in New India', November 1949, Hansa Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Speeches and Writings 11, 4, NMML.

⁶¹⁵ Sub-Commission on the Status of Women, EcoSoc Council, Photo: 224294, <http://www.unmultimedia.org/s/photo/detail/206/0206338.html>, accessed 20 March 2017. An almost identical image was published in *The New York Times* on 8 May 1946, 3.

struggle, women's rights had finally gained an official toe-hold in the global public sphere.



Figure 6: Members of the Sub Commission on the Status of Women, 8 May 1946. Left to Right: Hansa Mehta, India; Way Sung New, China; Fryderyka Kalinowski, Poland; Angela Jurdak, Lebanon; Marie Helene Lefauchaux, France; Bodgil Begtrup, Denmark. UN Photo.

This chapter examines the early contributions of Indian nationalist women to the work of the United Nations in the eventful months between the end of the Second World War in August 1945 and the founding of the Interim Government in India in September the following year. In November 1945, Amrit Kaur was appointed to lead the Indian delegation at the Conference for the Establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) where she sought to promote a Gandhian-inspired global vision of peace and equality. The following Spring, Hansa Mehta was appointed to the SCSW where she was responsible for defining the terms of new global standards for women's rights, and for promoting the SCSW's links to civil society. This represented an attempt to establish women as equal citizens at a global level which was linked to a parallel attempt by the AIWC to secure women's rights in India. At one level, these contributions mark the moment of arrival of Indian women on the world stage at the start of a new phase in global history. At the same time, they draw a line of continuity between the post-war world and the activities of the League of Nations in the

previous era. They are ambiguous in other ways too. These events took place in the uncertain period between imperial rule and independence, while at the same constituting activity at a level somewhere between the state and civil society. Ideologically, these early appearances at the United Nations represent renewed attempts to pursue the national interest amid evolving world conditions while also theoretically moving beyond the nation to create a more equal global future.

Amrit Kaur and the UNESCO Conference, London, November 1945

After the end of the San Francisco Conference in June 1945, events moved quickly in India and elsewhere. By the time the war in Asia came to its catastrophic climax in August, the election of a Labour government in Britain and widespread discontent on the Subcontinent brought the prospect of a British withdrawal closer, even if it remained unclear as to how events would proceed.⁶¹⁶ Meanwhile, plans for the establishment of the organs of the United Nations Organisation were progressing. Article 57 of the Charter of the United Nations had provided for a specialist educational organization and, accordingly, in November 1945, the Conference for the Establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) was held in London.⁶¹⁷ Members of forty-four national delegations were in attendance, which established an organisation dedicated to the purpose of preventing further war through education and cultural exchange.⁶¹⁸ Despite Amrit Kaur having been placed under house arrest during the Second World War, the Government of India now appointed her as head of the Indian delegation. By now she was a highly experienced leader of the Indian women's movement and a trusted associate of Gandhi with global civil society connections and, through her work for the AIWC, previous links to the League of Nations. As a result, she boasted personal capital as

⁶¹⁶ Bates, *Subalterns and Raj*, 171-174.

⁶¹⁷ *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, <http://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/>, accessed 18 June 2016.

⁶¹⁸ *Conference for the Establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. Held at the Institute of Civil Engineers, London, From the 1st to the 16th November, 1945*, ECO/CONF./29, UNESCO.

well as prestige by association and her outlook combined commitments to women's rights, transnational cooperation and Gandhian non-violence.

Kaur's contributions to the UNESCO conference highlight the extent to which nationalist women linked anticolonial nationalism to a wider global vision. Like many contemporaries, she viewed with horror the atomic destruction in Japan that had ended the war. 'Culture and civilisation stand today at the brink of disaster,' she warned the Conference, while the world was

'dominated by power politics, rent asunder by mutual suspicions and jealousies, still bent on the exploitation of weaker peoples, each country solicitous of his own freedom but indifferent to that of others.'⁶¹⁹

At the heart of the problem was imperially-wrought global inequality:

a world which is half bond and half free, half fed and half starved, where exploitation and social injustices flourish side by side with pious expressions of good intentions and pious sounding policies.

'Educational and cultural forces', she argued, might 'if directed in right channels, save humanity.' Even as Indian nationalists continued to pursue the campaign for national sovereignty, she argued that a 'spirit of understanding and world fellowship' must transcend the national interest:

No longer must children be taught to think in terms only of the glory of their own country; they must think of their country as being no more than a unit in and dedicated to the service of the larger whole of a world state.

Kaur's reference to a world state, so reminiscent of the hope expressed in Sarojini Naidu's claim that nationalism was only for 'transitional purposes', reflect the wider context in which she placed her national concerns.

Almost four decades before Benedict Anderson argued that the expansion of print media had enabled 'the nation' to be imagined into being, Kaur advocated for the mobilisation of the media in order to create a global community:

We must use the weapons of the press, the radio and the cinema to educate man to understand and appreciate his fellow men. We should be taught to see the goodness and the beauty that exist in every land. Translation must be made in every language of the books, both

⁶¹⁹ *Conference for the Establishment of UNESCO*, 33.

classic and modern, that reflect the soul of a people. Lying and ill-informed propaganda about any country or race must not be allowed.⁶²⁰

Kaur was arguing for a fully operational global public sphere in order to engender a sense of shared humanity. Mothers, regarded by nationalists as performing an important function in the formation of national identity, Kaur argued could also play a role in instilling a sense of universal love:

If goodwill is to be created, it will be primarily through the mothers of the race.... I believe it is women who will, if they can realise their latent moral strength, force the world to give up the doctrine of "might is right". The early training of the child is in their hands. I appeal to them to come forward in their thousands for the stupendous task of education children for the new world for which we all yearn.

The war had caused such momentous changes as to strongly signal the possibility of change. Yet if Amrit Kaur was a visionary, she was too much of a realist to assume that the moment had arrived when people might dispense with nationalism. Nor, indeed, did she appear to think this was desirable, at least in the short term. She herself continued to deploy the cosmopolitan-nationalist trope of India's special mission as a peacemaker. 'India has through her religions and philosophy, always stood for peace,' she claimed in the process of presenting Gandhi, Tagore and Iqbal as modern day sages. Kaur's cosmopolitanism, therefore, did not transcend the local. Rather the two spheres were intertwined in ideological and practical terms. For the rest of her career she combined her work in India as Minister for Health in the national government with work at UNESCO and the World Health Organisation, moving easily between the two spheres which she saw as interconnected parts of a universal whole.

The AIWC Annual Conference, 1945-46

If Kaur's performance at UNESCO announced the intention of Indian women to participate in the social work of the newly constituted global community, it was Hansa Mehta's work at the SCSW that represented their first substantial contribution. During her Presidential Address at the AIWC's 1945 annual

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.* Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso Books, 1983), Chapter 3.

conference, Hansa Mehta set out the vision that underpinned Indian women's contributions to world governance in the years immediately after the Second World War. 'We are on the eve of vast changes', Mehta informed delegates, before laying out her plans for her Presidency.⁶²¹ In the domestic context, this meant outlining a comprehensive 'Woman's Charter' to ensure that the new political settlement in India, when it came, would include full and equal citizenship for women. On the international front, Mehta indicated her intention to lead the AIWC in shaping the post-war global future. After the devastation of the war, she declared it 'time something was done to rescue the world and its civilisation.'⁶²² 'Our conference has always stood for non-violence and peace,' she reminded her audience, and she assured 'women all over the world that we shall join hands with them in their efforts to realize these ideas.'⁶²³ Mehta's assurance spoke of the deep confidence, self-belief and sense of duty with which Indian women approached the international community in the immediate post-war period. If the world was to be 'made new', as the founding of the United Nations promised, Mehta indicated that Indian women were poised to contribute to its re-structuring.

The AIWC's intention to renew its engagement with the global public sphere in the post-World War Two era was announced additionally in other ways. Without the restrictions that had prevented foreign delegates from travelling to India during the war there was a strong foreign presence at its 1945-46 annual meeting. Agatha Harrison, who was also instrumental in mediating between British government officials and Indian leaders during critical 'transfer of power' discussions, represented the Liaison Group of British Women's Organisations and expressed the hope that the AIWC might act as a bridge in the political deliberations then taking place.⁶²⁴ Amina El-Said, a delegate from Egypt, represented Arab women and her presence revived

⁶²¹ Hansa Mehta, 'Presidential Address before 18th Session of the All-India Women's Conference at Hyderabad,' *Roshni*, February 1946, 9.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁴ 'No More Delaying Indian Freedom: Women's Conference Demand', *The Times of India*, 31 December 1945, 5.

interest in the idea of a second All-Asian Women's Conference.⁶²⁵ Hanna Rydh, the Swedish Vice-President of the International Alliance of Women (IAW), and other delegates from Europe were also in attendance. Jointly these foreign women issued a statement to the press expressing admiration for the Indian women's movement and proposing 'an interchange of frequent visits between prominent feminists of Eastern and Western countries.'⁶²⁶ A message from Russian women read out at the conference further invited members of the AIWC to participate in the Women's International Democratic Federation conference to be held in 1946 in Paris, although AIWC involvement in this communist-affiliated organization never came to much. Representing more accurately the flavour of transnational politics in which AIWC leaders engaged in was a message from Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, the veteran British suffragette and wife of the newly-appointed Secretary of State for India, who celebrated 'the great record of gentleness and non-violence that the women of India have given as their contribution to world history.'⁶²⁷

Such alliances were based on a sense that, in spite of the imbalance in global power relations, 'progressive' women were united in solidarity against conservative forces. Even more unifying was the idea that women had a special contribution to make in building a peaceful future. Pethick-Lawrence's conviction that 'upon women as mothers of all living human beings rests the mission of reconciliation' echoed the sentiments of Amrit Kaur who, at the UNESCO conference a month earlier, had appealed to the 'latent moral strength' of women to 'force the world to give up the doctrine of "might is right".'⁶²⁸ Certainly Hansa Mehta saw women's transnational alliances as a means of working towards 'real peace', but they also created an opportunity for bringing nationalist grievances before an international

⁶²⁵ 'Message to WILPF Congress from Miss Agatha Harrison, 28 July 1946', WILPF, International Circular Letter, No.3/1946, November 1946, WILPF 3/7, LSE

⁶²⁶ 'No More Delaying Indian Freedom.'

⁶²⁷ 'An Important Message', *Roshni*, February 1946, 32.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*; *Conference for the Establishment of UNESCO*, 33.

audience.⁶²⁹ For example, she used her 'Presidential Address' to publically oppose the use of Indian troops in Indonesia, the prosecution of Indian National Army officers who had fought alongside Japan in the war, and the continued imprisonment of political prisoners in India, describing these issues as policies that 'sow[ed] the seeds of bitterness.' Foreign visitors were encouraged to 'impress this fact on your politicians whose short-sighted policy is responsible for the delay in establishing real peace.'⁶³⁰

The AIWC annual meeting left observers in little doubt of Indian women's intention to influence global events, nor of the anti-imperialist stance they would take. Referring to unrest in Syria, Lebanon, Indochina and Indonesia, the AIWC expressed 'alarm and distress' at attempts by western powers to suppress 'freedom movements [across the] East and Far East.'⁶³¹ Sending greetings 'to all those who joined them in the common struggle against imperialism', the delegates invoked this transnational solidarity as a means of 'lay[ing] the foundations for a larger brotherhood of nations.'⁶³² Of particular interest were events unfolding in Palestine, where controversial plans for the creation of a Jewish state were being mooted. Responding to Arab opposition to this proposal (carried directly to them by the delegate from Egypt), the AIWC issued a resolution registering its 'heartfelt sympathy and moral support [for] the demands of the Pan-Arab Association of Women.'⁶³³ Defending this resolution, Hansa Mehta placed the Palestine issue in the wider context of European imperial dominance: 'we believe in freedom for all and are up against foreign countries' interference in the affairs of other nations.'⁶³⁴ The AIWC's interest in the global context of European dominance prompted Harrison to remark on 'a "tide" in the Far East that we of the West are little conscious of.'⁶³⁵ Ever sensitive to Indian opinion,

⁶²⁹ Mehta, 'Presidential Address,' 6.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁶³¹ 'No More Delaying Indian Freedom'.

⁶³² *Ibid.*

⁶³³ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁴ 'Women's Status in New Order: Conference Decisions, *The Times of India*, 4 January 1946, 3.

⁶³⁵ 'Message to WILPF Congress from Miss Agatha Harrison'.

Harrison urged her European and American colleagues to reform their movement:

There is a natural impatience with organisations which call themselves "International" that pay little attention in their thought and action to affairs in that part of the world where so much of the human race is concentrated. ... too often conferences are held in the West; delegates are asked to attend at short notice, and therefore, perforce, people of these [non-European] countries long resident in the West, and perhaps not much in touch with the thought of their countries, attend instead.⁶³⁶

Harrison's report draws attention to some of the limitations of the international women's movement, which continued to attract criticism from Indian women. However, it also indicates that by engaging with international feminists, Indian nationalist women in the first half of the twentieth century were, to some extent, able to influence and change perceptions amongst their Western counterparts.

The flagship statement of Mehta's 'Presidential Address' was the proposed drafting of a Women's Charter, a document that was to be completed by members of the AIWC Standing Committee and submitted to the Indian authorities later that year. While the introduction of a detailed outline of the Women's Charter signaled the desire of the Indian women's movement to lay women's political, social and economic rights as the foundations of postcolonial Indian society, the move was linked to a wider attempt to introduce gender equality in the international sphere. Mehta declared it 'gratifying' that the Charter of the United Nations accepted the principle of 'equality between man and woman,' which she interpreted, in turn, as part of the new organisation's commitment to 'fundamental human rights'.⁶³⁷ Human rights and gender equality were not new concepts in India, Mehta emphasised, referring to the Congress Fundamental Rights Declaration in 1931. Now Mehta announced her intention to tether the promise of new India to the hopes of progressive global opinion at the United Nations: 'Let us

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁷ Mehta, 'Presidential Address,' 9.

women of the world unite to establish a real peace whose foundations rest on freedom for all, tolerance, justice and equality.’⁶³⁸

Gender Equality and the Birth of the United Nations

The Second World War had dealt a catastrophic blow to women’s international activities centred on the League of Nations. Yet, despite this disruption, the ‘embers of women’s activism, smoldering in the ashes of the League of Nations, flamed anew as the legacy of internationalism passed to the new United Nations.’⁶³⁹ The story, though, is one of both continuity and change. While existing organisations continued to be active, the changing world order affected the contours of the international women’s movement. In the post-war era, European and even American women would play a proportionally reduced role, while women from from Asia and Latin America became more active, vocal and visible. The new United Nations Organisation provided the international space for this activity and became an important site where women advanced their claims to equal citizenship. In this sense, from a global perspective, the rupture caused by World War Two was as enabling for the international women’s movement in the long run as it was devastating in the short term.

The Liaison Committee of International Women’s Organisations had been formed in order to streamline feminist interactions with the League of Nations. At the San Francisco Conference in 1945 it was again in operation and was active in pressuring delegates to embed a commitment to gender equality in the new world organisation. Although there was a strong aversion amongst some of the female delegates at the Conference to pressing for such a commitment, others, notably Bertha Lutz of the Brazillian delegation, worked tirelessly at San Francisco to include the principle of equality in the Charter. Lutz was horrified at the apparent complacency of British and American women in the field of gender relations. Virginia Gildersleeve, an

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶³⁹ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 222.

American delegate took the line that asking for women's rights was unseemly and undermined the claim to equality.⁶⁴⁰ Wary of antagonizing conservatives who were 'bored and irritated' by talk of women's rights, she also worried that the women's movement confined women solely to 'feminine issues'.⁶⁴¹ Ellen Wilkinson, a British MP and privy councilor, was of the opinion that her own career achievements were enough to indicate that a separate commission to improve women's status was unnecessary.⁶⁴² These approaches caused Lutz to report to a colleague that 'the mantle is falling off the shoulder of the Anglo-Saxons and we shall have to do the next stage of the battle for women'.⁶⁴³

Lutz's assessment would have resonated with the several Indian women who worked towards, or otherwise promoted, gender equality at the United Nations. The prospect of Indian independence, alongside the creation of a new international organisation built on the rhetoric of 'freedom', appeared to offer a real opportunity for Indian women to play a role in shaping the new world along more equal lines. As we saw in Chapter 3, the AIWC had laid claim to the concept of fundamental individual rights since at least the franchise campaign of the 1930s and this emphasis was considered to be of particular importance in India because, in many instances under Hindu law and customarily, women were conceived of as part of a family unit rather than as an individual in society. It was for this reason that Indian women had, inexplicably to some British feminists, opposed the so-called 'wife vote' during the 1930s franchise campaign. Nevertheless, Mehta was acutely aware that abstract guarantees of equality would not alone be effective in bringing about the desired goals. Historically, the Indian women's movement had argued for a combination of legal and social reform measures to improve the status of women. Agitation for legal reform of marriage and labour,

⁶⁴⁰ Margaret E. Galey, 'Forerunners in Women's Quest for Partnership,' in Anne Winslow (ed.), *Women, Politics, and the United Nations* (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1995).

⁶⁴¹ McCarthy, *Women of the World*, 155; Sluga, "Spectacular Feminism," 47.

⁶⁴² McCarthy, *Women of the World*, 155

⁶⁴³ Quoted in Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 222.

campaigns for female suffrage, and the establishment of educational and healthcare facilities were all important aspects of their activities.

This wide-ranging approach was consolidated in the AIWC's Women's Charter of 1946: a blueprint for action which, it was hoped, would determine gender relations in independent India. Later, as members of the Constituent Assembly and the Parliament in Delhi, Mehta and Amrit Kaur became tireless advocates for the introduction of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) – an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to remove community-specific cultural practices that discriminated against women.⁶⁴⁴ The Women's Charter sought to establish the Indian woman 'as an individual and as a citizen' in the new nation.⁶⁴⁵ Intrinsic to this status were the fundamental right to equality, civic rights as empowered voters and elected officials, and socio-economic rights such as education, healthcare, labour equality and marriage rights. Full and equal status was essential, the Charter decreed, not just on the grounds of personal development, but so that women could fully contribute both to the building of modern India and to the future of the wider world. The duties of women included being 'prepared to serve the nation', 'fight[ing] against the social evils which retard[ed] the progress of this country,' educating children 'to become good citizens', and 'striv[ing] to the utmost for world peace.'⁶⁴⁶

The logic of the Indian Women's Charter as national and global social service carried over to Indian women's work at the United Nations where they conceived of their participation as contributing to the post-war global community as citizens of the world. As early as 1933, Amrit Kaur had proposed the involvement of Indian women at the League of Nations as a contribution to world progress. By 1946, the AIWC was deeply invested in this idea as it appeared to offer a way for Indians not only to challenge the existing *status quo* but to build an alternative future. Thus, a commitment to 'world progress' inflected all Indian women's interactions with the United

⁶⁴⁴ Chaudhuri, *Indian's Women's Movement*, Chapter 6.

⁶⁴⁵ 'Draft of Indian Women's Charter Rights', *Roshni*, June 1946, 12-25.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

Nations. Hansa Mehta presented the work of the SCSW as a means of achieving the principles set forth in the preamble of the Charter of the United Nations. Its purpose, she explained, was to help achieve two purported aims, namely to 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of war' and, most relevantly, 'to affirm faith in fundamental human rights'.⁶⁴⁷ Speaking the following year at the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), she described the purpose of gender equality as allowing women to 'take [their] rightful place in society and give [their] full share in the building of a happy and peaceful world which is the purpose behind all the activities of the United Nations.'⁶⁴⁸

The Sub-Commission on the Status of Women and the Women's Charter

Just four months after unveiling plans for an Indian Women's Charter at the AIWC meeting in Sind, Hansa Mehta travelled to New York to take part in the first meeting of the SCSW. In the bustling temporary headquarters of the new UN, Mehta was a symbol of change and historical rupture. On one hand, she represented the slow emergence of women in prominent positions in inter-governmental global politics; on the other, she was an embodiment of the shift away from European imperial dominance. Only a year earlier, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit had protested against the exclusion of nationalist India from the San Francisco Conference. Now, Mehta's participation in the SCSW indicated the possibility of a new egalitarian future in which women and the previously colonised would fully contribute to society as leaders and equal citizens in both the national and global contexts. But Mehta was also a figure of continuity – a bridge to the past in the global history of the movement for women's rights. As a representative of the AIWC, she brought to the SCWC experience learnt from Indian campaigns for women's rights and national freedom, along with knowledge gained from links to transnational civil society

⁶⁴⁷ Quoted in Hansa Mehta, 'The U.N.O. Sub-Commission on the Status of Women', Hansa Mehta Papers, Second Instalment, Speeches and Writings, Folder 20, NMML.

⁶⁴⁸ Hansa Mehta, 'Observations of the Report of the Status of Women Commission', 8 March 1947, Hansa Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Speeches and Writings by Her, Folder 6, NMML.

and intergovernmental organisations in the interwar years. In contributing to attempts at the UN to engender a new blueprint for global citizenship, Mehta drew on this wide experience and contributed a vision that fused women's rights with an anti-colonial perspective.

The SCSW, which met in April and May 1946, was a sub-committee of the Commission for Human Rights (CHR). Both bodies fell under the jurisdiction of ECOSOC, an institution brought into existence by Chapter X of the UN Charter. The remit of ECOSOC included the promotion of 'human rights' and 'fundamental freedoms'.⁶⁴⁹ Bringing a specifically Indian nationalist interpretation of liberal feminism to bear on the new international organisation, Mehta sought to clarify precisely who constituted 'humanity' and to whom human rights applied. At the same time, by occupying this international terrain, she affirmed the right of the previously marginalised – both women and non-Western actors - to contribute to the establishment of the postwar global community.

The SCSW, it was felt by its supporters, was an opportunity to establish a global commitment to gender equality, but its very existence was acknowledged by its members to be precarious. 'Ordinarily', Mehta reported in the AIWC's organisational mouthpiece, *Roshni*, 'the Commission appointed to deal with Human Rights would have also dealt with the rights of women' and the justification for creating a separate sub-commission to specifically address women's rights was widely contested.⁶⁵⁰ The idea of a sub-commission had been mooted, but then rejected, at the San Francisco Conference with the entire question of women's rights being assigned to the CHR.⁶⁵¹ Only in February 1946, under pressure from women's organisations and women delegates at the UN, did ECOSOC approve the creation of a

⁶⁴⁹ *Charter of the United Nations*, Chapter X, Article 62.2.

⁶⁵⁰ Mehta, 'The U.N.O. Sub-Commission.'

⁶⁵¹ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 223. See also Galey, 'Forerunners in Women's Quest for Partnership'.

separate sub-commission.⁶⁵² This struggle to get the SCSW established reflected the marginal status of women's rights. Writing to Pearl Buck from Lucknow, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit lamented the lack of attention Mehta's work received in the Indian press.⁶⁵³ Buck responded with an even more pessimistic assessment:

Unfortunately this sub commission was very badly reported, with complete lack of sympathy and even with sarcasm. You know the somewhat jeering attitude with which women are regarded in the United States.⁶⁵⁴

Mehta, who met three times with Buck during the time of the SCSW, and who shared a platform with her at a meeting of the East and West Association, would have been all too aware of this opposition, but such challenges can only have heightened the sense of 'great responsibility' that she and her colleagues assumed.⁶⁵⁵ The purpose of the first session of the SCSW was to draft a report defining its scope and programme of work, which was to be presented to the CHR for approval before being passed to ECOSOC. This was a genuine opportunity to give substance to the abstract promise of equality outlined in the UN Charter, and various women's organisations sent observers to monitor proceedings. It was a momentous task, and the SCSW took place under the prevailing sense that 'women all over the world are watching and awaiting the results.'⁶⁵⁶

Mehta repeatedly stressed that she saw no inherent distinction between the rights of women and human rights, yet she believed that equal rights could not be realised without special attention being paid to women. This reflected

⁶⁵² Margaret E. Galey, 'Women Find a Place,' in Winslow (ed.), *Women, Politics, and the United Nations*, 13; Mehta, 'The U.N.O. Sub-Commission on the Status of Women'.

⁶⁵³ Pandit to Mrs Walsh, 3 July 1946, Pearl Buck Papers, Series 2, Box 29, Folder 14, PSB.

⁶⁵⁴ Pearl Buck to Mrs Pandit, 13 August 1946, Series 2, Box 29, Folder 14, PSB.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*; Bergtrup, quoted in *Summary Record of the Ninth Meeting of the Sub-Commission of the Status of Women, Held at Gillet Hall, Hunter College, New York, 13 May 1946 at 3.30pm*, E/HR/ST/16, 2.

⁶⁵⁶ Bernardino, quoted in *Summary Record of the Second Meeting of the Sub-Commission of the Status of Women, Held at Gillet Hall, Hunter College, New York, 1 May 1946 at 10.30am*, E/HR/ST/7, 2, UN records <http://unbisnet.un.org> (hereafter UN).

a consensus in the global women's movement at the time, although it is notable this approach differed from the Indian women's position stated during the franchise campaign of the 1930s, during which they adopted the policy of 'fair field, no favour.' Nevertheless, Mehta felt compelled to present her position as a uniquely Indian one. Her pursuit of women's rights, she told the India League in London en route to New York, was quite distinct from western feminism. 'The outlook of Indian women is different from that of western women,' she insisted. 'We have no narrow feminist ideas.'⁶⁵⁷ Later at a National Committee for Indian Freedom dinner in New York, she reiterated that '[w]e are not thinking of women as women, but women as human beings, as part of humanity.'⁶⁵⁸ In making these claims, Mehta presented Indian women as a force for unity and peace in the new global order, reflecting the non-sectarian model for the pursuit of women's rights publicly claimed by nationalist women in the Indian context.

Mehta may have made utopian-sounding speeches, but when it came to the work of the SCSW, Mehta was less an idealist than an efficient bureaucrat who ensured the SCSW became an entity of substance at the United Nations. The immediate achievement of the SCWC was to expand on the ambitions of previous work at the League of Nations regarding the status of women. During the 1930s, women's organisations had campaigned for global commitments to equality.⁶⁵⁹ Although the response of the League of Nations was patchy, one result of this pressure was the appointment, in 1937, of a 'Committee of Experts' to survey the legal status of women across the world. The Committee met three times between 1938 and 1939 but inevitably its work was disrupted by the outbreak of war. Many at the United Nations, including the Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs who opened the first meeting of the SCSW, assumed that the SCSW would simply carry on and update this previous work.⁶⁶⁰ Over the course of its nine

⁶⁵⁷ 'Human Rights for All', *The Times of India*, 27 April 1946, 8.

⁶⁵⁸ 'India's Future Status: Mrs Hansa Mehta's View', 21 May 1946, 5.

⁶⁵⁹ Miller, 'Geneva – The Key to Equality'.

⁶⁶⁰ *Summary Record of the First Meeting of the Sub-Commission of the Status of Women, Held at Gillet Hall, Hunter College, New York, 26 April 1946 at 5.10pm*, E/HR/ST/3, 1, UN.

meetings and numerous drafting sessions, however, the SCSW expanded this remit significantly.

As soon as the SCSW completed initial formalities, the delegates moved to expand its scope. The pre-war legal survey, it was thought, was wholly insufficient and Mehta was the first to propose that the SCSW should include 'political, civic, economic, educational, social and domestic fields' in the definition of women's rights.⁶⁶¹ As she later explained, '[i]t is not a dry, legal survey we desire but a survey of laws and their application particularly where they adversely affect women.'⁶⁶² According to Mehta, the whole methodology of appointing legal experts was flawed and instead she and her colleagues advocated a more comprehensive, 'whole-public-sphere' survey that included consultation with governments, women's organisations, labour unions and academic institutions. On top of this, the SCSW proposed a worldwide campaign of 'vigorous propaganda' to create favourable public opinion through radio, cinema and print media. To achieve the necessary changes, a 'Women's Affairs' department would be created within the United Nations Secretariat and measures to facilitate internal collaboration at the organisation would be introduced. Other proposals included the introduction of programmes for the training of women and the international exchange of women's knowledge and skills. These measures drew strongly on the pre-war, Geneva-based work of international women's organisations and furthered the development of the globalising processes of international cooperation.

Mehta's most notable contribution to the work of the SCSW was the suggestion that delegates draw up a broad outline of how women's rights should be defined.⁶⁶³ If, she argued, the purpose of the SCHR was 'to raise the status of women to equality with men in all fields of human enterprise', it

⁶⁶¹ *Summary Record*, E/HR/ST/7, 1. Mehta, 'The U.N.O. Sub-Commission.'

⁶⁶² Hansa Mehta, 'Report on the Sub-commission on the Status of Women to the Commission on Human Rights,' *Roshni*, April 1947, 50.

⁶⁶³ *Summary Record*, E/HR/ST/7.

was necessary to lay out what was meant by 'equality.'⁶⁶⁴ Just as the AIWC's Indian Woman's Charter defined the terms of women's citizenship in free India, Mehta argued for the establishment of a blueprint for citizenship that would apply globally. This proactive step, she argued, could be achieved without waiting for the results of the survey.

The final report produced by the SCSW included a women's charter that strikingly resembled the Indian Women's Charter as suggested to the AIWC a few months earlier. The United Nations version was necessarily shorter than the Indian charter (the SCSW having been advised to 'simplify' and 'condense' by Eleanor Roosevelt as Chair of the CHR) and there were variations in emphasis and detail.⁶⁶⁵ Yet both documents framed women's rights in the same political, civil, socio-economic terms. Furthermore, the first three paragraphs of the Preamble section of the Indian Charter are identical to a section included in the SCSW report. That the two documents have such substantial overlap indicates how much influence Indian feminism had at the UN in 1946, and how invested the Indian women's movement was in the wider global movement for women's empowerment. Mehta herself travelled easily between the two spheres, interlinking the development of Indian and global feminism in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.

The Sub-Commission on the Status of Women and Global Civil Society

As the SCSW session progressed, it became evident that the delegates were faced with an important existential question: would the SCSW function as a transnational, civil society-type entity that transcended the state or would it represent, and effectively become an instrument of, national governments? On the whole, the delegates favoured the former. After all, the SCSW traced its roots to the civil society activism of the international women's movement

⁶⁶⁴ *Rapporteur's Report of the First Session of the Sub-Commission on the Status of Women*, 13 May 1946, E/HR/ST/13, 3, UN.

⁶⁶⁵ *Summary Record of the Seventh Meeting of the Sub-Commission of the Status of Women, Held at Gillet Hall, Hunter College, New York, 9 May 1946 at 2.30pm*, E/HR/ST/15, 2, UN.

and greatly owed its existence to pressure from this lobby. The work of the SCSW, by moving beyond the limited legal scope it was originally assigned, carried on this tradition and in so doing, the SCSW took on the character of an activist body rather than limiting itself to technical work. In its proposed methods of implementation, the SCSW borrowed heavily from the pre-war international organisations. The suggested tactic of creating propaganda for distribution through the medium of cinema had been a stock strategy of all major women's organisations since the 1930s and the idea of promoting transnational knowledge exchange reflected the long held transnational feminist practice of holding 'Summer Schools' and international conferences. The idea of creating a 'Women's Affairs' department in the UN Secretariat, meanwhile, was an idea that built on the unofficial activities of the Liaison Committee of International Women's Organisations in Geneva and their interactions with Gabrielle Radziwill in the League of Nations Secretariat.

Amongst the SCSW delegates, Mehta and Bodil Bergtrup probably had the closest connection to the pre-war civil society activism of the international women's organisations, which had themselves been so far somewhat sidelined at the United Nations. The AIWC had been linked to the IAWSEC and the WILPF since the 1920s and, *en route* to New York, Mehta had further cultivated these links by meeting with members of the Liaison Committee of British Women's Organisations in London.⁶⁶⁶ Reflecting this allegiance, as a member of the SCSW, Mehta sought to maximise the influence of the transnational women's movement at the United Nations. Like its prewar predecessor, the new global campaign for women's rights, Mehta argued, must be rooted in transnational civil society and be beyond the reach of governments. Mehta's endorsement of the methods of the prewar international women's activism should not be mistaken for uncritical acceptance of its historical role, however. Mehta did not advocate simply recreating the European-dominated movement of the prewar era. What she envisaged was a much more extensive and egalitarian global network, as her

⁶⁶⁶ 'General Office News and Notes', *Roshni*, June 1946, 52.

meeting with the Egyptian feminist Amina El Said during a stopover in Cairo indicated.⁶⁶⁷

The question of civil society versus state involvement came to a head in a discussion over future appointments to the SCSW. Mehta and others argued that members of the SCSW should be appointed by ECOSOC in their individual capacity, essentially from a global pool of prominent women.⁶⁶⁸ Marie-Hélène Lefauchaux, took a different view. A member of the wartime Resistance in Paris and of the post-occupation French Constituent Assembly, Lefauchaux argued that women should be appointed by national governments. This drew on the established European narrative that women's contribution to national war efforts legitimated their inclusion in the *body politic*. Clearly responding to the French national trauma caused by the German occupation, she argued that in previously occupied countries, such appointments could be a way of recognising women's service to the nation. Other delegates, however, reiterated that the SCSW should be independent of national governments. The Polish delegate, Fryderyka Kalinowska, raised the issue of 'backward countries' (alluding to Trust territories) and noted that if their women were to be represented they must be appointed directly rather than through their governments – a point that must have seemed relevant to Mehta given the problems the AIWC had experienced in circumventing the influence of the India Office in an earlier era. Both Mehta and Angela Jurdak, the delegate from Lebanon (a former French Mandate territory), stressed the importance of the SCSW maintaining independence from national authorities. As Jurdak viewed it, '[t]he Sub-Commission is an international body and should be free from party politics.'⁶⁶⁹ This linking of the SCSW to feminist civil society suggests an ambition to move beyond international politics and institute cosmopolitan transnational cooperation. It would permanently define women's rights activism at ECOSOC. By 1951, nineteen international non-

⁶⁶⁷ 'General Office News and Notes', 52.

⁶⁶⁸ *Summary Record of the Fourth Meeting of the Sub-Commission of the Status of Women, Held at Gillet Hall, Hunter College, New York, 3 May 1946 at 10.50am, E/HR/ST/9, 4, UN.*

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

governmental organisations (NGOs), including the AIWC, were affiliated to the SCSW's successor, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).⁶⁷⁰ In the present day, NGOs continue to be 'a critical element' in the work of the CSW, and are acknowledged as being 'influential in shaping the current global policy framework on women's empowerment and gender equality.'⁶⁷¹

At the time, the idealism of the proposal to delink the SCSW from international politics struck some observers as rather naive. As René Cassin, an *ex officio* delegate from the CHR, pointed out, it was unrealistic for the SCSW to hope to function without government support because ECOSOC would never make appointments to the SCSW without the backing of that appointee's national government. Cassin was pointing out the in-built constraints put on transnational solidarity by the UN system. Nevertheless, the SCSW stood by its commitment to civil society by recommending that members of the SCSW should be appointed in their individual capacity rather than through their governments. Furthermore, the realisation that the SCSW could not avoid government control gave a boost to its efforts to maintain links with women's organisations. In response to Cassin's comments, the SCSW made a formal request to ECOSOC:

For the efficient handling of the work of the United Nations, it is important that the Sub-Commission on the Status of Women should stimulate the interest of women of the international and national organizations to collaborate with these organizations and co-ordinate their efforts. Therefore the Sub-Commission requests the Economic and Social Council to refer to it all communication and information received concerning all matters of interest to women.⁶⁷²

As the SCSW session came to an end, Bergtrup's final remarks expressed the hope that women's civil society organisations would engage with and contribute to the work of the SCSW:

I am sure there will be found gaps here and there when the women's organizations all over the world – as we wish they will – carefully go

⁶⁷⁰ 'An Intervention by the International Federation of University Women Before the Commission' in Janet Robb, AAUW, 'The Work of the Commission on the Status of Women', Hansa Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Subject File 17, 135, NMML.

⁶⁷¹ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/ngo-participation#sthash.KnNXjPjk.dpuf>, accessed 8 April 2017.

⁶⁷² *Summary Record of the Fifth Meeting of the Sub-Commission of the Status of Women, Held at Gillet Hall, Hunter College, New York, 3 May 1946 at 10.50am*, E/HR/ST/11, 1, UN.

through it and the programme will be more complete when we get their suggestions.⁶⁷³



Figure 7: Members of the Sub Committee on the Status of Women at a press conference, 14 May 1946. Left to Right: Angela Jurdak, Lebanon; Fryderyka Kalinowski, Poland; UN Photo Bodgil Begtrup, Denmark; Minerva Bernardino, Dominican Republic; Hansa Mehta, India. UN Photo.

In the middle of May, the SCSW presented its report to the CHR. It contained a summary of the discussions, a statement of ideals, an outline of policy aims, and a twelve-point program of action.⁶⁷⁴ However, the response of the CHR immediately highlighted a major obstacle. Although it accepted a good deal of the report, the CHR blocked the SCSW's policy aims which, crucially to members of the SCSW, included socio-economic as well as political reforms.⁶⁷⁵ This challenge, along with earlier signs that the SCSW might come into conflict with the CHR, prompted members of the SCSW to lobby for the promotion of the SCSW to the status of a full Commission directly under ECOSOC. In June, ECOSOC endorsed this and, on 21 June 1946, the new CSW was created by Council resolution 11(II). The CSW met

⁶⁷³ *Summary Record of the Ninth Meeting of the Sub-Commission of the Status of Women, Held at Gillet Hall, Hunter College, New York, 13 May 1946 at 3.30pm, E/HR/ST/16, 2.*

⁶⁷⁴ *Rapporteur's Report, m E/HR/ST/13.*

⁶⁷⁵ Galey, 'Women Find a Place'.

for the first time in February 1947 and quickly moved to reinstate the original policy aims agreed by the SCSW and to reconfirm its links to the wider international women's movement.

Mehta was not amongst those to personally lobby for full Commission status, nor would she participate in the CSW when it convened in 1947. Yet as a member of ECOSOC she defended the proposal, pointing out the danger of the issue of human rights eclipsing women's rights. 'In the past the claims of women were apt to be forgotten,' she warned colleagues at ECOSOC, reeling off examples from American and French republican history.⁶⁷⁶ Furthermore, she pointed out, women's status was inferior 'not merely from the denial of her political rights but in many cases also from the denial of economic, civil and social rights'. She therefore argued that

[a] separate commission is ... necessary in order that it may pay more effective attention to the problems that affect women all over the world and bring to light her real position in society so that measures may be taken to improve it.

In doing so she helped secure the future of the CSW, an organisation that continues to work with global civil society to promote women's rights globally to this day.

Conclusion

Several months after Mehta's work on the SCSW was complete, Jawaharlal Nehru, as head of the recently formed Interim Government, announced to the Constituent Assembly in Delhi his intention that independent India should become a significant global player:

India is such a country that by virtue, not only of her large size and population, but of her enormous resources and her ability to exploit those resources, she can immediately play an important and vital part in world affairs.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁶ Hansa Mehta, 'Observations of the Report of the Status of Women Commission', 8 March 1947, Hansa Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Speeches and Writings by her, Folder 6, NMML.

⁶⁷⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Aims and Objects of the Constituent Assembly', Speech at Constituent Assembly, 13 December 1946, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Series II, Vol. 1, (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1984), 249.

The early interventions of Indian women at the United Nations show that this project was already in motion. In the post-war context, India's sense of special mission as a peace-maker was lent new relevance and underpinned India's sense of identity on the world stage. But if utopian pronouncements framed women's contributions, Hansa Mehta's work on the SCSW indicates a more practical focus. Mehta was instrumental in defining an approach to women's rights at the United Nations based on a conception of women as full and equal citizens, that, it was hoped, would apply globally as well as in India. Furthermore, as one of the most vigorous advocates of linking the work of the SCSW to the international women's movement, she helped institute a framework through which civil society organisations were officially included in the work of the United Nations. So while, at one level, Mehta's was a contribution that helped define the soon-to-be-independent nation as a geo-political entity, it should also be understood as part of a below-state-level history that cut across national boundaries.

CHAPTER 7

After Independence: Hansa Mehta and the United Nations Commission for Human Rights, 1947 – 1952

[I]f we are aiming at an international authority which would preserve the peace of the world. It is absolutely necessary for the states to delegate a fraction of their sovereignty to [the United Nations].⁶⁷⁸

In the preceding chapters, we have followed the careers of Indian nationalist women in the global public sphere during the final three decades of colonial rule. Two fundamental themes define these interventions. First is the cosmopolitan-nationalist ideological framework that underpinned their activities. Second is the importance of certain ideas and practices of liberal citizenship: namely the ideology of rights and civil society activity. In combination, these ideas and modes of political expression produced women who operated, or attempted to operate, as citizens of the world, despite their colonised status. This final chapter considers some of the continuities running between this pre-Independence activity and the postcolonial era with a particular focus on Hansa Mehta's work for human rights as a member of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and as a political figure in India. This history is solidly rooted in the Indian nationalist-feminist tradition of cosmopolitan thought, liberal citizenship, and transnational civil society collaboration while also reflecting some of the foreign policy concerns of the new Nehruvian state. We will first consider this foreign policy through soon-to-be-independent India's campaign against discriminatory legislation in the Union of South Africa before examining more closely the proceedings of the CHR. The measurable results of these lengthy, often-acrimonious discussions were limited, amounting only to the very general, non-binding set of principles outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The introduction of meaningful measures to implement human rights was also strongly opposed by representatives from the Soviet bloc and more quietly resisted by the United States. Nevertheless, Hansa Mehta's work on the

⁶⁷⁸ Hansa Mehta, 'The Human Rights Commission', *Roshni*, April 1948, 18.

CHR and beyond indicates the existence of wide-ranging and often below-state-level attempts to institute a more just and democratic future for women and other oppressed people around the world, and the hope that the United Nations could achieve it. From her point of view, humankind had reached such a state of scientific progress and interconnectedness that no part of the world could afford to live in 'splendid isolation.'⁶⁷⁹

(Soon-to-be) Independent India and the United Nations

As the representative of India on the Commission for Human Rights, Hansa Mehta was an appointee of Jawaharlal Nehru's Interim Government and subsequently of the Government of independent India. Because of this, her interventions must be seen in the context of India's foreign policy, which according to Manu Bhagavan, was built on Nehru's 'quest to build a world that moved past the nation state and empire model'.⁶⁸⁰ Certainly, Nehru intended to make a strong statement in the international arena and it was Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, who, as leader of the Indian delegation to the United Nations General Assembly in October 1946, announced India's ambitions to the world:

India does not yet play a sufficiently effective part in this Assembly. She desires and intends to do so. As a major country, geographically in a strategic position in the Indian Ocean, with significant relations and cultural ties with her neighbours in Asia, the contribution she has made in resistance to aggression and the cause of human freedom and her role in world economy entitle her to a place in the important organs of the United Nations – I would mention especially the Security and Trusteeship Councils – and an adequate share in the administration of the Organization.⁶⁸¹

The prior experience of Indian women in the global public sphere greatly assisted the attempt to fulfill this vision of international influence. Not only did nationalist women provide a pool of competent candidates for international appointments, but, as educated, liberated women they lent the new Indian

⁶⁷⁹ Hansa Mehta Papers, Second Instalment, Speeches and Writings 22, 4, NMML.

⁶⁸⁰ Bhagavan, *The Peacemakers*, 67.

⁶⁸¹ United Nations. *Official Records of the Second Part of the First Session of the General Assembly. Plenary Meetings of The General Assembly. Verbatim Record. 23rd October – 16 December 1946.* (Flushing Meadows, New York), 731, UN.3/1A, National Library of Scotland (NLS).

regime international prestige by demonstrating the seemingly advanced level of Indian society. Pandit's appointment as the only woman to head a national delegation at the General Assembly projected an image of progress, not only equal to, but actually in advance of the so-called developed nations.⁶⁸² As she claimed in her inaugural speech in the UN General Assembly:

Indian women are now taking part in all nation-building activities. We do not recognize caste, creed or sex as a barrier to progress and our women have equality of opportunity with men. Two of our leading women have already taken a worthy part in Committees connected with the United Nations. Believing as we do that, in building the future, the effort and responsibility must be shared jointly by men and women, we earnestly hope that women of all countries will have the occasion to participate more fully with men in all departments of life, including the work of this Assembly, thus helping to create a better and more balanced world.⁶⁸³

This rhetoric of progress was not unprovoked. The concept of civilizational hierarchy had by no means disappeared with the League of Nations and was in fact embedded in the United Nations through the International Trusteeship System. According to Article 76 of the Charter of the United Nations, Trusteeship, which replaced the League of Nations mandates system, obliged the United Nations Administering Authorities

to promote the political, economic, social, and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the trust territories, and their progressive development towards self-government or independence as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned.⁶⁸⁴

Although carefully worded, the Charter implied that a territory's right to self-government was linked to the level of 'advancement' of its society. For nationalist Indians who had long complained of the implications of 'the White Man's Burden' in delaying Indian independence, the compulsion to

⁶⁸² This second meeting of the 1st Session of the General Assembly took place in New York. The first, to which Pandit was not appointed, took place in January 1946 in London.

⁶⁸³ *Official Records of the Second Part of the First Session of the General Assembly. Plenary Meetings of The General Assembly. Verbatim Record. 23rd October – 16 December 1946.* (Flushing Meadows, New York), 734. Silent video of Pandit at this conference may be viewed at <http://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/2022/2022494/> (07.06-07.23). Audio and video of Pandit addressing the UN General Assembly a year later can be viewed at <http://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/2064/2064802/>, (06.38-08.24).

⁶⁸⁴ Chapter XII, Article 76 (b), *Charter of the United Nations*.

accentuate the progressive nature of its society to an international audience was powerful. This consideration would remain an important feature of India's presentation to the world in the years after independence. After the Constitution of India came into effect in January 1950, a press release of the 'India News' agency in New York reported that 'Indian Women Play Large Role in Country's Development as a Republic.'⁶⁸⁵ To illustrate the point, the release quoted Hansa Mehta who made the claim that the Indian Constitution 'has lifted women out of the minority category, endorsing a position which they have actually held since Mahatma Gandhi first called on them to participate in the fight for independence.'

If the championing of gender equality was one aspect of nationalist India's global identity, the new Indian government also intended to use its hard-won autonomy to challenge imperialism and racial discrimination on a global scale. The introduction by the Union of South Africa of discriminatory legislation against the large Indian community there - the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act (1946) – provided the grounds for such a statement. The subsequent campaign in the General Assembly, led by Pandit, against this legislation pitted the ideal of universal rights against the concept of domestic jurisdiction.⁶⁸⁶ This addressed an essential contradiction in the Charter of the United Nations. On the one hand, the 'Preamble' stated the intention to 'reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.' Meanwhile, Article 2.7 guaranteed 'domestic jurisdiction' over internal matters. The Indian campaign resulted in a resolution urging the Union of South Africa to conform to the provisions of the Charter, which, though they challenged the principle of domestic jurisdiction, hardly clarified the contradiction. Furthermore, it exposed the lack of commitment to universalist principles by the United States and Great Britain,

⁶⁸⁵ 'Indian Women Play Large Role in Country's Development as a Republic,' India News, [undated], Countries Collection, 21, 10, SSA.

⁶⁸⁶ *Official Records of the Second Part of the First Session of the General Assembly*, 731-732. See also Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, Chapter 4; Ankit, 'In the Twilight of Empire'.

both of which had opposed the Indian resolution. The USSR, on the other hand, supported India's campaign. However, as its contributions to the work of the CHR would confirm, this was based, not on support for human rights, but on its intention to use the United Nations as a site for promoting its geo-political interests.

The CHR was appointed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to fulfil the obligation guaranteed by the Charter of the United Nations to 'make recommendations for the purpose of promoting respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.'⁶⁸⁷

According to Mehta, the logical corollary of the UN Charter was a comprehensive Bill of International Rights – a declaration of universally applicable rights to which all member states would be legally bound, and a muscular international system of implementation through which to uphold those ideals. As she pointed out to her colleagues on the CHR, one of the arguments made by South Africa in the General Assembly in its defence against India's campaign was that no violation of human rights had occurred because, in fact, no definition of human rights existed. The drafting of an International Bill of Rights was, Mehta argued, an urgent necessity in order to ensure that 'pleas of this character should not in future be allowed to be advanced within the forum of the United Nations.'⁶⁸⁸

Jawaharlal Nehru's official instructions to Mehta were that 'we must take our stand on the equality of opportunity for all peoples and races' and that 'there should be no discrimination on grounds of sex'.⁶⁸⁹ It is instructive, however, to understand Mehta's contribution to the CHR, not purely as state policy, but as reflective of her personal outlook as a nationalist activist and leader of the Indian women's movement. Mehta herself appeared to acknowledge this

⁶⁸⁷ Quoted in Mehta, 'The Human Rights Commission,' 17.

⁶⁸⁸ United Nations, Press Release SOC/2[illegible], 27 January 1947, Hansa Mehta papers, First Instalment, Subject File 15 (i), 264, NMML.

⁶⁸⁹ G.S. Bajpai to Hansa Mehta, 22 January 1947, Hansa Mehta papers, First Instalment, Subject File 12, NMML.

dual role in a response to the delegate for Lebanon during the Fourth Session of the CHR during which she sought

to assure him that on my part I am as anxious for the protection and promotion of human rights as he is, and I also assure him, on behalf of my Government, that my Government is also very anxious to see human rights protected and promoted.⁶⁹⁰

Certainly, Mehta, who had a degree of executive discretion in her work on the CHR, had a long personal record of support for the concept of individual rights. As we saw in Chapter 6, she had already intervened on the issues of women's rights at the UN Sub Committee on the Status of Women, where her considerable experience in the Indian women's movement was brought to bear. As she repeatedly argued at that time, women's rights were human rights.⁶⁹¹ The so-called 'Nehruvian' vision of universal human rights, therefore, cannot be solely attributed to Nehru but, rather, drew on the views of a range of actors, including, in particular members of the Indian women's movement, who had long appropriated the concept of individual rights. Furthermore, it was the Indian women's movement, with its wealth of experience in the global public sphere, which supplied the human resource for the Indian state to carry out Nehru's foreign policy at the United Nations.

The Commission for Human Rights

Opening the first session, Henri Laugier, the Assistant Secretary-General of ECOSOC, defined the task of the CHR as

Following up in the field of peace the fight which free humanity had waged in the fields of war, defending against all offensive attacks the rights and dignity of man, and establishing, upon the principles of the United Nations Charter a powerful international recognition of rights.⁶⁹²

Mehta described Laugier's approach as 'very correct' and, in her work on the CHR between 1947 and 1952, she clearly saw herself as one of the most

⁶⁹⁰ Hansa Mehta, 'Report on Commission on Human Rights Fourth Session,' Hansa Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Subject File 15 (i), 174, NMML.

⁶⁹¹ Hansa Mehta, 'Observations of the Report of the Status of Women Commission', 8 March 1947, Hansa Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Speeches and Writings by Her, Folder 6, 2, NMML.

⁶⁹² *Human Rights Commission, First Session, Summary Record of the First Meeting Held at Lake Success, New York, on Monday, 27 January 1947, at 11:00 a.m.*, E/CN.4/SR, 28 January 1947, 1-2, UN. Silent video of Laugier opening this session can be viewed at <http://www.unmultimedia.org/avlibrary/asset/2018/2018512/>, although Mehta is not visible.

prominent advocates of this vision.⁶⁹³ As she wryly noted, the eighteen members of the CHR were far from united in following Laugier's lead:

I wonder if all the members of the commission who listened to this great speech felt the same way as the speaker, or really subscribed to the view expressed by M. Laugier. The task of the commission would have been very simple if they had.⁶⁹⁴



Figure 8: Hansa Mehta with Carlos Garcia Bauer, the representative of Guatemala, before a meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights, 1 June 1949. *UN Photo.*

Indications that Laugier's vision was not universally shared were clear from the start in the general levels of inefficiency and evasion that hampered proceedings. During the First Session a general discussion on the International Bill of Rights 'lasted for days' without reaching any definite conclusions, Mehta complained, and the only real achievement of this opening meeting was the appointment of a Drafting Group.⁶⁹⁵ This committee would prepare a draft Bill of Rights but it would be guided only by what had been a very general and, in Mehta's opinion, ineffectual discussion in the CHR. This, she complained, was 'rather an unusual procedure.'⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹³ Hansa Mehta, 'Human Rights Commission', *Roshni*, July 1947, 20.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.* The members of the CHR were: Australia, Belgium, Byelorussia, Chile, China, Egypt, France, India, Iran, Lebanon, Panama, Philippine Republic, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Uruguay, Yugoslavia.

⁶⁹⁵ Hansa Mehta, 'Statement on Human Rights', Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Subject File 14, 293, NMML; Hansa Mehta, 'Human Rights Commission', *Roshni*, July 1947, 19.

⁶⁹⁶ Mehta, 'Statement on Human Rights,' 293.

Meanwhile, concrete proposals for implementing human rights were passed over. An Australian motion that the CHR establish an International Court of Human Rights was referred to the Drafting Group 'without much discussion'.⁶⁹⁷ Most seriously, the 'more important question' of how to enforce human rights was ignored altogether. 'Who', Mehta asked in vain, 'will carry out the decision of the International Court or any other body set up for the purpose?'⁶⁹⁸

The work of the CHR was persistently dogged by national rivalries. The Third Session was delayed by a diplomatic dispute that erupted after visas to enter America for delegates from Byelorussia and Ukraine were delayed. The delegate for the USSR raised an emphatic protest and the CHR suspended its work while awaiting the delayed delegates' arrival. But the issue was never resolved and it overshadowed the entire Third Session. As Mehta complained, '[I]ike King Charles' head it came up again and again in Mr. Pavlov's [the Soviet delegate] speeches.'⁶⁹⁹ Mehta was impatient with proceedings, which appeared to her inefficient. René Cassin, she reported, 'as usual made a long speech going over the same ground again and again.' Pavlov 'gave a long lecture on democracy which did not leave time to finish the article that day.' Translation issues 'caused much delay and often confusion'.⁷⁰⁰ Sometimes differences of opinion degenerated into outright farce as when the Ukrainian delegate forced a vote on the issue of whether or not to vote on a procedural matter.⁷⁰¹ Some of these delays were inevitable; others were intentionally engineered.

Beset by national rivalries and what Mehta described as a 'clash of ideologies,' the CHR did not agree on the form the Bill would take until the end of the Second Session in December 1947, nearly a year after the CHR

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid.*; Hansa Mehta, 'Human Rights Commission,' 19.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁹ Hansa Mehta, 'Report on Commission on Human Rights Third Session,' Hansa Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Subject File 15 (i), 56, NMML

⁷⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

had first convened.⁷⁰² At that point the CHR agreed that it would draft both a Declaration, which would lay down brief principles, and a more detailed Convention, which would define a series of rights to be incorporated into domestic laws. The issue of implementation still remained unresolved. What mechanism would bring the perpetrators of human rights abuses to account?

The underlying problem was, of course, that not all delegations were committed to the vision of human rights as presented by Laugier at the beginning of the First Session. The delegations of the two emerging Cold War 'Superpowers' did not agree on much during proceedings but they were united in their view that the proposed Bill of International Rights should be limited only to a non-enforceable Declaration.⁷⁰³ Almost all the other delegations supported the idea that the Declaration should be followed by a more detailed Covenant to which member states would be legally bound. If the Declaration laid out common principles, the Covenant would make it incumbent on national governments to enforce human rights 'from above' through legislation. Further to these two proposed documents, Mehta envisaged a global system of enforcement to ensure that individuals and groups could circumvent national governments. From the outset she argued that

[t]he overriding consideration before the Commission should be not merely the enunciation of principles but the improvisation of adequate machinery, either through establishment of a world court of human rights, reference to the international court or action by the security council.⁷⁰⁴

The CHR's task, in her view, was to produce

a simple forthright [Bill of Rights], which is easily understood, with the assurance that there will be adequate machinery for its enforcement, whenever human rights are violated in countries which are members of the United Nations Organization.⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰² Mehta, 'The Human Rights Commission,' 17.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁰⁴ Press Release SOC/20, 27 January 1947, Hansa Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Subject File 14, 114(a), NMML. This echoed the Australian representatives view that 'it was no use having these principles if there was no effective machinery for enforcing them'.

⁷⁰⁵ 'Speech by Mrs. Hansa Mehta before Commission on Human Rights,' 27 January 1947, Hansa Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Subject File 15 (i), 20, NMML.

In order to achieve this, she deemed it 'absolutely necessary for [individual] states to delegate a fraction of their sovereignty' in order to prosecute human rights abuses.⁷⁰⁶

It was precisely the issue of domestic jurisdiction that proved unresolvable, the ideology of human rights crashing headlong with the principal of national sovereignty. The delegation from the USSR was openly against any attempt to 'interfere in the domestic affairs of a State' and in this, as all matters at the United Nations, they consistently received the support of the Soviet bloc, which on the CHR included the Ukraine, Yugoslavia, and Byelorussia.⁷⁰⁷ By the end of the First Session, it was clear that Mehta's approach on the CHR was causing disquiet. Apart from South Africa, whom India had already challenged in the General Assembly, various national delegations had good reason to fear scrutiny of their domestic policy. The United States, for example, was subject to criticism about the treatment of African Americans, as was the USSR on the subject of civil liberties.⁷⁰⁸ By now, petitions seeking redress for alleged human rights abuses had begun to arrive at the offices of the United Nations, including the so-called Negro Petition edited by W.E.B du Bois and submitted by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). While the USSR and the USA blocked the introduction of these petitions to the CHR, Mehta demanded that all communications received by the UN Secretariat alleging human rights abuses be distributed to members. Her demand, she acknowledged, contributed to 'an atmosphere of apprehension' on the CHR, but Mehta had little patience with such concerns:

I am confident that this atmosphere will be completely dissipated ... if the members of the Commission approach the question of securing human rights not as it is likely to affect specific cases of discrimination, but as the joint endeavor of the United Nations to do away with obsolete, conflict-breeding ideas and systems.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁶ Hansa Mehta, 'The Human Rights Commission,' 18.

⁷⁰⁷ *Commission on Human Rights, Second Session, Summary Record of the Thirty-Eighth Meeting*, 15 December 1947, E/CN.4/SR.38, 8-9, UN

⁷⁰⁸ See Carol Anderson, 'From Hope to Disillusion: African Americans, the United Nations, and the Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1947,' *Diplomatic History*, 20, 4 (1996), 531-563.

⁷⁰⁹ [Untitled report], Hansa Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Subject File 15 (i), 50, NMML.

The Question of Implementation

Hansa Mehta eventually had the opportunity to address the issue of implementation during the Second Session of the CHR in Geneva, 2nd – 17th December 1947. During this session, the work of the CHR was divided between three Working Groups: the first to work on the draft Declaration, the second to draft the Convention, and the third to consider the question of implementation.⁷¹⁰ Mehta was elected Chairman of the third group, which reported to a plenary session of the CHR on 15th December. The meeting of the six-strong Working Group on Implementation immediately exposed divisions on the issue, with the delegate from the Ukrainian SSR (in line with a general policy adopted by the Soviet bloc) refusing to take part on the grounds that the question of implementation could not be discussed until the Declaration had been finalised.⁷¹¹ Despite this interruption, the Working Group agreed a range of measures to ensure that abstract human rights principles could be enforced. These were based on a detailed document drafted and introduced by Mehta herself, reflecting her belief that ‘a procedure for implementing an international Convention [was] essential in order to assure the non-violation of human rights by states themselves’.⁷¹² They included establishing the right of individuals and groups to petition the UN directly, the setting up of an international committee to consider and attempt a process of conciliation in alleged human rights abuses, granting judicial authority to an International Court of Human Rights, and enabling the machinery for enforcement through the United Nations General Assembly.⁷¹³

When the Working Committee introduced these proposals to the plenary session of the CHR, the level of opposition was ominous. ‘The Russian Group’, as Mehta called them, was ‘consistently against the idea of

⁷¹⁰ Hansa Mehta, ‘Report of The Human Rights Commission,’ 43, NMML.

⁷¹¹ *Commission on Human Rights, Second Session, Draft Report of the Working Group on Implementation, 10 December 1947, E/CN.4/53, 3-4, UN.*

⁷¹² *Commission on Human Rights, E/CN.4/SR.39, 4; 10.*

⁷¹³ *Commission on Human Rights, E/CN.4/53.*

implementation.⁷¹⁴ A.E. Bogomolov, the member from the USSR, for example, condemned the idea of an international committee to investigate human rights as ‘a fantastic and dangerous proposal,’ and he demanded all discussion on implementation should be postponed pending the final drafting of the Declaration.⁷¹⁵ He was supported by the Yugoslav delegate, who described the Working Group’s proposals as ‘a new attempt to transform the United Nations into a kind of world government, placed above national sovereignty.’⁷¹⁶ Alluding to Cold War rivalries in Europe, he depicted the challenge to domestic jurisdiction as ideological cover for American ambitions of ‘international domination,’ in which category he explicitly included proposals to extend the Marshall Plan to Eastern Europe.⁷¹⁷ The Ukrainian delegate evaded the question of national sovereignty by stating that there was no need for implementation in his country because ‘respect for human rights [was] assured by the new Stalin Constitution.’⁷¹⁸ His government ‘would never accept those measures,’ he warned.⁷¹⁹ Meanwhile, the United States was more subtly fending off pressure regarding the NAACP petition.

By contrast, the remaining members of the CHR supported the proposals of the Working Group, albeit with varying amounts of enthusiasm. At one extreme, the representative from Belgium (who was also the Rapporteur of the Working Group on Implementation) made an incendiary comparison between the Soviet bloc’s defense of national sovereignty and the opposition of Germany to the Hague Convention in 1907, and described such responses as ‘reactionary.’⁷²⁰ Forcefully repudiating the Yugoslav delegate’s previous comments about the Marshall Plan, the British delegate, Lord Dukeston, ‘wondered whether those who spoke in this way were really in touch with

⁷¹⁴ Hansa Mehta, ‘The Second Session of the Human Rights Commission held at Geneva from 2nd December to 17th December 1947, Hansa Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Subject File 15 (i), 41, NMML.

⁷¹⁵ *Commission on Human Rights*, E/CN.4/SR.38, 9.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*; *Commission on Human Rights, Second Session, Summary Record of the Thirty-Ninth Meeting, 15 December 1947*, E/CN.4/SR.39, 12.

⁷¹⁸ *Commission on Human Rights*, E/CN.4/SR.38, 15.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷²⁰ *Commission on Human Rights*, E/CN.4/SR.39, 9.

reality.⁷²¹ Attempting to steer the debate away from these divisions, Charles Malik, the delegate from Lebanon, made an impassioned plea for the sanctity of human rights, which he argued lay ‘outside ... national sovereignty.’⁷²² His own country was ‘healthily cynical of declarations and resolutions’ and was in full support of ‘an international treaty [on human rights] binding on all its signatories.’⁷²³ The most conciliatory tone was struck by Carlos Romulo of the Philippines, who noted that ‘[i]t was an entirely new conception that a citizen should have the right to summon a fellow citizen or the authorities of his own State before an International tribunal.’⁷²⁴ He was, therefore, ‘quite able to understand the misgivings expressed by certain delegations.’ The American delegation remained silent, but in reporting back to India, Mehta lumped it in with the Soviets as most obstructive on the issue of implementation.⁷²⁵

The Third Session of the CHR was held from 24th May to 18th June 1948 in New York, resulting in the final draft of the Declaration that would be passed as the UDHR later that year in the General Assembly. Again, during this Session, Mehta attempted to press the issue of implementation, expecting (mistakenly) that this would be swiftly dealt with now work on the Declaration was nearly complete. What is striking about Mehta’s intervention at this point is her strong advocacy of the right of an individual or group to petition against human rights abuses – a principle rooted in the notion that rights superseded national affiliation. She described this as ‘the more momentous question of implementing human rights and fundamental freedoms at the instance of aggrieved humanity.’⁷²⁶ Noting that in an earlier era the League of Nations had received petitions from individuals and groups, Mehta argued that ‘[t]he peoples of the world expect that this function of the League of Nations should be undertaken by the United Nations.’ She also pointed out that the UN had

⁷²¹ *Commission on Human Rights*, E/CN.4/SR.38, 14.

⁷²² *Commission on Human Rights*, E/CN.4/SR.39, 7.

⁷²³ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷²⁵ Hansa Mehta, ‘The Human Rights Commission,’ 18.

⁷²⁶ ‘India Delegation Proposal on Implementation,’ 18 June 1948, Hansa Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Subject File 15 (i), 94, NMML. Also UN document E/CN.4/153.

already received a large number of petitions and argued that establishing the official apparatus for dealing with this demand from global civil society was of paramount importance.

In addition to Mehta's interventions, several national delegations agreed that the CHR should address the issue of implementation in the Third Session. The Australian delegation submitted draft proposals for an International Court of Human Rights, while Malik of Lebanon recommended the report of the Working Group on Implementation from the previous session. The Belgium representative echoed Mehta's opinion that the UDHR 'might remain a dead letter' unless it was backed up by a definite blueprint for implementation.⁷²⁷ René Cassin of France made a special statement supporting the idea of a dedicated committee appointed to examine alleged human rights abuses and 'not... ruling out the possibility of considering the establishment of international judicial guarantees of human rights as a human being's last remedy'.⁷²⁸ However, Cassin, later a Nobel Prize winner for his work in drafting the UDHR, was at best lukewarm on the idea of an International Court of Human Rights, which he alleged to be a premature suggestion. Far more urgent, in his view, was the need to work out the mechanism for prosecuting war crimes under the Convention on Genocide. This preference represented a Eurocentric perspective on postwar priorities that was not shared by India.⁷²⁹ More harmful to the cause of implementation, however, was the outright opposition of the Soviet bloc. Raising, once again, the issue of national sovereignty, the Russian delegate criticised suggestions on implementation as 'inadmissible interference in the domestic affairs of any State.'⁷³⁰

⁷²⁷ *Commission on Human Rights, Summary Record of the Eighty-First Meeting, 1 July 1948, E/CN.4/SR.81, 13, UN*

⁷²⁸ 'Statement by Mr. René Cassin, Representative of France, on the Implementation of Human Rights', 16 June 1948, E/CN.4/147, 6, UN.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷³⁰ *Commission on Human Rights, E/CN.4/SR.81, 14.*

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and After

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was unanimously approved, amid great fanfare, by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948.⁷³¹ Unanimously, that was, except for the eight abstentions from the Soviet bloc, Saudi Arabia and South Africa. Supporters hailed the document a 'Magna Carta for the world' to which 'men and women in countries far distant from Paris or New York will turn for hope and guidance and inspiration.'⁷³² Mehta described herself as 'exhilarated' by the formal adoption of the UDHR, which she celebrated publicly as carrying considerable 'moral force' in the global establishment of human rights.⁷³³ Yet the opposition of the USSR did not bode well. The Soviet delegate, Andrei Vishinsky, not only described the Declaration as 'unsatisfactory and requiring considerable amendment' but further suggested that the challenge it posed to national sovereignty undermined the entire project.⁷³⁴ '[O]nly within the framework of [state] government did human rights have a meaning,' the Soviet delegate thundered in the General Assembly.⁷³⁵ The opposition of the Soviet bloc to the UDHR was damning. In any case, the UDHR was non-binding, toothless, and, at best, carried only moral weight. The additional elements of the Bill of Rights, towards which the CHR was, in theory, working, were incomplete, with crucial work on the Covenant and on the means of implementation remaining. It was nearly two decades before something resembling this vision came to fruition, with two Covenants and two optional protocols being adopted by UN member states in 1966. The issue of implementation, it may be argued, has never been resolved.

Mehta, for her part, continued to press for a complete, effective international Bill of Rights at the CHR. At the Sixth Session of the CHR in April 1950, she

⁷³¹ For the full text of the UDHR please see the Appendix.

⁷³² John Kenton, 'Human Rights Declaration Adopted by U.N. Assembly', *The New York Times*, 11 December 1948, 1.

⁷³³ 'Speech made by Mrs. Hansa Mehta, Delegate from Indian in Commission on Human Rights, Third Session, on May 27, 1948' Hansa Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Subject File, 15, 91, NMML.

⁷³⁴ Kenton, 'Human Rights Declaration Adopted by U.N. Assembly'.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*

bemoaned the 'conspiracy of silence on the part of governments' regarding the issue of implementation but, she urged her colleagues on the Commission to persist in searching for a solution.⁷³⁶ Mehta continued this policy on the CHR until its Ninth Session in 1953, when it was taken up by her replacement on the CHR, her AIWC colleague Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya.

Concurrently with her work in the UN, Mehta was active in domestic politics, where, amongst other things, she acted as an advocate for universal human rights. As she had consistently insisted, the function of the UDHR was to publicise human rights to the global public, and this task she tried to fulfill in India. In 1946, she had been elected to the Constituent Assembly, the body that drafted the Constitution of independent India. As the Constituent Assembly debated the new Constitution, which was adopted in November 1949, it was Mehta who systematically weighed up how well it measured up to 'the International Standard as laid down in the Declaration of Human Rights.'⁷³⁷ She also addressed the Indian public directly through radio broadcasts and the print media. Writing in *Roshni* in September 1950, she described the implementation of human rights as a means of avoiding both conflict and human exploitation.⁷³⁸ On the first anniversary of the adoption the UDHR she gave a radio broadcast commending the UDHR to the nation:

In laying down this common standard of human conduct the United Nations have laid down the foundation of true democracy. It is the observance of this standard that will make democracy really effective and ultimately lead to world security.⁷³⁹

Commission on Human Rights and Global Civil Society

As we have seen, along with the Indian delegation, representatives from several other nations on the CHR pushed for a fully functioning human rights

⁷³⁶ Hansa Mehta, 'Speech of 25th April 1950', Hansa Mehta Papers, First Instalment, Subject File 15 (i), 233, NMML.

⁷³⁷ Hansa Mehta, 'Human Rights in the New Constitution of India', Hansa Mehta papers, First Instalment, Speeches and Writings by Her, 9, 1, NMML.

⁷³⁸ Hansa Mehta, 'Human Rights and World Peace,' *Roshni*, September-October 1950, 4-5.

⁷³⁹ Hansa Mehta, 'On the 1st Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,' 10 December 1949, [Radio Talk], Hansa Mehta papers, First Instalment, Speeches and Writings by Her, 14, 3-4.

regime. Mehta's promotion of universal rights also reflected a wider consensus amongst global civil society. Sessions of the CHR were attended by representatives of numerous societies, many of which were, themselves, umbrella organisations serving wider civil society. Much like the civil society that coalesced around the Social Section of the League of Nations, these groups constituted an active constituency of liberal internationalist opinion that engaged with the UN, presenting a counter-force to the national self-interest and geo-political wrangling that eventually derailed attempts to institute a fully functioning human rights regime.

Against the toxic background of inter-state Cold War tensions, India's stance, as presented by Mehta, closely chimed with that of many of the various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that carefully observed the work of the CHR.⁷⁴⁰ The representative attending the CHR on behalf of the World Federation of United Nations Organisations, spoke of the importance of the methods of implementation and, like Mehta, emphasised the role of public opinion in instituting a culture of human rights. A representative of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) declared that the Working Group on Implementation, which Mehta had led during the Third Session of the CHR, had 'brought a ray of hope to the working masses.'⁷⁴¹ Exposing the inconsistency of the Soviet delegation, the AFL delegate expressed shock that the USSR, who had lobbied for the acceptance by the CHR of the 'Negro Petition', now appealed to the notion of national sovereignty to oppose implementation measures. Human rights, she argued, should transcend ideological difference: '[N]o matter how certain economic systems might differ, those differences should not preclude respect for human rights.'⁷⁴²

That the stance of India should chime with global civil society is not surprising given Mehta's background in the transnational women's movement and links established by Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit in 1945 to the African-American rights

⁷⁴⁰ See *Commission on Human Rights*, E/CN.4/SR.38.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*

movement. Walter White of the NAACP, who was instrumental in organising the 'Negro Petition' agreed with Mehta's focus on implementation and deemed it

essential ... that [the CHR] in addition to recommending definitions of human rights and agreements for nations to sign must also recommend the type of machinery to correct the abuses, once discovered.⁷⁴³

Mehta was sympathetic to the hope expressed in the NAACP's petition that 'the super-government body will take action that will eventually remove the discriminatory practices they suffer.'⁷⁴⁴ Mehta viewed the right to petition the United Nations as an assurance of individual democratic citizenship that transcended national affiliation. This was a view shared by the AIWC, which itself sent a statement to the CHR concerning the right to petition.⁷⁴⁵

Furthermore, Mehta agreed whole-heartedly with the sentiments of W.E.B. Du Bois, whose response to the draft document was as follows:

there is nothing to be said against [the draft Declaration], but as I have intimated before, general statements on rights are of no importance to us today; what we want is specific application of universally recognized rights.⁷⁴⁶

Beyond the civil society that congregated around the CHR, Mehta actively engaged with new ideas circulating more widely in the international community after the war. Her suggestion that alleged human rights abuses be assessed by an international committee, for example, was drawn from the work of Hersch Lauchterpacht, the international lawyer and author of *An International Bill of the Rights of Man* (1945).⁷⁴⁷

⁷⁴³ Walter White to Edward R. Dudley, 4 February 1948, Part 14, Group II, Series A, Folder 001439-015-0112, <http://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001439-015-0112>, accessed 22 January 2017, NAACP.

⁷⁴⁴ Hugh H. Smyth, 'The NAACP Petition on the Denial of Human Rights and the United Nations,' *The Journal of Negro Education*, 17, 1 (Winter 1948), 88.

⁷⁴⁵ Commission on Human Rights, *Report to the Economic and Social Council on the work of the Sixth Session of the Commission, 27 March – 19 May 1950*, E/1681, 3.

⁷⁴⁶ W.E.B. du Bois to Walter White, 23 August 1948, Part 14, Group II, 1940-1955, Folder 001439-015-0112, NAACP. Also in attendance at the sessions of the CHR was Roger Baldwin, a former member of the India League of America and supporter of Pandit's wartime activities in the USA, who represented the International League for the Rights of Man at the CHR for several years after 1950.

⁷⁴⁷ Mehta, 'The Second Session of the Human Rights,' 41.

Hansa Mehta, Gender Equality and the UDHR

One success story that nuances the wider narrative of failure associated with the CHR is the attempt to enshrine gender equality in the UDHR, and it is noticeable that this is a story of civil society, rather than state, activity. As in Geneva during the interwar period, and as we saw in Chapter 6, one of the largest civil society networks represented at the sessions of the CHR was the international women's movement. Mehta had solid connections to this network, which included a number of organisations that maintained affiliations and other links to the AIWC, including the International Alliance of Women (of which Mehta was a Vice-President in 1946). Amongst these were long term allies including the World's Young Women's Christian Association, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the St Joan's International Social and Political Alliance.

Mehta was amongst those to encourage and champion civil society involvement in the work of the CHR. As we saw in Chapter 6, she was instrumental in defining the role of the Sub-Commission on the Status of Women, and supported the establishment of its successor, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), as an independent commission. We also saw how the CSW was deeply connected to the international women's movement. Now, as a member of the CHR during its First Session, Mehta argued, in opposition to Eleanor Roosevelt, that the CSW should be officially included in the work of the CHR.⁷⁴⁸ This resulted in an ECOSOC Resolution inviting members of the CSW to attend the meetings of the CHR. Although Mehta did not always agree with the suggestions made by the CSW – the CSW generally recommended forms of positive discrimination of which Mehta did not approve – she helped amplify its voice at the UN, and ensured that women's rights remained on the agenda of the CHR amid a variety of competing claims.

⁷⁴⁸ *Human Rights Commission, First Session, Summary Record of the First Meeting Held at Lake Success, New York, on Monday, 27 January 1947, at 11:00 a.m., E/CN.4/SR.1, 28 January 1947, 6-7, NMML; Mehta, 'Observations of the Report of the Status of Women Commission'.*

How the inclusion of the CSW might make a substantive impact on the work of the CHR was demonstrated during the Third Session of the CHR (24th May – 18th June 1948), when the CSW proposed an amendment to Article 1. The existing draft began: ‘All men are born free and equal in dignity and rights’, and enjoined ‘all men’ to ‘act towards one another like brothers’.⁷⁴⁹ As these masculine forms potentially excluded women, the CSW’s amendment requested that ‘all men’ be substituted with ‘all people’ and ‘like brothers’ be replaced by ‘in a spirit of brotherhood.’ The CHR readily took up this point and amended the wording to ‘all human beings.’ The final version of Article 1 thus read:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.⁷⁵⁰

This amendment ensured that the UDHR explicitly applied to women as well as men and helped legitimise later feminist interventions in the work of the CHR. So significant is this legacy that today it is still used by women’s rights campaigners to bolster claims to equality, particularly where they relate to non-Western women and concern religious or cultural practices that limit women’s rights.⁷⁵¹ Mehta, who is sometimes credited with facilitating the enunciation of women’s rights in the UDHR, has thus become a global symbol used to strengthen contemporary campaigns.

Beyond the wording of Article 1, the CSW, as well as women’s organisations acting independently of the CSW, made frequent interventions in the work of the CHR. These discussions were marked, not just by opposition from conservative opinion, but by differing conceptions about what equality meant.

⁷⁴⁹ Hansa Mehta, ‘Report of the Third Session of the Human Rights Commission’, Hansa Mehta papers, First Instalment, Subject File 15 (i), 64, NMML.

⁷⁵⁰ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>, accessed 12 October 2016.

⁷⁵¹ See, for example ‘Statement by la Coordination française du lobby européen des femmes, Femmes solidaires and Regards de femmes, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council’, E/CN.6/2010/NGO/41, 2, UN; ‘Provisional summary record of the 15th meeting (Chamber A)’, 29 September 2010, E/2010/SR.15(A), 8, UN.

A proposed clause suggested by the CSW that upheld a woman's right to dissolve marriage, for example, faced opposition from the International Union of Catholic Women's Leagues.⁷⁵² A clause relating to equal pay was supported by the CSW but opposed by the Liaison Committee of International Women's Organisations, who argued that the clause gave rise to the interpretation that equal rights did not apply elsewhere in the document.⁷⁵³ In these discussions, Mehta took the line that the Declaration should be as brief a document as possible, causing her to clash several times with the CSW who sought to add specific commitments to women's rights. Nevertheless, these discussions served to ensure that global public opinion was heard on the CHR, even if it was state-based geo-political interests that eventually triumphed over the concept universal rights.

Conclusion

Mehta's approach to human rights drew on a combination of cosmopolitan-nationalism, the ideology of individual rights, and belief in the practices of civil society activism. Human rights, therefore, were not envisaged as a polar opposite to nationalism. Mehta believed that the national citizen was also a global citizen, whose rights must be upheld by the international community should the nation state fail in this duty. With a background in the Indian and international women's movements, she also retained a role for civil society in this vision. Furthermore, in her work on human rights, Hansa Mehta not only promoted global citizenship in theory but also lived it in practice. By operating simultaneously in the global and national spheres, she operated as a model twentieth century global citizen, transitioning easily from national to global and back again, exemplifying how, in an interconnected world, a person might belong equally 'at home' and 'in the world'.

⁷⁵² Mehta, 'Report of the Third Session of the Human Rights Commission'; *Commission on Human Rights. Third Session, Summary Record of the Fifty-Eighth Meeting, Lake Success, New York, Thursday 3 June 1948*, E/CN.4/SR.58, 17, UN. At this stage in the drafting process, what would become Article 16 of the UDHR was referred to as Article 13.

⁷⁵³ Hansa Mehta, 'Report of the Third Session of the Human Rights Commission'. The relevant article in this document is referred to as Article 24.

This interpretation of Mehta's role in the history of human rights extends the analytical framework beyond the nation. In adopting a global perspective, it immediately becomes clear that the history of human rights, far from being drawn exclusively from any particular national or cultural tradition, is in fact a history of transnational exchange and of interactions that took place in spaces between, as well as within, nations. It is also clear that our understanding of the history of human rights should not be confined to the level of the state. Rather, it is a history that took place in public spheres between a range of state and non-state actors and drew heavily on civil society traditions. Included in this story are representatives from several state governments in addition to India: Australia, France, Belgium, Lebanon and Britain all contributed in various ways. But we must also be aware of the involvement of the range of civil society actors representing different sections of global opinion, which continued to put pressure on the United Nations to institute a globally applicable system of rights for a substantial period after the drafting of the UDHR had been completed. Indian nationalist women, through Hansa Mehta and her successors on the CHR, were integral to this effort.

It has been argued that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was

less the annunciation of a new age than a funeral wreath laid on the grave of wartime hopes. The world looked up for a moment. Then it resumed its postwar agendas.⁷⁵⁴

There is no doubt that national rivalries frustrated the development of a meaningful international human rights project after 1948 and that they resulted in a global history of international conflict. However, the triumph of the nation-state and of inter-state rivalry over the ideology of human rights is only part of the story.⁷⁵⁵ Reviewing the period through Hansa Mehta's work on the CHR draws upon an alternative global history, driven, not by the forces of polarisation and disintegration, but by considerable efforts to overcome forms of discrimination and repression, even if those efforts were frustrated and their legacies were ambiguous.

⁷⁵⁴ Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, 2.

⁷⁵⁵ For the victory of the nation-state see Moyn, 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,' 369.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

Today on the Avenue de la Paix, not far from the Palais des Nations in Geneva, stands a statue of Mohandas K. Gandhi, one of India's most famous exports. In recent times, statues of Gandhi in Africa have attracted controversy. But not this one. Here in the genteel surroundings of Ariana Park, the Mahatma sits undisturbed, back turned to the vast complex that is the European office of the United Nations, studying a book. The Geneva Gandhi is the Gandhi of quiet contemplation; his untroubled demeanour suggests his whole-hearted sanction of the bastion of international co-operation behind him. 'The world is in good hands,' the personification of peace and non-violence seems to say.

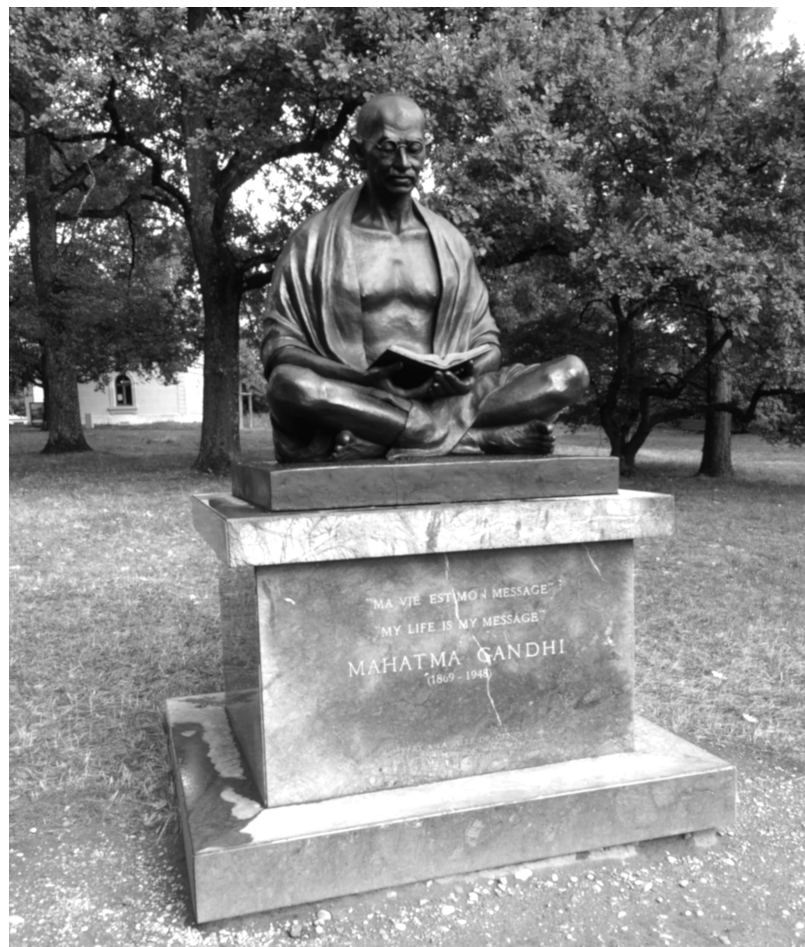


Figure 9: Statue of Mahatma Gandhi, Ariana Park, Rue de la Paix, Geneva.

The Gandhi statue was gifted to the City of Geneva by the Government of India in 2007 and there can be no mistaking the joint claim made by its placement on the Avenue de la Paix. Here, by mutual association, India (through Gandhi) and Geneva (through its history of internationalism) are made to represent the human quest for peace. Gandhi himself is upheld as a global figure, even as, in India as well as in Africa, his star (and that of the Congress movement he represented) was, by 2007, diminished. The real-life Gandhi visited the city only once at the time of the World Disarmament Conference in December 1931, when, at the behest of European pacifists, he delivered his message of non-violence to an international audience at Victoria Hall. It is, perhaps, appropriate that the Geneva Gandhi is depicted reading a book. Although his activities in South Africa and India identify him as a man of action, as a global figure his legacy is ideological and, indeed, symbolic.⁷⁵⁶

The visibility of Gandhi in the home of interwar internationalism contrasts with the less conspicuous presence of his female colleagues, whose considerably more active engagement with Geneva, and the global public sphere in general, is buried in the archives or in scattered accounts. This thesis is an attempt to understand and bring meaning to this neglected history.

Nationalist women lived and worked through dramatic political changes that resulted in the end of imperial rule in India, played a conscious role in campaigning for that outcome, and helped frame the national and global ambitions of the postcolonial state. This thesis has shown that, while the careers of nationalist women were very much associated with this national history, they also contribute to global historical narratives. Their transnational activities present a history of liberal cosmopolitanism written in the agency of

⁷⁵⁶ For Gandhi's global legacy see David Hardiman, *Gandhi in his Time and Ours. The Global Legacy of His Ideas* (London: C. Hurst, 2003).

non-Western women and located in transnational collaboration below the level of the state.

We began, in Chapter 2, with a sketch of the social, political, and intellectual influences that formed the generation of nationalist women that came to prominence in the 1920s and 1930s. As highly mobile, internationally networked actors, nationalist women operated privately as ‘citizens of the world.’ But it was the ideological influence of cosmopolitan-nationalism that brought political meaning to their sense of global belonging. For nationalist women influenced by the history of social reform, citizenship was also associated with the ideal of service and, later, tethered to the ideology of fundamental rights. In Chapter 3, we saw how this concept of citizenship could be applied to both the imperial and the global sphere. Travelling in Europe in 1933, the practical implications of being citizens of the world included transnational alliances with sympathetic women’s organisations, publicity in the media, and, innovatively, engagement with the global public sphere in Geneva. Chapter 4 illustrates how this below-state level history of transnational cooperation developed in the 1930s and early 1940s. The consolidation of links to transnational civil society and to the institutions of global governance indicated to Indian women the ways in which the global public sphere might be used to undermine imperial rule while also progressing various social and political causes at a local and global level. Indian women’s continued cooperation with British feminists, despite differences of opinion and practical difficulties brought about by the Second World War, indicates the enduring nature of these connections and illustrates some of the ways nationalist women exerted influence on their European allies.

In Chapter 5, the focus shifted to the United States of America where, operating at the level of civil society through the public sphere in 1944-1945, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit conducted a campaign to promote the Indian nationalist cause. Although this campaign failed to substantially influence

official policy, it helped bring 'the India Question' to the attention of global liberal opinion during an important moment of possibility as the Second World War came to a close. When the global community met in San Francisco in April-June, Pandit was amongst the most visible of campaigners for a new progressive world order. Her activities in the United States exemplify the level of civil society engagement with the processes that shaped the post-war world. They mark her autonomy as a political figure and were notable in anticipating independent India's international identity as a defender of suppressed peoples.

The transnational activities of nationalist women in the 1930s and early 1940s laid the groundwork for their subsequent work at the United Nations. In Chapter 6 we saw how Hansa Mehta drew on her experience in the Indian women's movement in the attempt to establish global gender equality through the Sub-Committee on the Status of Women (SCSW) in May 1946. Pre-empting the Nehruvian ambition for India to play a larger part in world affairs, Mehta helped create a global standard for women's rights and was instrumental in establishing an enduring link between the United Nations and feminist civil society. As we saw in Chapter 7, Mehta, through her work on the Commission for Human Rights, was also a forceful advocate of the establishment of a new, global human rights regime. Here she was a representative, not just of the Indian state but of global liberal opinion, made up of a range of state and civil society actors, and of the collaborative attempt to promote human rights.

Recovering the global and transnational careers of Indian nationalist women helps establish them as autonomous historical figures and draws attention to the ways they influenced the Indian nationalist project. Their interactions with civil society and world governance institutions in Europe in the 1930s illustrate the ways women operated independently and separately of male colleagues. It is a striking fact that Indian women were significantly more involved with transnational organisations and world governance institutions in

the 1930s than their male nationalist colleagues. Although Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit's tour of the United States of America in 1944 and 1945 was sanctioned by Gandhi, Pandit operated there without a brief, becoming the 'sole spokesman' for India while male leaders were either imprisoned or preoccupied with domestic events. Women's activities in the global public sphere prior to independence contributed to the way India emerged as an assertive advocate of global equality on the world stage after 1945, despite the often exclusive association of Jawaharlal Nehru with this policy. In postcolonial India, the legacy of women's campaigns for fundamental rights is compromised by the persistence of 'personal laws' that subordinate individual rights to the claims of the community. Nevertheless, the concept of fundamental rights remained part of the liberal 'flotsam and jetsam' perceived by C.A. Bayly in the postcolonial state, informing liberal opinion even as conservative forces rejected it.⁷⁵⁷

Beyond the nation, Indian women were agents of change in the global development of ideas and political practices. Cosmopolitan-nationalism, a concept originating with nineteenth century European nationalists, was creatively reinterpreted by Indian women as a response to twentieth century imperialism, and underpinned their claims to legitimacy in the global arena. To begin with, Indian women's appropriation of cosmopolitan-nationalism upheld orientalist assumptions about India's mission as the spiritual saviour of the world, but over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, it came to represent an alternative claim to modernity based on ideas about freedom, democracy and equality. Refashioned for the moment of possibility created by the disruption of the war, cosmopolitan-nationalism became part of the language of decolonisation and multilateralism.⁷⁵⁸ At the United Nations, while Pandit deployed Mazzinian concepts in the spot-lit General Assembly, Amrit Kaur and Hansa Mehta made quieter attempts to fulfil India's mission to the world at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural

⁷⁵⁷ C.A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 276.

⁷⁵⁸ Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, Chapter 4.

Organisation (UNESCO) and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). On the Commission for Human Rights (CHR), Mehta became a forceful advocate for multilateralism, insisting (albeit unsuccessfully) that nation-states should sacrifice some of their sovereignty for the universal good. These discussions in the international arena pitted outward-looking, cosmopolitan-nationalism against nationalism's more aggressive forms that dominated the Cold War era.

Beyond the refashioning of cosmopolitanism as a language of resistance, nationalist women's activities contributed more widely to the global development of liberal ideas and practices in the early to mid-twentieth century. Their assertion that political and socio-economic rights applied to all human beings challenged the democratic legitimacy of European powers and helped promote an expanded conception of citizenship. Indian women's interactions with British feminists during the franchise campaign in the 1930s illustrate this point. While a high proportion of British feminists were content for the imperial state to award only limited political rights to Indian women, nationalist women countered with the claim of fundamental rights. In doing so, Indian women influenced the ways European feminists thought about these issues. Eleanor Rathbone, an imperialist-minded feminist, never changed her overall policy towards Indian women, but she did indicate that she was receptive to nationalist perspectives by asking Indian women's opinions and conceding minor points.

The subtle shift in Rathbone's outlook is indicative of more significant changes within European feminism at large. While conservative opinion in Britain remained impervious to anti-imperial ideas, the reception of nationalist claims in more progressive circles indicates that Indian women influenced the general timbre of the public opinion. The policy of the 'five friendly societies' that later formed the British Liaison Group during the Indian women's franchise campaign was explicitly guided by the opinions of Indian women. In the 1940s, the alliance formed between this contingent of British political

opinion and Indian women's organisations translated to overt support of Indian nationalist demands, despite disagreements over nationalist women's refusal to support the Allied war effort. This suggests that Indian women contributed to the gradual shifting of the centre-ground of public opinion in Britain, with sympathy for Indian women's rights, as women and as Indians, gaining support. Furthermore, by occupying high-ranking domestic and international positions, Indian women set a global example for women's empowerment, as Grace Lankester's statement at the beginning of this thesis indicates. A more surprising acknowledgement of this influential role came decades later in a letter from the recently elected British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit:

[Y]ou have obviously been a pioneer in the field. ... I remember watching from afar your great success as High Commissioner here. You paved the way for the rest of us to follow'.⁷⁵⁹

For nationalist women, the United Nations offered a platform from which to advance the cause of liberal rights globally. The 'Women's Charter,' the introduction of which by Hansa Mehta significantly extended the intended scope of the SCSW, drew heavily on ideas developed in the Indian colonial context and demanded full citizenship rights for all women everywhere. The SCSW was quickly upgraded to a full Commission and the Commission for the Status of Women continues to shape the gender policy of the United Nations today.

On the CHR, Hansa Mehta continually argued not only for a declaration of universally applicable rights but for a robust system of implementation to make those rights a reality. Mehta's role on the CHR undermines earlier narratives that identify human rights with Western or European actors. It is also pertinent to Samuel Moyn's revisionist arguments that challenge the association of the post-war 'UN moment' with human rights. As Moyn rightly points out, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, had little measurable

⁷⁵⁹ Margaret Thatcher to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 11 June 1979, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit Papers, First Instalment, Correspondence, File 1369, NMML.

effect, due precisely to the lack of machinery for implementation. What is missing from his argument, however, is an acknowledgement of the attempts by Mehta and others to institute such procedures, even if they ultimately failed. This alternative history of human rights identifies Indian women as part of the long, on-going history of negotiation and claims-making that sought to determine what natural rights were and to whom they applied. This challenges widespread assumptions about the genesis of democratic ideas and how they spread across the world.

It is essential to understand the extent to which nationalist women's transnational careers before and immediately after independence represented below-state level, civil society activity even as the Indian nationalist cause structured their lives. This type of activity was determined by social class, available only to those with the requisite financial means, education, connections, and social capital. It was also gendered, providing an arena for women's public service that was separate from the highest-level geopolitical machinations, from which they were excluded. Nationalist women's activities related to confirmed 'women's' issues - women's rights and 'social' matters – in a manner that reflected the wider context for women's engagement with the global public sphere in the 1930s and 1940s. However, gendered assumptions were not static and developed according to women's assertive participation. When Amrit Kaur visited Geneva in 1933, even the limited role of women on the 'social' committees of the League of Nations was precarious and campaigns for women's representation were part of a transnational effort to challenge the masculine character of the League. The more formalised relationship of women and women's civil society through the Commissions of ECOSOC marks the development of this process in the post-Second World War era. Nationalist women's involvement in this casts them as agents in the history of women's global civil society, especially as it relates to the institutions of global governance in the mid-twentieth century. Hansa Mehta's work on the CHR shows that this association was not confined to women's organisation and in fact was too connected to civil society

efforts concerned with the broader question of human rights. By asserting their right to operate in this sphere, nationalist women contributed to its reach and ideological scope, helping to ensure that the United Nations became a more diverse global forum in the second half of the twentieth century.

Wider Implications

The interconnectedness of global civil society reminds us that the twentieth century nation was a more porous entity than national histories might have us believe. It also emphasises, in a global context, the fact that nations were more heterogeneous than international histories have previously imagined. Transnational civil society actors found common ground on areas that caused division within nations. Transnational women's alliances, for example, were allied against conservative forces on multiple local fronts, even if the specific conditions that caused division were locally determined. These insights inform and corroborate the current move in South Asian historiography away from the previously dominant binary frames of analysis, whether they be imperialist-nationalist, East-West, subaltern-elite, or colony-metropole.⁷⁶⁰ The lives and careers of colonial actors, and the contexts in which they operated, were more complex than these dichotomies suggest.

The histories of Indian women's cosmopolitan-nationalist careers complicate the idea of nationalism as a driver in world history. We see, instead, transnational lines of connectedness drawn by interactions between people, the exchange of ideas, and shared endeavour. These connections nuance geopolitical assessments of the twentieth century, contributing new layers of meaning to a world ordinarily defined by shifting geopolitical power blocs and responses thereto. This has the potential to help recognise the agency of previously marginalised actors in the making of the modern world.

⁷⁶⁰ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Reading (the) late Chris Bayly: a personal tribute', *South Asian History and Culture*, 7, 1 (2016), 1-6 and Faisal Devji, 'C.A. Bayly', *Past and Present*, 237, 1 (November 2017), 3-12.

Nationalist women's careers suggest that 'the nation' was only one of several intersecting concepts used by twentieth century actors to frame their public interventions, even amongst those we label 'nationalist.' While it is vital not to reduce our understanding of the past to yet another binary axis of interpretation, this raises an important question about the relative importance of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in the global twentieth century. If we are to refer to nationalist women's careers to help us answer this question we must reflect on the ambiguities of their cosmopolitan-nationalism. Does the fact that their cosmopolitanism was partly a strategic manoeuvre to undermine imperialism negate its historical significance?

Throughout nationalist women's careers, nationalism and cosmopolitanism were theoretically in competition. The women themselves, however, did not admit the conflict. Mazzinian cosmopolitanism resolved the issue by framing national fulfilment as a prerequisite of global progress. Nationalism in this context could be posited as a 'transitional' movement rather than an end in itself. This was the logic behind Sarojini Naidu's quip that she was a 'bad nationalist' on the grounds that she was 'first and last a human being' and the sentiment behind more earnest invocations by nationalist women of a 'common humanity'.⁷⁶¹ Amrit Kaur's cosmopolitanism was based on the assumed unity of mankind:

If we admit that all religions have laid upon mankind the duty of living so that we may contribute to the general well-being, it follows that the science of good citizenship extends from local interests to national, international and human relations.⁷⁶²

Global citizenship was not just desirable but essential, and all the more so in the globalising twentieth century - 'the scientific age' - in which human beings were increasing connected and new technologies brought the prospect of great destruction as well as 'progress'.⁷⁶³

⁷⁶¹ Sarojini Naidu, 'Presidential Address,' 138-139.

⁷⁶² Kaur, *The Concept of Social Service*, 16.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*; *Conference for the Establishment of UNESCO*, 33.

Nationalist women's activities suggest that their rhetoric was solidly based on the notion of global interconnectedness. Transnational alliances with civil society organisations and individual supporters produced meaningful solidarities with a range of groups and individuals who worked, in different ways, towards, as they saw it, a re-ordered global future. As the liaison work of Amrit Kaur and Shareefah Hamid Ali examined in Chapter 4 indicates, the international prestige for India associated with transnational connections was significant. But, for Indian women, that prestige was supposed to be instrumental in their AISC work for women's rights as well as being desirable in its own right. The global networks they helped create were loose enough to contain competing visions and conflicting priorities and they also indicate that national interest was not the only force at play. Even though Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit saw imperialism as the greatest threat, her international experience caused her to recognise shared disadvantages that affected women globally. As we saw in Chapter 2, for Naidu at least, these progressive networks offered fulfilment that was not available to her in India. The close personal relationship formed between the English-educated Amrit Kaur, who was a Christian, and the Quaker reformer Agatha Harrison (Chapter 3) indicates something similar. For the Indian women's movement, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, in particular, it was also solidarity with non-Western allies that gave meaning to cosmopolitanism.

While India was colonised, the potential conflict between cosmopolitanism and nationalism was held at bay because the implications of subsuming the national interest to the global good were, in the eyes of nationalist women, more hypothetical than real. If nationalism was 'transitional' then the conflict with cosmopolitanism could be deferred.

National independence tested the prior resolution of the conflict between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. The response of nationalist women was varied. Building on her earlier work at the League of Nations, Amrit Kaur became a great proponent of international cooperation through the 'social'

work of the United Nations. Her work at UNESCO and for the World Health Organisation (WHO) promoted Gandhian and other Indian ideas for, as she saw it, the good of humanity but she also saw that India might benefit from global health campaigns. She was thus able to balance her work as Indian Minister for Health with international work. It is interesting to note that after she retired from the Indian cabinet she continued to work for WHO, the YWCA, and the Red Cross. As a member of the CHR, Hansa Mehta was clear that nation states must be willing to relinquish national sovereignty in the name of global standards of rights and understood that this could only be achieved through international effort. On the SCSW she defended the independence of women's civil society against state interference. At the same time she continued to focus her efforts on India, working for reform through parliament and the wider public sphere.

After independence, cosmopolitanism remained the language of resistance for previously colonised women. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, developed close affinities both with Egyptian feminists and with the Ghanaian anticolonial movement. Through campaigns in the United Nations General Assembly, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit fronted the Indian state's effort to become a leader of 'suppressed peoples,' based on a belief that nationalism remained a legitimate method of challenging world inequality. By attracting prestige and the prospect of influence, cosmopolitanism can thus be seen as an instrument of nationalistic policies.

Operating in the global arena, nationalist women could not escape the force exerted by nationalism in a nationally-organised world. One manifestation of this was the way nationalist governments appropriated the issues of women's rights in the service of national geopolitical agendas. When the Soviet delegate on the CHR (unfairly) accused Hansa Mehta of sacrificing women's rights to national policy in relation to a discussion about equal pay, she could not resist being drawn into nationalistic points-scoring on the issue.⁷⁶⁴ Vijaya

⁷⁶⁴ Mehta, 'Report of the Third Session of the Human Rights Commission,' 79.

Lakshmi Pandit was more of an offender in this regard, disingenuously publicising the Gandhian commitment to women's rights to an international audience even though she knew the reality to be more complex.⁷⁶⁵

Nevertheless, the importance of cosmopolitanism in defining the identities, ideas, and transnational modes of activity associated with the careers of nationalist women in general should not be dismissed.

It is undoubtedly true that 'nationalism won', to use Samuel Moyn's blunt phrase, in global history after 1945.⁷⁶⁶ It is also true that nationalist women were to some extent agents of this victory. However, what their careers show is that nationalism and cosmopolitanism could be held in tandem. Towards the end of her career, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit expressed frustration that her work had consistently located her efforts in the global arena when she really wanted to use her experience in India. Yet she never stopped 'thinking globally', as her call, expressed in 1985, for 'mature leadership ... to save our planet and ensure a more meaningful life for its inhabitants' indicates.⁷⁶⁷ Belonging, duties, and rights, as imagined by Indian nationalism women, were not confined to any particular context, but could be applied simultaneously to the globe and the nation, as well as to a range of different local and transnational spheres defined by gender, class, or political outlook. If, in a global sense, nationalism triumphed, cosmopolitanism survived and remains available for new interpretations in the twenty-first century.

A Global History for a Global Age?

Amongst nationalist women there was a strong sense that global interconnectedness made transnational cooperation necessary. Their ways of operating in the global public sphere were conscious responses to the

⁷⁶⁵ See, for example, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, 'India to America. The Position of India in World Politics' in *The Atlantic*, 192, 4, (October 1953), 107-109. For a more critical view of Congress and gender see Pandit, *So I Became a Minister*, 102.

⁷⁶⁶ Moyn, 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights,' 369.

⁷⁶⁷ 25 May 1985, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit Papers, Second Instalment, Subject File 8, NMML.

globalising conditions they perceived around them. How might they be of use in our relatively more interconnected world a century later?

Nationalist women's global careers tell us that some of the seemingly novel aspects of our present day predicament are not unprecedented. Like today's commentators, twentieth century actors considered themselves to be globally connected as never before and nationalist women's careers reflected this mindset. The acknowledgement that we have, to some extent, 'been here before' should remind us what is at stake in the globalised, twenty-first century. Gains for international cooperation, through, for example, the establishment of the organs of the United Nations Organisation, were hard-won in the shadow of two catastrophic, large-scale conflicts. We know international dialogue has so far been unable to solve the world's problems, but we must also be aware it has to some extent served to pull humanity back from the brink of nuclear disaster, the threat of which appeared so present in the post-Hiroshima/Nagasaki era, as it does increasingly today. Greater understanding of the context in which transnational institutions emerged should give pause to those who seek to undermine them.

Historically-informed understanding of the stakes is one thing, but the past also offers precedents of how human beings have previously addressed the problems of difference and inequality in an interconnected world. These contain inspiration as well as warnings and we should be alert to both. Historic transnational solidarities that cut across otherwise apparently self-evident boundaries contain blueprints that inform present-day problems. The British Prime Minister recently claimed, 'if you think you are a citizen of everywhere, you are a citizen of nowhere.'⁷⁶⁸ In doing so she echoed the discourses of polarisation that have so fundamentally infused recent public

⁷⁶⁸ Theresa May, 'The good that government can do', Speech at Conservative Party Conference at ICC Birmingham, 5 October 2016, <http://press.conservatives.com/post/151378268295/prime-minister-the-good-that-government-can-do>, accessed 5 September 2017. May appears to be inspired by the idea proposed in David Goodhart that society can be divided into 'the somewheres' and 'the anywheres'. See David Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere* (London: Hurst & Co., 2017).

debates about the European Union and global interconnectedness. Yet the example of nationalist women suggests that 'culture wars' between the supposed 'somewheres' and so-called 'anywheres' are not inevitable.⁷⁶⁹ Today, the conception of a global elite is more widely associated with unregulated global capital than it is with progressive movements. In this context the elision between inequality and the imagining, by nationalists in London, Moscow, and Washington, of essential dichotomies between 'the local' and 'the global' is very often exaggerated, not to mention constructed, for political ends. Another type of cosmopolitanism is available, although it is much less prominent in our academic and political discourse. This is the cosmopolitanism of global civil society, rooted in the idea of inclusive citizenship, which today includes organisations such as this year's Nobel Peace Prize winner, the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, and the numerous Non-Governmental Organisations that currently hold consultative status with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

Indian nationalist women are part of the history of this latter-day global civil society. Over the course of their long careers, they lived and promoted an alternative reality in which local and specific interests and the wider good of humanity were understood to be interconnected, making it possible for them to identify as 'citizens of everywhere.' This enabled constructive engagements with different perspectives. While, as historians, we may understand that the notion of global citizenship was historically and socially determined, we might also consider it an attractive exemplar for our present age. At the same time, we should take note of the blind spots, biases and failures of our historical predecessors. Did their elitist focus prevent the spirit of world fellowship they sought to foster? Did the gendered separation of social and political spheres in the twentieth century contribute to its failures? Was their attempt to blend cosmopolitan and nationalism a pragmatic

⁷⁶⁹ See Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere*.

response to global realities or fatally flawed? In considering these questions, we may yet learn from the lessons of global history.

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APPENDIX

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁷⁷⁰

Preamble

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

Article 1.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

⁷⁷⁰ <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>, accessed 12 October 2016.

Article 2.

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3.

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4.

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5.

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6.

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7.

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8.

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9.

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10.

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11.

(1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

Article 12.

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13.

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14.

(1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

(2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15.

(1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 16.

(1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

(2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

(3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 17.

(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18.

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19.

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20.

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 21.

(1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

- (2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.
- (3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Article 22.

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23.

- (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
- (2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
- (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
- (4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Article 24.

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Article 25.

- (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.
- (2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26.

- (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
- (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27.

- (1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

(2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 28.

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29.

(1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

(2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

(3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30.

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.