

# Gender Biasness During Partition of Punjab

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**Abstract:** The Punjabi women under this organization championed the cause of female education. They opened welfare programmes and started welfare centers. The Rani of Kapurthala started a welfare center for women at Jalandhar. The women of Royal families came forward to organize women of Punjab. They also thought for their betterment.

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The gender discrimination is a common theme in the way we practice our faith and needs to be eradicated. That a woman is equal to a man is a vision the Gurus fought for. I may be going out on a limb, but it is believe that Sikh Gurus were extraordinary individuals who were touched by *Waheguru* to do work on this planet, to show society how to make it better, and they did so in human form. They had to interact with humans. They were revolutionaries who stood up for justice and rights regardless of the form: human rights, civil rights, and gender rights.

In November, 1910, at a private meeting under presidency of Mrs. B.N. Sen and Sarla Devi Chudhurani as general secretary the Bharat StreeMahamandal was formed with headquarters at Lahore. The objective of this organization was to bring together the women of the all caste and creed on the basis of their common interest in the moral and material progress of women of India. (Other members who lent their valuable support to Bharat IstriMahandal were SusheelaThe Ram, Mrs, Ram Saran Dass and Mrs. ShadiLal.

The chief aim was to spread of female education, but as the Purdah System and child marriage were the main obstacles to the education of women it was proposed to start an organization in every province the function of which would be to collect money and engage teachers who would be sent to the houses of those who desired to educate their wives and daughters.<sup>1</sup>

After 1910 ADs National and provincial women's association were started by women who became experienced in local women's association. Among them was Sarla Devi Chaudharani, who was the founder of *Bharat Istri Maha Mandal*.<sup>2</sup>The *Bharat Istri Mahamandal* Planned to open branches in all parts of India to promote female education. It development branches in Lahore. Allahabad, Delhi, Karachi, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Bunkura, Hazaribagh, Midnapur and Culcutta. The aim of the *Bharat Istri Mahamandal* was to bring together "women of every 6 race, creed, class and party on the basis of their common interest in the moral and material progress of the women of India".<sup>3</sup>

*The Bharat Stree Mahamandal*, played an important contribution in shaping women's identify:-

- 1) They held periodic meetings to bring together women from all the province of India.
- 2) They made arrangements for teaching elderly women in their homes.
- 3) They encouraged enrichment and propagation of Indian languages so that women could be exposed to modern thought and knowledge through the medium of their own language.

<sup>1</sup>Radha Kumar, *The History of Doin: An Illustrated Account of Movement for women's rights and feminism in India 1800-1900*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1993. p.32.

<sup>2</sup> Everest Jan a Matson. *Women and Social Change in India*, (Heritage Publishers, 1981), op.cit., p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> Forbes Geraldine, *Modern Women in India*, (Combridge University Press, 2000), op.cit, p.70.

- 4) They maintained contact with association catering to the needs of working women.
- 5) They opened but outlets to market handicrafts made by women.
- 6) They launched branch offices of the organization in all provinces and important towns throughout India with a view to ensuring that the action programmes of the Bharat streeMahamandal were implemented in a systematic and co-ordinate way. They cooperated and linked up with similar association in the country.<sup>4</sup>

*The Bharat Istri Mahamandal* criticized social evils prevalent in the society. They regarded Purdah as a great hindrance and stumbling block to female education. To get around this practice, they would send teachers into the homes to teach reading, writing, music, sewing and embroidery. Sarla Devi had written about the importance of women escaping male domination, so only women were allowed to join this organization. Most of the member had worked previously with male dominated women's organization and designed project similar to those favored by male reformers.<sup>5</sup>

The evolution of such activities evoked a small elite group of women to come forward to enter public life. Who, without challenging the traditional roles and familial responsibilities of women worked actively to generate political awareness among their fellow sisters. For this purpose several organizations of women were formed at several places of the country. In order to link up these groups and to establish coordination among them a need was felt to establish women's organization on a country level. <sup>6</sup>After the first world war, National Women's Organization sprang up among them three major organization: The Women Indian Association (WIA), the National Council Of Women In India (NCWI) and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) emerged between 1917 and 1927.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Women's Indian Association:-**

In 1917, women Indian association (WIA) was founded by Annie Beasant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa and Margaret cousins.<sup>8</sup>

The establishment of the WIA was the first attempt to organize women on an all India basis. By 1921 the organization had established 48 branches and a membership of 2700. The founding members of the organization were Annie Beasant, Margaret cousins and Dorothy Jinarajadasa. Annie Beasant had interested herself in the education of Indian women and had attempted to make them conscious of their social and political rights. <sup>9</sup>

Marget cousins was the founding member of the Irish women's franchise league from 1906-1913, she was one of its prominent speakers and campaigners and had the organizing capacity and the patience to initiate an association of women. Annie Beasant was an Irish lady. She was the president of the Theosophical society from 1907 until her death in 1933 and she was congress president in 1917-18. She took keen interest on women's education since 1901 and wrote a pamphlet on the subject. In 1904 she opened a girl's school associated with her central Hindu College in Benaras. In 1917 she was chosen president of the newly formed women's India association. <sup>10</sup>

The women's Indian association had humble beginning in this regard. It is worth to mention that for the formation of this organization the lead was taken by British women with the association of many Indian women. The women who founded this organization decided to call it WIA because membership was open to both Indians and Europeans. Annie Besant became the first president with Margaret cousins, Dorothy jinarajadasa, Mrs. Malati Patwardhan, Mrs. Ammu Swaminathan, Mrs. Dadhabhoj and Mrs. Ambujammal as honorary secretaries. They laid stress on female education. The WIA also started a monthly journal Istri Dharma

<sup>4</sup> Bharat Ray, *Early Feminists of Colonial India: Sarla Devi Chaudhurani and RockeySakhawatHussain*, p.85.

<sup>5</sup> Forbes Geraldine, *Modern Women in India*, (Cambridge University Press, 200, op.cit., p.71.

<sup>6</sup> Vijay Agnew, *Elite Women in Indian Politics*, Vikas Publishing, Delhi, 1979), pp. 104-105.

<sup>7</sup> Forbes Geraldine, *Modern Women in India*, CambridgeUniversity Press, 2000, Op. cit. p.72.

<sup>8</sup> Matson Jana Bverett, Op.cit., p. 68.

<sup>9</sup>Agnew Vijay, op. cit, pp.104-105.

<sup>10</sup> Matson Jana Everatt, op.cit., p. 84.

published in English, also published in Hindi and Tamil, carried news of women's interest. By the end of the first year there were thirty branches within five years, forty three branches, twenty centers and 2,300 members. Each branch accepted the main aims of the association but remained self governing.

#### **The National Council of Women in India:-**

The National council of women in India (NCWI) was the next all India women's organization established. By 1925 women of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras made efforts to establish link between the other associations into a new council.

The National Council of Women in India was established as a national branch of the International Council of Women. The international council of women convened its first meeting in WashingtonDC in 1888 to advance women's social, economic and political rights. Many prominent women of India played a key role in the advancement of this council.<sup>11</sup> The council established links with BPWC, the Calcutta women's league of service and provincial council formed in Bihar, Orissa and Delhi. The BPWC stands for Bombay Presidency Women Council. It was formed in 1918 by lady TATA and others. This council joined with National Council of Women in India. Lady Tata made efforts for the advancement of this council.<sup>12</sup>

The leader of the Bombay Presidency women's Council also sought a national forum. The result in 1925 was a third national women's association. The Bombay based National Council of Women in India. The BPWC and the Calcutta women's league of service were in corporate into the NCWI and provincial councils were formed in Bihar, Orissa and Delhi.<sup>13</sup> This organization followed the programmes like supporting child marriage Restraint Bill, trying to get women representative on the Royal Commission of Labor, engaging in rescue work and holding classes. By 1934 there were eight provincial council, 180 affiliated societies and 8201 members in the NCWI.

In 1928 AIWC founded the All Indian Women's Education fund to finance a college for women, the lady Irwin college in Delhi.<sup>14</sup> The beautiful city of Delhi was the scene of a unique gathering when the sound AIWC on educational reform met in 1928. Women delegates gathered from 33 constituencies. The conference deliberated on important matters concerning women and the vicereine, Maharanis and people of various professions and house wives mixed on a common platform in a spirit of perfect equality. The conference was opened by lady Irwin and was followed by a civic reception.

The primary purpose of the AIWC was educational reform but they were interested themselves in all aspects of a women's life. They campaigned for social reforms such as Rai Hari Bilas Sharda's bill for the prevention of child marriage, the removal of legal disabilities in the law of inheritance and marriage and the right of women to vote.

Many congress women became eminent members were Sarojini Naidu, Vijay Laxmi Pandit, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Kamla Devi Chattopadhyay. <sup>15</sup>Rajkumari Amrit Kaur considered political and social reform to be interconnected. There were no rigid and exclusive shares of a women's life, she thought political reforms would form a source for many other social and educational rights for women. <sup>16</sup>

The women's organization provided a common platform to the women of India to emancipate themselves in all shares of life including their demand for political rights. In 1917, the secretary of state for India Edwin Montague announced the British government intension of including more Indians in the governing process.

The first step in the political emancipation of women was taken in 1917 when a deputation of fourteen members with Sarojini Naidu as their leader met Mr. Montague requesting him to grant the right to vote to women. The

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<sup>11</sup>Forbes Geraldine, op.cit., p.68.

<sup>12</sup> Matson Jana Everett., op. cit., p.21

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, p.26

<sup>14</sup> Agnew Vijay, op.cit., p.117.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp.118-119.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p.117.

women's deputation demanded that they be included under the expanded franchise in the new constitution which, instead of discrimination on account of sex should ensure equal opportunities to women.

The deputation included representatives of several women's organizations like the *Seva Sadan*, the *Mahila Seva Samaj*, the Indians women's university and the women's branch of the home rule league. Included in the delegation were Annie Besant, Dr. Joshi (Late Rani Rajwade), Begum Harsat Mohan and Margaret Cousins. Sarojini Naidu was group's spokesperson. Three European women in the delegation. Besant Cousins and Jinaraja dasa had participated in the women's suffrage movement in Britain.

Secretary of state Montague evidently did not take the women's delegation very seriously in 1917. He described the interview in his diary by commenting on "one very nice looking doctor from Bombay", Dr. Joshi, labeling Sarojini Naidu "a revolutionary at heart" and Margaret Cousins "a well known suffragist from London" a theosophist and one of Mrs. Besant's crowd. After women left, Montague received a delegation of crowd. After women left, Montague received a delegation of landholder and seemed amused at their hostile reaction to women's suffrage when playfully raised the issue with them. Viceroy Chelmsford was skeptical of support for the demand among the educated India elite.<sup>17</sup>

The British officials at first dismissed the idea of women suffrage as unrealistic under Indian conditions. The demand was not mentioned in the Montague-Chelmsford report.<sup>18</sup> When the South borough franchise committee was formed to investigate the suggestion regarding the franchise in the scheme, the women suffragists took very means to bring to the notice of the committee all the evidence which showed the need for, and the country's support of the inclusion of women in the new franchise.<sup>19</sup> Prominent among the organizations of 40 branches the women graduate union of Bombay and the women's branch of the Home Rule League. In addition, the women of Bombay organized a petition signed by 800 ladies reiterating their demand for the vote. The south borough franchise committee toured India in 1918 to gather information. They accepted women's petition but interviewed women from only two provinces Bengal and Punjab.<sup>20</sup>

The South borough committee published its report in April 1919 but did not recommend extending the vote to women. The arguments used by the South borough committee were familiar to Indian nationalist. The Congress and the Muslim League, the two largest political associations of the country supported the demand of the women.

Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu went to England to present evidence before the joint select committee. The Bombay committee on women's suffrage decided to send Mrs. Harabai A. Tata and her daughter Mithan (After marriage Mithan Lam) to England with Sir Sankaran Nair. Harabai's budding feminism was encouraged by Princess Sophie, daughter of Maharaja Dalip Singh and granddaughter of Ranjit Singh, who was living at England at that time. Princess Sophie favoured, "vote for women", badge and explained the suffrage movement to Harabai. Under her tutelage Harabai became "a firm believer and worker for the cause of women suffrage." She was the real soldier in this campaign.

Mrs. Annie Besant, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu and Mrs. Harabai Tata were the women who were heard by the committee in support of the extension of franchise to women in India.<sup>21</sup>

The House of Commons decided that the question was one for Indians to answer for themselves and while retaining the sex disqualification in the reform bill they framed the electoral rules in such terms that if any provincial legislative council should approve by a resolution in favour of women's franchise, women should be put on the electoral register of that province. This was the only provision regarding franchise matters which might be changed before a 10 years' time limit. Until after that period women were ineligible for election as legislative councilors.

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<sup>17</sup>*Ibid*, p. 104.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid*, p. 103.

<sup>19</sup>*India year Book*, 1935, p.101

<sup>20</sup>*Forbes Geraldine*, op.cit., p. 95.

<sup>21</sup>*India year book*, 1935, p. 123.

The Mont ford reforms of 1919 only enfranchised about one million women.<sup>22</sup> Travancore was the first to grant the legislative vote to women at the close of 1920. Madras and Bombay Presidencies gave the lead to the other provinces to extend the franchise to women. The Mysore legislative council passed the women suffrage resolution in April 1922, the united proinces followed in 1923. In October, 1924 Assam provincial council granted women suffrage for its province. In 1926 Punjab, Central Provinces, and Bengal, all granted the franchise to women and finally Bihar and Orissa in 1929.<sup>23</sup>

The women suffrage resolution rode to victory on a wave of nationalist enthusiasm. Although the number of women qualified to vote was never large enough to be a matter of concern. Throughout India the numbers enfranchised were small in Madras, women were 8.46% of the total voters, 5.03% in Bombay and 3.0% in United province and Bengal and only 2.5% in the Punjab. In the Central Legislative Assembly women comprised 4.36% of the total electorate.<sup>24</sup>

The first election under the government of India act of 1919 was held in 1920. The act enfranchised less then one percent of the total female population. The following table indicates the number of male voters to adult female voters.<sup>25</sup>

The Hindu women were politically more experienced than their Muslim counter parts. The formers had been encouraged by the Congress leaders to join politics. Their involvement in the Satyagrahs had made them conscious of political issues and more over they did not have the disadvantage of having to observe the Purdah. The participation of Muslim women in politics had so far been extremely limited and very few attempt had been made by the Muslim leadership to mobilize them. A provincial women's league had existed in Punjab only since 1932. The Muslims, after the election of 1936 set up provincial committee of women. The experience of Hindu women in politics enabled them to campaign thoroughly and they were extensively supported with votes from their own community. Muslim women could also rely on their community, but the Muslims being more conservative were reluctant to go to the Polling booths.

Begum Shah Nawaz had expressed similar sentiments. In her autobiography, father and daughter, she writes about the difficulty of collecting women votes for seats specifically reserved for Muslim women in Punjab and Bengal. The system of reservation and nomination of seats had protected the Muslim women from competing with the Hindus. The annual report of the AIWC in 1937 mentioned that Muslim women had won seat specifically reserved for them. They suggested that if there had been an open contest the Muslim candidates would most probably have lost.<sup>26</sup>

After independence the constitution of India guarantees adult suffrage to all without any discrimination of sex. The Indian women have been granted political equality with men. Article 16(1) of the constitution provides equality of opportunities or appointment to any office under the state. Article 325 makes no special electoral rolls on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex. Further the Article 326 emphasizes that election to legislative assemblies of state were to be held on the basis of adult franchise.

As a result of adult franchise and equality with men the Indian women are taking active part in politics and holding high offices. No doubt their number is not very high but their capacity in administrative and political matters has been well recognized. Their position is enviable to their counter parts throughout the world. Our country had women Prime Minister (Late Smt. Indra Gandhi), Women Ambassadors, women Chief Minister, Ministers and Legislators who played a prominent role in shaping the destiny of our country.

In the first general election held in 1952 and later on women contested for seats in the parliament and legislative assemblies of the state.

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<sup>22</sup> Gupta PadminiSen, op. cit., p.124.

<sup>23</sup> *India year book*, 1935, p.124

<sup>24</sup> Forbes Geraldine, op-cit., p.101.

<sup>25</sup> Agnew Vijay, op.cit, p.113.

<sup>26</sup> Agnew Vijay, op.cit., p. 124.

Sucheta Kirplani and Mayawati, Nandini Satpathy and Shashi Kala Kakundar became chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Orrisa and Goa respectively. RajkumariAmrit Kaur was the first woman minister of central cabinet and Shanno Devi was the first woman to become the speaker of state legislative assembly of Haryana. Rajindra Kumari Bajpai became Lt. Governor of Pondicherry, Najma Heptullah was appointed Deputy Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha.

Smt. Indira Gandhi played a dominant role in the politics of India as the Prime Minister of the country. Sonia Gandhi, Mamta Banerji, Jaya Lalita and Mayawati are also very dominant in politics. Rabri Devi was the chief minister of Bihar.