

Women's Politicization and Engagement in Punjab Elections, 1919–1947

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The paper focuses on the evolving role of women in the political landscape of the British India and the colonial Punjab during the first half of the twentieth century. It emphasizes the political awakening of women, particularly with the support of leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, and Marget Cousins, as well as their increasing visibility in the Indian National Congress (INC) from the late 19th century onwards. For the better understanding the paper is divided into two sections. The first section highlights when women were start taking active part in the politics and their social origins as well. The second section deals with the Punjabi women representation in the General and Punjab Legislative elections from 1926 to 1947.

I

During the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, the pattern of women's lives began to change. The development of women education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries produced a 'new woman' whose interests went beyond the household. For the first time in India's history, women began to communicate with women outside their families and local communities or in the public spaces. There was a small group of women who shared English as a common language. This made possible communication across language barriers. On the other hand, there were growing numbers of women literate in the vernacular languages which enabled them to learn about women's issues in the women journals like *Istri Samachar*, *Istri Sudhar*, *Stree Darpan*, etc. For the early architects and participants of women's movement in north India, one component of their work was the formation of *mahila samitis* or Ladies' Clubs at the regional level.

The small local clubs and women's auxiliaries of the Indian National Congress and the National Social Conference became the medium for the expression of women's question or opinion. At the same time, they were

a training ground for women who would later take up leadership roles in politics and social institutions. Women began to define their interests, propose solutions, and take action only after they formed their own associations. Women's associations, called by various titles, sprang up all over India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Most were geographically limited but they shared the goal of bringing women together to discuss women's issues. The major concern of early women organisations like the Ladies Society in Calcutta (1882), Bengal Women's Education League (1902) and The Stri Zarhosti Mandal (1903) was social reformation, education and improving the social condition of the women. However, none of them were successful in mobilizing a large number of women or in providing unified political leadership to them at national level.

It must be noticed that with the formation of Indian National Congress in 1885, the political environment of the nation changed. Saraladevi Chaudharani¹ was critical of the women's meetings held in conjunction with the Indian National Social Conference (1887) and made a call for independent permanent association of Indian women. An early example of this type of ladies' auxiliary was the Bharata Mahila Parishad (Ladies Social Conference), inaugurated in 1904 as part of the National Social Conference begun in 1887.² Women responded favourably and Saraladevi Chaudharani's organization the Bharat Stree Mahamandal (the Large Circle of Indian Women) had its first meeting in Allahabad in 1910.³ Women leaders were defining women's issues as women education, child marriage, the observance of purdah, and women's status in the family.

In 1887, INC 3rd session marked the women's first presence, not only European and Eurasian, but Indian and one or two of these from each Presidency, being amongst the number in the Reserve Gallery behind the President's platform.⁴ Several officials from the Bombay and Bengal Presidencies were present to witness the proceedings, among whom are the names of Mr. and Mrs. Wadia, Dr and Mrs. Bose, Mr. and Mrs. A.G. Cardew, Mr. and Mrs. G. H. Stuart were mentioned.⁵

In 1889, INC session noticed no less than 10 women delegates graced the assembly, one elected by men at a public meeting, the others by various ladies' associations, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Bengal Ladies' Association and the Arya Mahila Samaj ladies. They included European and Native Christians, a Parsi, an orthodox Hindu, and three Brahmo Samaj ladies.⁶ Among these women, only 1 woman had connections with the Punjab. Miss Jessie Royce Carleton, M.D., a young

lady doctor and is the idol of the people of Ambala, amongst whom she lives and labours, untiringly, by her own choice and the barest pittance, in the purest spirit of Christian love and self-abnegation.⁷ It must be noticed that in this session, Surendranath Banerjee who was a practiced orator carried his hearers along with him by addressing them 'Sister and Brother Delegates'. The presence of lady delegates, few in number but all women who in one field or another have justly earned distinction, is a grateful indication of the awakening that is going on throughout the country, to higher and better things. No arguments, proposals were put forward by any women delegates. This session was the precursor of the presence of women as delegates in INC sessions. Women were in attendance at annual Congress meetings from as early as 1889, although their roles were primarily decorative.

The first major appearance of women in the public political sphere was during the Swadeshi movement, when large numbers of Bengali housewives participated in it. In the nationalist movement the success of Swadeshi movement of Bengal (1905) depended on the output of a large amount of home-spun yarn, and this brought the women of India into the national movement for the first time. In India, a few elite women encouraged by the presence of Annie Besant, had attended political meetings since the beginning of the First World War. The most owing of these women were Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant and Bi Amma, the mother of Muhammad Ali. The Home Rule League (1916) had established a Women's Branch to enable women to meet and discuss political issues without the inhibiting presence of men.⁸ It was after the First World War that nationalist sentiment and activity increased exponentially in India. The imagery of women murdered in the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of 1919, for example, gave frame to the women's political movement as they engaged in debates and disagreements with the British representation of the massacre.

After World War I national women's organizations were created with the efforts of Irish women like Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins in the first half of the 20th century, the Women's Indian Association (WIA) in 1917, the National Council of Women in India (NCWI) in 1925, and the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1927. They were non-political organizations interested in promoting educational opportunities for women and improving their position by social and legal reform. They however, became increasingly involved in the question of women's right to vote and were largely responsible for organizing the Indian women

suffrage movement. By 1921 the organization WIA had established 48 branches and a membership of 2,700.⁹ The founding members of the organization were Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins and Dorothy Jinarajadasa. The WIA, throughout their campaign of women suffrage, had acknowledged the inspiration received from the Suffragette movement in the West.¹⁰ During the same period, Indian women were placing their demand of right to vote and were participating in the national movement for freedom.

The campaign for the enfranchisement of Indian women could only become an issue when Indians were allowed to participate in parliamentary bodies in India. In Britain, a woman of Indian origin, Princess Sophia Duleep Singh was active in women suffrage campaigns. The public demands for women suffrage in India were first raised as an issue in 1917, when the Secretary of State and Viceroy of India, Montagu and Chelmsford came to India to discuss constitutional reforms. A women's delegation led by Sarojini Naidu met Montagu, Secretary of State for India, during his visit. Margaret Cousins, an Irish suffragette arranged a delegation, which consisted of 14 women.¹¹ The deputation included representatives of several women's organizations like the Seva Sadan, the Mahila Seva Samaj, the Indian Women's University and the Women's Branch of the Home Rule League. ¹² During the deputation, Sarojini Naidu was delegated to read out a prepared address. Margaret Cousins had drafted the women's franchise address, which was published before the meeting in December. Prior to 1917, the women had limited franchise in Bombay and Madras. The number of women who could vote in Madras was so small that it failed to make any impact on their consciousness politically, and they did not protest when it was withdrawn. In Bombay, women did vote for the Bombay Corporation and the Municipality.¹³

The women's deputation was sympathetically received, but no mention of women enfranchisement was made in the Montague-Chelmsford Scheme of Reforms. Later, the Southborough Committee (1918) was established to make a detailed study of the women question. The Southborough Committee published its report in April 1919 but did not recommend extending the right to vote to women. In consideration of the conservative sections of the population and the social customs of the country, the committee felt it was not advisable to extend the suffrage to include women. The custom of secluding women was specifically mentioned as one of the many problems in recording and registering

voters.¹⁴ The Government of India Bill published in 1919 did not enfranchise women, but it did empower provincial legislatures to remove the sex barrier at their discretion. Many of the provinces immediately introduced resolutions to franchise women. The resolutions were passed in Madras and Bombay in 1921, United Provinces in 1923, Central Province, Bengal and Punjab in 1926.¹⁵

In 1927, Katherine Mayo's book *Mother India* sparked global controversy, becoming a tool for the British authorities to reject India's demand for independence in 1920s. In response, Mahatma Gandhi enlisted Sarojini Naidu to counter Mayo's accusations through a lecture tour in England and America in 1924.¹⁶ Sarojini Naidu's impactful speeches, widely covered in *Young India*, earned her significant publicity and contributed to her election as Congress President the following year. The AIWC stressed the political goal of self-government as a means to achieve women's aspirations.¹⁷ The AIWC was originally called to discuss female education, but they found that this question could not be addressed without looking at other issues such as purdah, child marriage, and later agreed that these problems could not be separated from India's political subjection.¹⁸

Women had participated in the first major political satyagraha in India in 1919. Small and isolated groups of women held political meetings in Bombay and Punjab. Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu addressed meetings in Bombay to educate women in the nature of satyagraha,¹⁹ and Kasturba Gandhi and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay sold proscribed literature in the streets.²⁰ In Punjab, Sarladevi Chaudharani organized women on a political basis.²¹ In Lahore an increasing number of women were attending public meetings, but none so far had attempted to address them.²² The Constructive Programme of Mahatma Gandhi included several social reform activities. The women were, however, encouraged to participate in the constructive programme of khadi, village industry, prohibition and untouchability.

At the All-India Congress Committee (A.I.C.C.) session of 1921 Mahatma Gandhi successfully passed a resolution to make khadi an integral part of the fight for Swaraj. Innumerable articles were published in *Young India* on the duty of every congressman and woman to use khadi and gave detailed instructions about spinning and weaving.²³ Mahatma Gandhi successfully mobilized the wives and daughters of congressmen to promote the use of khadi. Sarladevi Chaudharani worked actively to popularize the idea in Punjab. She was apparently the first woman to

address a public meeting wearing a khadi sari. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur organized a Spinner Association in Punjab and extensively promoted the use of khadi.²⁴ Basanti Devi and Urmilla Das, the wife and sister of C.R. Das, sold khadi in the streets of Calcutta. Their arrest by the police had given the movement added strength and an increasing number of women, who had so far been apathetic, enlisted themselves as volunteers.²⁵

Women were from now on, became integral to nationalist activities, demonstrated by their mass participation in the 1930 Salt Satyagraha. Initially excluded by Gandhi from the Dandi March as 75 disciples chosen to accompany him on his walk to Dandi consisted of men only. Women expressed disappointment but Gandhi explained that since sufficient number of men were likely to respond, the presence of women was not essential.²⁶ Despite this, they remained undeterred, with Margaret Cousins protesting the gender-based division of roles, as women managed the Ashram while men participated in the satyagraha.²⁷ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay met Gandhi and expressed her desire to be involved in the Satyagraha.²⁸ Durgabai Deshmukh²⁹ aware that Gandhi wished to exclude women from the Salt Satyagraha, met with the local leaders of Madras and suggested that they be included in the movement.³⁰ The Nehru women, Mrs. Motilal Nehru, Uma Nehru, and Kamla Nehru became actively involved in different ways. The Civil Disobedience movements had provided them with an access to political activity.

The A.I.C.C. session passed a special resolution acknowledging the contribution of women to the success of the 1930 Satyagraha.³¹ The mass participation of women in the nationalist movement was significantly influenced by Gandhi's commitment to improve the status and role of women in Indian society. The nature of his leadership and programme had enabled the tradition-bound and conservative women to make a breakthrough. The political career of a majority of women, like the men, began with some contact, direct or indirect, with Mahatma Gandhi. They were either present at a meeting addressed by him, had met him personally or communicated with him.³² A few of these women who participated in national freedom struggle also became members of secret and revolutionary societies. Women were involved in the 1920's but their numbers increased significantly in the 1930s.

Women who were able to assume leadership roles in the Congress had the unique advantages of education, wealth, liberal family background and support of male family members. As wives and daughters of popular politicians they could take advantage of their family

names and secure the goodwill of their colleagues in the Congress. An analysis of the career of leading women politicians such as Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kriplani, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay indicates that patronage and family association played a major role in their success which was a unique phenomenon and not representative of a trend in society.³³

Women were enrolled as members of the Congress, elected as delegates to the annual A.I.C.C. meetings and nominated to the Working Committee. The participation of women in the Congress and more specifically in Gandhian politics had increased steadily, but there was no proportionate increase in women as representatives or delegates to the annual A.I.C.C. meetings. The available records of delegates who attended A.I.C.C. meetings are incomplete. A close analysis of the year corresponding to the most significant Satyagraha, 1922, 1930, 1937 and 1940, reveals the following facts:

- In 1922, out of 350 delegates to the A.I.C.C. only 16 were women.³⁴
- In 1930, out of 21 provinces electing 350 members only eight provinces elected 13 women members in all.³⁵
- In 1937, out of 285 members only 8 were women.³⁶
- In 1940, the year in which the Women's Department was established, this had dwindled to 5 out of a total of 386.³⁷
- Of these women less than half played significant roles in either local or national politics. The women who were successful fall into two categories: those with family affiliations to the Congress and its leadership and those from wealthy and unorthodox families.³⁸

At the A.I.C.C. session of 1922 out of 16 women members, 9 members social origin can be recognized.³⁹ Three of them are from the Nehru household. The two delegates from Bengal are the wife and sister of C. R. Das. The two Muslim ladies are the mother of Muhammad Ali and the wife of Hasrat Mohani. Sarladevi Chaudharani is the niece of Rabindranath Tagore and the wife of a politically active lawyer of the Punjab, Rambhug Chowdhary. Sarojini Naidu had gained considerable political experience by 1922, was well known among the nationalists, but has no direct family affiliations to the Congress. In 1930, out of 13 women delegates only 4 members' social origin can be recognized.⁴⁰ The older members are Uma Nehru and Basanti Devi and the newcomers are

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and A. Lakshmi pathi. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was married to Sarojini Naidu's brother but her political career is independent of any family influence. In 1937, out of 8 members, 6 were well known.⁴¹ The newcomers are Satyawati, the granddaughter of Swami Shradhananda, and Mridula Sarabhai, the daughter of the textile magnate Ambalal Sarabhai.

Table-1
The Women Delegates to All India Congress Committee
from the Punjab

Province	No. of women delegates	Name of the delegate
Punjab and NWFP (1922)	1	Sarladevi Chaudhurani
Punjab (1930)	1	Sardarni Sardul Singh Caveeshar
Punjab (1937)	1	Sardarni Sardul Singh Caveeshar

Source: A.I.C.C. Papers, Compiled from File No. 16/1922-24, File No. 12/ 1930, File No. 6/1937.

Sarladevi Chaudhurani and Sardarni Sardul Singh caveeshar were two women delegates of Punjab to A.I.C.C. Sarladevi Chaudharani was the niece of Rabindranath Tagore and became the editor of a small magazine called *Bharati*.⁴² The Tagore's strongly supported the Brahmo Samaj and had educated all the women of their family. Sardarni Sardul Singh Caveeshar was wife of Sardar Sardul Singh Caveeshar who was president of Punjab Rajs Conference which was held on 7th April 1935 at Bardella Hall. Only two women attended the conference of which one was Mrs Sardul Singh.⁴³ Later on Sardar Sardul Singh Caveeshar became treasurer of Sikh Political Party of which any Sikh male or female can become member by filling a form.

In 1936-37, when Jawaharlal Nehru as President did not appoint a woman to the Working Committee, the incident provoked protests from Mahatma Gandhi and women's organizations. The All-India Women's Conference published a protest. They were critical of the Working Committee for excluding Sarojini Naidu and for not considering the appointment of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay as a socialist member. They were particularly aggrieved that Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, a

representative to the Second Round Table Conference, was not considered good enough for the Congress.⁴⁴ In 1940, the Congress organized the Women's Department in recognition of the growing political involvement of women and to increase their membership. At the annual A.I.C.C. meetings of the Congress, women were present as members and were appointed delegates. Gandhi had established a convention of electing at least 1 woman member to the elite Working Committee of the Congress.⁴⁵ Sarojini Naidu for many years filled this position alone. Occasionally others were appointed, like Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Mridula Sarabhai in 1946-47.⁴⁶ The period of national freedom struggle in the first half of the 20th century marked a transformative phase for women, as they began to engage in political activities. The presence of women in the satyagrahas and in Congress meetings is explained in terms of their elite status in society. An analysis of the social and family background of significant women politicians supports assumptions of their wealth, status and education. These women's success was heavily influenced by their family environments, which emphasized education and progressive social beliefs.

II

The second section of the paper deals with brief introduction of the electoral system that was present in the Punjab from 1920 to 1947 and basic data relating to the women political participation, women seats, names of the women and party affiliation in the elections (General and Bye-elections) which took place in this period, both for the central and provincial legislatures.

The Punjab was annexed by the British on 29th March 1849. The Indian Councils Act of 1861 gave Legislative Councils to Bombay and Madras and authorised the establishment of similar councils in other provinces.⁴⁷ But it was in 1897, thirty-six years after the passage of the Act, that Punjab got a legislative Council comprising 9 members with no reference of women. There was no provision of election of the Member of Legislative Councils who were all nominated by the Lt. Governor.⁴⁸ The Government of India Act of 1909 gave only 1 out of the 27 elected seats in the newly created 60-member central legislature.⁴⁹ The strength of the Punjab legislature was restricted to 24 and only 5 were to be elected from these 24 members.⁵⁰ Although this strength was raised a little later to 8 in 1912 and to 16 in 1916. There is no mention of women up to this time period.

The first reference of women in the legislative context came with the Government of India Act of 1919. Indian women's interest in the Right to vote came much later than their reform efforts to promote education, against social evils, and participation in public life. The public demands for women suffrage in India was first raised as an issue in 1917, when the Secretary of State and Viceroy of India, Montagu and Chelmsford came to India to discuss constitutional reforms. In the 33rd Session of INC of 1918, Sarladevi Chaudharani presented the resolution supporting the Right to vote for women. At this time petition politics seemed the only way to make an impression on government. Despite the delegation, private interviews, and evidence of support, the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms failed to mention women at all.

The Government of India Act of 1919, made substantial changes in the structure and functioning of the central and provincial legislatures. At the centre, the new Act provided for a bi-cameral legislature.⁵¹ As a result of Government of India Act of 1919, a new male electorate was created, but only 3% of Indian men were enfranchised to vote for representatives to Provincial Assemblies, and only 0.06% for the Central Assembly excluding women by allowing the Provincial Assemblies to drop the exclusion clause, which most of them did.⁵² The first Punjab Legislative Council, constituted in 1921, was composed of (besides 23 nominated officials and non-officials) 71 elected members, of whom 35 were Muslims, 15 Sikhs and the rest Hindus and others.⁵³ The Punjab sent 4 directly elected members to the Council of State and 12 to the Legislative assembly. There were a number of disqualifications and qualifications listed for the voters of the central legislature. Disqualifications were identical for the voters of both the houses. In concrete terms, no person was eligible to be a voter who was a female.⁵⁴ Women were not allowed to vote, get elected or nominated for election for the central legislature. It was on the 7th December 1925 that Punjab Legislative Council allowed women the right of vote.⁵⁵ The legislature was authorised to pass a legislation doing away with the disqualification in 1926. The Act enfranchised less than one per cent of the total female population.⁵⁶

Table-2
The Number of Male Voters to Adult Female Voters
for the Year 1926.⁵⁷

Province	Proportion of Electors to Population (Per cent)	Proportion of Adult Male Electors to Adult Male Population (Percent)	Proportion of Female Electors to Adult Female Population (Per cent)
Central Provinces including Berar	1.3	5.2	-
Bihar and Orissa	1.1	4.6	-
Assam	3.7	14.2	0.2
Bengal	2.5	9.7	0.3
United Provinces	3.5	12.4	0.4
Punjab	3.4	11.9	0.5
Bombay	3.9	13.4	0.8
Madras	3.2	11.6	1

Source: Indian Statutory Commission, A Survey Report (Government of India, 1930), p. 191.

Table-3
Distribution of the Seats in the Punjab Legislative Assembly
(1937-1947)

Province	Total	Total General	General for scheduled castes	Backward Areas and tribes	Sikhs	Muslims	Anglo Indians	Europeans	Indian Christians	Commerce, Industry, mining etc.	Landlords	Universities	Labour	General Women	Sikh Women	Muslim Women	Anglo Indian Women	Indian Christian Women
Punjab	175	42	8	-	31	84	1	1	2	1	5	1	3	1	1	2	-	-

The Table-2 highlights that in Punjab, the proportion of female electors to the adult female population was only 0.5 percent. The Government of India Act of 1935 made profound changes. Unlike most of other Provinces, the Act gave a unicameral legislature to the Punjab although with a changed designation: The Punjab Legislative Council was now styled as the Punjab Legislative Assembly.⁵⁸

The Table-3 shows that 4 seats were provided to women in the Punjab Legislative Assembly from 1937-1947. If we look at the Property/ Status Qualifications of Punjab Legislative Assembly voters, 1937-47⁵⁹, we found following requisites for Urban and Rural Constituencies: Woman being literate, widow or mother of officer/ Other ranks in military, other than officers or of His Majesty's military forces died in war and wife of a voter other than a title-holder was eligible for vote casting. The average number of voters per territorial constituency was about 16,000 in the Punjab. By a rough estimate, now 12% of the total population and 24% of the adult population in the Punjab got enfranchised.⁶⁰ The disqualifications for the candidates desirous of getting nominated for election and voters were almost the same as before.⁶¹ The qualifications for the Council of State did not change but for the Punjab Legislative assembly, these did change as women were given 4 constituency seats.

Table-4
Distribution of Punjab Seats in the Central Legislature, 1920-47

House	Community/ Special Class	No. of seats
Council of State	Muhammadans	2
	Sikhs	1
	Non- Muhammadans	1
	Total 4	
Legislative Assembly	Muhammadans	6
	Sikhs	2
	Non- Muhammadans	3
	Landholders	1
	Total 12	

Source: *The Punjab Government Gazette Extraordinary*, 7th August 1920; Home Public, File No. 120/1920, *National Archives of India*, New Delhi.

The Punjab Legislative Council (1919-1936)/ Assembly (1937-1947)

In the General Election and Bye-Elections 1920, 1923, 1926 and 1930 there was no reference of women in the election returns.⁶² However, in 1930, a petition was filed from the seat of North-East Towns (Non-Muhammadan Urban) constituency Shrimati Lekhawati Jain against Mr Tek Chand.⁶³ The petitioner alleged that 'nomination papers of the petitioner were rejected illegally'. The election was held void. The Bye-Election (date of polling: 5th-8th February 1934) was caused by this election petition in which Shrimati Lekhawati Jain won.⁶⁴ She was elected to a Congress seat in Punjab Legislative Council.⁶⁵

Table-5
Women Elected, Party Affiliations and Percent of Votes Polled
in the General Elections 1937

Name of Women's Constituencies	Extent	Seat	Election Returns: Voters (V.) % of votes polled (P.) Winner candidate (W.)
Lahore City (General)	Municipal Committee and Cantonment of Lahore.	1	V. 33719 P. 48.93% W. Parbhathi Devi (Congress Party) 11331 2. Shanno Devi Sehgal (Congress Nationalists Party) 5070
Inner Lahore (Muhammadan)	Lahore City within the Circular Road	1	V. 10315 P. 40.53% W. Baji Rashida Latif (Independent) 2123 2. Ummal Khan 1402 3. Zakiyya Sultana 600 4. Khurshid Begum 19
Outer Lahore (Muhammadan)	Municipal Committee of Lahore (outside the Circular Road) Cantonment of Lahore, Municipal Committees of Baghbanpura-Bhogiwal, Amritsar district	1	V. 4134 P. 55.01% W. Beguma Jahanara Shah Nawaz (Unionist Party) 2062 2. Karam-un-Nisa 201
Amritsar (Sardar)	Amritsar District	1	V. 58106 P. 69.78% W. Raghbir Kaur (Congress Party) 22058 2. Kartar Kaur 16918 3. Tulsibai 84

Table-6
Women Elected, Party Affiliations and Percent of Votes Polled
in the General Elections 1946.

Name of Women's Constituencies	Extent	Seat	Election Returns: Voters (V.) % of votes polled (P.) Winner candidate (W.)
Lahore City (General)	Municipal Committee and Cantonment of Lahore.	1	V. 43372 W. Mrs Rameshwari Nehru (Congress Party), (Elected unopposed)
Inner Lahore (Muhammadan)	Lahore City within the Circular Road	1	V. 3865 P. 69.08% W. Begum Salma Tassadaq Husain (Muslim League) 2073 2. Bibi Rashida Latif (Independent) 536
Outer Lahore (Muhammadan)	Municipal Committee of Lahore (outside the Circular Road) Cantonment of Lahore, Municipal Committees of Baghbanpura-Bhogiwal, Amritsar district	1	V. 5072 P. 58.97% W. Begum Jahanara Shah Nawaz (Muslim League) 2282 2. Khurshid Begum (Ahrars Party) 72 3. Zainab Bibi (Independent) 1
Amritsar (Sardar)	Amritsar District	1	V. 7075 P. 62.26% W. Parkash Kaur (Congress Party) 29480 2. Sant Kaur (Communist Party) 8802 3. Kartar Kaur (Independent) 5741

The Election Petition was filed by Sardarni Parkash Kaur.⁶⁶ In the Lahore City (General Women constituency), Bye-Election was caused by the demise of Shrimati Parbhathi Devi from 21st -26th February 1938 in which Shrimati Bhag Devi (w/o L Duni Chand) won. In West Multan Division (General-Rural constituency), Bye-election was caused by Rai Bahadur L Sham Lal's resignation from 26th February 1940 to 6th March 1940 in which Shrimati Shanno Devi won. In Lahore Inner (Muhammadan-Urban constituency), Bye-election was held from 15th to -18th September 1941 in which Husanara Begum scored second highest no.

of votes.⁶⁷ In the General Elections 1946, it was noticed that from South-Eastern Towns (General Urban constituency), Shrimati Shanno Devi Sehgal (Congress Party) won scoring 15901 votes when there were 36365 voters and % of votes polled was 41.96%. The women constituencies were same as in 1937.

The Bye-Election caused by election petition in Lahore City (General Women constituency) took place from 4th to 8th November 1946, in which Shrimati Sita Devi won.⁶⁸ When we look at the members from the Punjab in the Constituent Assembly of India (1946), we find that there was only 1 woman member (Begum Jahanara Shah Nawaz) out of 28 members.⁶⁹

The major issues raised by these women after becoming members of Punjab Legislative Assembly were related to women's education in the province. The Minister of education congratulated Begum Rashida Latif Baji, Begum J. A. Shah Nawaz and Shrimati Raghbir Kaur, for their very useful suggestions regarding women's education and assured them that the question of women's education would receive earnest and careful consideration from the Government.⁷⁰ These women focused on improving the status of women by highlighting issues such as discrimination against female child, condition of the peasant women, grievances of these poor women, the establishment of widow ashrams on industrial lines, as proposed by Shrimati Parbhathi Devi.⁷¹ They requested that a larger sum of money be earmarked in the budget for female education, the construction of high school buildings with commodious boarding houses attached, so that a larger number of students could be admitted to both the schools and the boarding houses. They also proposed that scholarships be given to girls receiving education in village schools, and that the situation of women undergoing imprisonment in the province's jails be addressed.⁷² In her speech, Begum Rashida mentioned that the women of the province had previously no representation in the Assembly. Now that women had been fortunate enough to be granted representation, they proposed to fight for their own rights and would compel government to accede to their demands.⁷³ Thus, it can be concluded that although very few women were involved in politics, they continuously fought for their rights.

Conclusion

The women, raised in progressive families, adopted new roles in politics, education, and social reform, while still adhering to traditional roles of wife and mother. The differences lay in perceiving these roles not as

something exclusive, but by combining them with activities outside the home. Their participation in politics was designed to inspire other women to follow suit. Those who became prominent on the national or provincial level shared among them common characteristics of wealth, education, power and status. The women delegates to Congress meetings or as members of the Working Committee did not represent the common women who were involved in nationalist politics. While these served as models for the middle and lower classes, nevertheless, the opportunities that were available to elite women were exclusive and restricted to their own group. The masses of women had limited access to positions of power and authority, and had little direction and knowledge of the fundamentals of political life. The status or prestige acquired by elite women during the nationalist movement cannot therefore be generalized to apply to all women in Indian society.

It was only after the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 that significant changes occurred in the politics of the Punjab. The first reference of women in the legislative context came with the Government of India Act of 1919. The key finding of the second section of paper is that women's political participation in Punjab was significantly restricted before 1926. Women were granted the right to vote in Punjab only in 1926. There were certain qualifications for women to become members of Punjab Legislative Assembly. From 1937 to 1947, there were 4 constituency seats for women. In the elections of 1937, the participation of women was limited to a few constituencies, with candidates largely from the Congress Party and Independent affiliations. These women candidates, such as Parbhati Devi, Raghbir Kaur, and Jahanara Shah Nawaz, received notable support, though voter turnout was generally moderate. By 1946, there was a noticeable shift, with more women contesting elections, and a few constituencies (like Lahore) electing women unopposed. However, women's participation in the Constituent Assembly remained minimal, with only Begum Jahanara Shah Nawaz representing Punjab out of 28 members. In the 1946 elections, the political landscape had shifted. Rameshwari Nehru was elected unopposed in Lahore, reflecting her strong political standing. Overall, while women's political participation in Punjab was limited during this period, significant progress was made for social emancipation and empowerment of women laying the foundation for greater politicisation of women in India's political future.

NOTES

¹ Sarladevi Chaudharani was the niece of Rabindranath Tagore and the wife of Rambhuj Chowdhary, a well-known lawyer of Punjab. As a student she participated in the Revolutionary activity in Calcutta and was a member of a radical group, 'Jungtar.' In 1905, after her marriage, she had moved to Punjab. In Punjab she had organized the young students for revolutionary activity. Later she came under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi and participated in the khadi movement and the 1919 Satyagraha.

² Geraldin Forbes, Caged Tigers, 'First Wave', feminists in India, *Women's Studies International Forum*, December 1982, p. 527.

³ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in modern India*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 1996, p.70.

⁴ A. Moin Zaidi & Shaheda Zaidi ed., *Encyclopadia of Indian National Congress*, Volume One: 1885-1890, S Chand, New Delhi, 1976, p. 173.

⁵ *Report of the 3rd Indian National Congress* held at Madras on 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th December 1887, p. 199.

⁶ These women were Pandita Ramabai, Miss S. Manockjee Cursetjee, Mrs. Ghosal (Shrimati Swarna Kumari Devi), Miss Jessie Royce Carleton, Mrs. Gangooli (nee Kadamini Bose), Mrs. Emma Brainerd Ryder, Mrs. Trimbuck (Shevantlibai) Canaran, Mrs. Kashibai Kanitkar, Mrs Nikambe. A. Moin Zaidi & Shaheda Zaidi ed., *Encyclopadia of Indian National Congress*, 1976, p. 327, 328.

⁷ A. Moin Zaidi & Shaheda Zaidi ed., *Encyclopadia of Indian National Congress*, p. 328.

⁸ Annie Besant, *The Future of Indian Politics*, Theosophical Publishing House, Bombay, 1922, pp. 91-104.

⁹ *India Year Book*, 1923, pp. 552-55.

¹⁰ Aruna Asaf Ali, 'Women's Suffrage India,' *Our Cause*, Shyam Kumari Nehru (ed.), *Kitabistan*, Allahabad, no date), p. 349.

¹¹ They were Margaret Cousins, Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Mrs Sarlabai Naik, Dr I. Joshi, Mrs Srirangamma, Mrs Chandrasekhara Aiyar, Mrs K. Kibe, Herabai Tata, Mrs Lazarus, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Nalinibai Daivi, Begum Hasrat Mohani and Mrs Guruswami Chetty. Annie Besant's *New India*, 18th December 1917, p. 4; *Joint Select Committee on the Government of India Bill*, Appendix, 136; 'All-India Women's Deputation to the Secretary of State', *Stri Dharma* (February 1918): p. 16; Margaret Cousins, 'A Historical Deputation', *Indian Ladies Magazine* (November-December 1934), pp. 228-9.

¹² One Who Knows, op. cit., p. 9; Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu, pp. 194-97. (op. cit., p. 4); Vijay Agnew, *Elite Women in Indian Politics*, p. 108.

¹³ *India Year Book*, 1922, p. 533.

¹⁴ *Report of the Franchise Committee*, 1918-1919.

¹⁵ Lakshmi Menon, *The Position of Women*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1944, p. 27.

¹⁶ Katherine Mayo in *Mother India* had described the pitiable situation of women in Indian society. She had described in detail the effects of child marriage, pre-mature maternity and the position of widows. Katherine Mayo had substantiated her charges by quoting statistics, government hospital records. *Mother India* was denounced by the Indians as untruthful and false. Mahatma Gandhi referred to it as the drain inspector's report.

¹⁷ Manmohan Kaur, *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement (1857-1947)*, Sterling Publishers, Delhi, 1960, p. 145.

¹⁸ Geraldine Forbes, *From Purdah to Politics: The Social Feminism of the All-India Women's Organization*; Hanna Papanek and Gail Minault (ed.), *Separate Worlds: Studies of Purdah in South Asia*, Columbia (Mo.), USA, 1982, pp. 219-244.

¹⁹ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 17 February 1919.

²⁰ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, "I Remember," *1921 Reminiscences* (Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India).

²¹ *The Tribune*, 3 September 1919.

²² Manmohini Sehgal. Private Interview, 17 October 1973, Delhi.

²³ *Report of the Civil Disobedience Enquiry Committee*, pp. 2-3.

²⁴ M.K. Gandhi, *Letters to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur*, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1961, p. vi.

²⁵ *Young India*, 1919-1921, p. 764.

²⁶ M. K. Gandhi "To the Women of India," *Young India*, 1930.

²⁷ P. Thomas, *Indian Women Through the Ages*, Asia Publishing House, New York, 1964, p. 330.

²⁸ Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Private Interview, 9 October 1973, Delhi.

²⁹ Durgabai Deshmukh was a young girl in 1930. Her career during the nationalist movement is primarily centred in Madras. She was elected a member of the Constituent Assembly in 1946.

³⁰ Vijay Agnew, *Elite Women in Indian Politics*, p. 40.

³¹ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 14th June 1930.

³² Vijay Agnew, *Elite Women in Indian Politics*, p. 49.

³³ Vijay Agnew, *Elite Women in Indian Politics*, p.80.

³⁴ A.I.C.C. Papers, File No. 1922-24.

- ³⁵ A.I.C.C. Papers, File No. 12/1930.
- ³⁶ A.I.C.C. Papers, File No. 6/1937.
- ³⁷ A.I.C.C. Papers, Membership file for 1940.
- ³⁸ Vijay Agnew, *Elite women in Indian Politics*, p. 88.
- ³⁹ A.I.C.C. Papers, Compiled from File No. 16/1922-24.
- ⁴⁰ A.I.C.C. Papers, Compiled from file No. 12/1930.
- ⁴¹ A.I.C.C. Papers, File No. 6/1937.
- ⁴² Sayavarta Ghosh, Women Terrorists of India, *Illustrated Weekly of India* 28th January 1973, pp. 34-38.
- ⁴³ *Kundan*, 20th April 1935, p. 13.
- ⁴⁴ *Stri Dharma*, May 1936. Vijay Agnew, *Elite women in Indian Politics*, pp. 86-87.
- ⁴⁵ File No. 12/ADM/71, DIG-CID Office, Bombay, Letter written by Mahatma Gandhi to Jawaharlal Nehru on 29 May 1936; Vijay Agnew, *Elite women in Indian Politics*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1979, p. 86.
- ⁴⁶ Mridula Sarabhai, Interview; Vijay Agnew, *Elite Women in Indian Politics*, p. 86.
- ⁴⁷ Azim Husain, *Fazl-i-Husain: A Political Biography*, Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., Bombay, 1946, p. 75.
- ⁴⁸ *The Panjab Administration Report, 1911-12* (Lahore: 1912), p.75.
- ⁴⁹ For details see GOI No. 14 of November 15, 1909. Especially PGG of 22 November 1912 which in a big way supersedes the former.
- ⁵⁰ K.C. Yadav, *Elections in Panjab: 1920-1947*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1987, p. 4.
- ⁵¹ The Council of State (or the Upper House) comprising 60 members (27 nominated and 33 elected) and the Legislative assembly (or the Lower House) 145 members (42 nominated and 103 elected). The members were 58 and 141 for the Upper and Lower Houses respectively after Burma was separated as provided in the Government of India Act of 1935.
- ⁵² Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, 'Gender and Imperialism in British India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26th October 1985, WS74.
- ⁵³ Azim Husain, *Fazl-i-Husain: A Political Biography*, Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., Bombay, 1946, p. 150.
- ⁵⁴ K.C. Yadav, *Elections in Panjab: 1920-1947*, p. 7.
- ⁵⁵ *The Punjab Legislative Council Debates*, 25th June-25th October 1926, Volume 9-B, p.1636.
- ⁵⁶ *Indian Statutory Commission, 1918-1919*.

⁵⁷ *Indian Statutory Commission, A Survey Report (Government of India, 1930)*, p. 191. (i) It is not possible to make any reliable estimate of the increase in population between 1921-26, but the consequent error given in the percentage above are not likely to be very material. (ii) The Census gives figures for males and females of the age of twenty or over, but as the vote cannot be obtained till the age of twenty-one, the figures used for adult males and females in 1921 are estimates. It is not thought that the errors in these estimates will be sufficiently large to affect the percentage given. (iii) The above table excludes throughout the population of those areas which do not send elected representatives to the Provincial Legislatures; Vijay Agnew, *Elite women in Indian Politics*, p. 113.

⁵⁸ K.C. Yadav, *Elections in Panjab: 1920-1947*, p. 16.

⁵⁹ *The Punjab Government Gazette Extraordinary*, 13th November (Para No. 1331) may be seen for sources. K.C. Yadav, *Elections in Panjab: 1920-1947*, p. 18.

⁶⁰ K.C. Yadav, *Elections in Panjab: 1920-1947*, p. 19.

⁶¹ K.C. Yadav, *Elections in Panjab: 1920-1947*, p. 19.

⁶² K.C. Yadav, *Elections in Panjab: 1920-1947*, p. 41-67.

⁶³ It has extent of Municipal Committees of Ambala, Jagadhari, Simla, Ludhiana, Jagraon, Hoshiarpur, Jullundur, Cantonment of Ambala, Kasauli, Dagshai, Sabathu, Jutogh, Jullundur

⁶⁴ K.C. Yadav, *Elections in Panjab: 1920-1947*, p. 73.

⁶⁵ *Civil and Military Gazette (Lahore)*, Tuesday, 20th February 1934, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Petition was filed by Sardami Parkash Kaur against S Basakha singh regarding the Amritsar- Central constituency. The allegation was that the election was not in order. The election was held void (5th July 1937) and the Bye- election was caused by this election petition. K.C. Yadav, *Elections in Panjab: 1920-1947*, p. 98, 102.

⁶⁷ K.C. Yadav, *Elections in Panjab: 1920-1947*, p. 105

⁶⁸ K.C. Yadav, *Elections in Panjab: 1920-1947*, p. 127

⁶⁹ K.C. Yadav, *Elections in Panjab: 1920-1947*, p. 40.

⁷⁰ *The Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, 5th April to 22nd July 1937, Vol. I, p. 532.

⁷¹ *The Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, 5th April to 22nd July 1937, Vol. I, pp. 880-881.

⁷² *The Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, 5th April to 22nd July 1937, Vol. I, p. 1263.

⁷³ *The Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, 5th April to 22nd July 1937, Vol. I, p. 1261.