

Gandhi's Women Agents: Feminine Sartorialist Approach, Structural Filtration, and Political Mobilisation in Bengal, 1920-1922

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Abstract: *This essay examines the crucial role of women in the Gandhian nationalist movement, emphasising Gandhi's distinctive capacity to galvanise female involvement through his charismatic leadership and the incorporation of 'feminine' qualities. The paper analyses the symbolic importance of Charkha and Khadi as instruments of women's emancipation and national identity, especially during the 1920-22 period in Bengal. It highlights the grassroots initiatives of women leaders and organisations that promoted Gandhian principles, demonstrating their agency within the movement's structural limitations. The collaboration between women and the Charkha/Khadi movement is depicted as a pivotal element of the Indian nationalist struggle, demonstrating how Gandhi's charisma and the organisational structure empowered women to assert their roles in the quest for independence while contending with traditional gender norms. The study emphasises the intricate relationship between human agency and structural dynamics in influencing women's roles in the Gandhian constructive nationalist movement.*

Keywords: Gandhi, Leadership, Women Participation, Nationalist, Movement, Charkha, Khadi

The prevailing view of Gandhi as an unparalleled mass leader is incomplete without acknowledging his strategy of involving a significant number of women in the campaign. Although his approach did not entirely liberate women or adequately identify the primary cause of gender-centric backwardness in production relations, it can be generally agreed that Gandhi's success in mobilising women for the nationalist movement was an unprecedented event. This article examines the factors contributing to Gandhi's success in attracting a significant number of women. Was it due to his charismatic personality, characterised by the adoption of 'feminine' virtues and the promotion of a 'feminine' spirit of courage that morally resonated within women? Answer has

been varied. Scholars like Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph argued that the so called 'charisma' was very much entwined with Gandhi's ethical and methodical action 'in the manner of women'.¹ In the study of Gandhian 'charisma', the aspect of gender is often remained a neglected variable because despite of its 'frailties' the infusion of Hindu traditional metaphysics and 'charismatic appeal for sexual equality' made him a 'dedicated feminist' for achieving 'dramatic involvement of women in public life'.² Some scholars were enthusiastic enough to compare between early Franciscans, early Quakers, and Gandhians as charismatic leaders whose charisma emanated from motherly adherents.³ In this sense, we can return to Manubehn Gandhi's memoir 'Bapu – My Mother', where she said,

*"Generally it is not possible for a man to become a mother to anyone because he has not been endowed by God with a mother's loving heart. But Bapu appropriated for himself a share of even this divine gift."*⁴

Manubehn's representation of Gandhi's 'divine gift' could be perceived as feminine charisma and as one of the causes behind attracting women followers to his cause. What she, like many of the women followers of Gandhi, attributed on Mahatma as deific quality, in Weberian sense had been 'social construction' because the 'locus of power is in the led'.⁵ In case of Gandhi, the women participants were the loci of power based on which Gandhian 'feminine' charisma had been alleged or presumed. So, without social validation, Gandhi's 'feminine' charisma would not work, and social validation, from origination to dissemination, is a structural process. In Weberian sense again, 'charisma' could not sustain for long if not get routinised. But Weber had differentiated between premodern prophetic charisma and political organisational charisma; both of which embodied within Gandhi. Weber said,

*"...the prophet or the mystagogue, different as they are in their basic orientations, have to be able especially to organise purely symbolic-emotive spheres and to restructure the emotional components of personality, while the political leader has to exhibit different qualities or orientations, in combining a symbolic ordering of the social stability with more detailed daily problems of administration."*⁶

Gandhian movement in a mystagogue-level organised 'purely symbolic-emotive sphere' as 'feminine' charisma, while the 'symbolic ordering of the social stability' as political leader manifested through exceptional organisational framework, which substantiated as well as conjugated with the previous. So, in this sense the Gandhian charisma was a hybrid.

So here we can move on to the flipside of the question: alternatively, was it a structural consequence of Gandhian political mobilisation, wherein Gandhi's moral influence over a select group of prominent women facilitated broader control over the female participants; disseminated through interpersonal and hierarchical channels in various stages? The answer should be a bit of both. Women supporters of Gandhi systematically advocated for Gandhian hegemony

at the grassroots level, resembling a rhizomatic spread of political control with pre-existing hierarchical relations at provincial and local levels, while Gandhi's 'feminine' alternative through Charkha and Khadi, provided women a structurally and morally compatible locus for assimilation. Some scholars had already tried to redefine Gandhian movement from the perspective of 'micro-political' experiments in Deleuzian sense, by mentioning his intension for using 'the minoritarian political potential of women against men', which in itself had rhizomatic potentials.⁷ But again there had been pre-existing structures, which Gandhian organisational change neither had or wanted to destabilise. What Rudolph and Rudolph have argued in case of Gandhian use of 'religion' in mobilisation, that 'unlike his predecessors Gandhi leavened traditional symbolism with reformist ideas'; in case of organisational dissemination it conjugated between newer rhizomatic and older hierarchical approaches just like another hybrid model.⁸ Although this processual nature of Gandhi-to-womenfolk dissemination of hegemony has not been always dominated by women-only associates at various level but dotted with male Gandhian followers also, but women, either as individual Gandhian workers or as conjugal partner of male Gandhian workers, played an important role in this process of hegemony dissemination. These were pre-existing structures, which cooperated with Gandhian new 'feminine' minoritarian micro-politics. Scholars like Gene Sharp argued that 'constant internal strengthening of Indian society and its institutions' as vital force for Gandhian strategy.⁹ Strengthening of male-female traditional bond within a reformed and modern scenario of anti-colonial movement could be perceived in this way. This article examines historical instances in which women followers of Gandhi actively engaged in consolidating and mobilising the female populace; another pre-existing and predeceasing structure which although not totally traditional, worked very much in support of the movement. Certainly, the phenomenon has not been monocausal, as elements such as Charkha and Khadi have significantly influenced women, owing to their inherent capacity to engage with female communities. Charkha-Khadi was the symbol which had hybridised differing elements. However, throughout this process, certain female followers acted as lightning conductors of varied nature. The influence of Charkha and Khadi, as this article contends, became a more effective instrument only when women advocate engaged actively in this mobilisation effort. To figure out this grand arc of gendered mass movement, this article would take 1920-22's Bengal as the spatio-temporal focal point of this study.

Previous works usually dealt more with the first part of the question, dealing with Charkha's politicisation. Generally, scholars accepted the fact that the Charkha provided women with a non-violent means of resistance and exemplified feminine solidarity for national unity.¹⁰ Women who did not actively participate contributed by disseminating the Swadeshi message and conducting spinning Khadi classes in various ashrams; however, the most

prominent involvement in these activities was observed among 'middle class' women.¹¹ Rebecca M. Brown described this process as 'resignification', through which Gandhi made this 'gendered, domestic task a political act'.¹² Charkha and Khadi were essentially pre-existing and preceding structure in case of Bengal due to the fact that this province had seen its use during the Swadeshi Movement, but Brown argued that the symbolic use of them in Gandhian movement was different.¹³ What Brown found as something of a 'resignification', Madhu Kishwar's argument was that the Gandhian perception about women had nothing to do with women's traditional role, 'with which Gandhi had no serious quarrel' and 'in fact complemented their household role and yet seemed to give them a sense of mission within their prosaic existence'.¹⁴ So, for Kishwar, Gandhi made political participation compatible for the women, rather than putting emphasis on a feminised political space. C.A. Bayly's argument in this case could be considered as the balanced one. C.A. Bayly proposed that the Gandhian perspective has a dual nature; patriotic Indians, both men and women, should spin their own yarn and involve local weavers in the creation of homespun fabric. It represented a significant ethical and spiritual duty to enable the revival of the prosperous era when many women of noble descent participated in spinning their own yarn, which was later woven by skilled artisans. The reintegration of women into the labour force is essential for enhancing India's productive capabilities. However, this process should align with a reaffirmation of traditional roles, as stated by Manu, who claims that a wife's duty is to weave, while an unmarried woman's role is to spin.¹⁵ Similarly, Lisa Trivedi posited that the embrace of Khadi and the dismissal of adornment served as both a critique of Western modernity and a reconfiguration of 'traditional' community, emphasising women's connection to the nation while diminishing ties to family, caste, or class affiliations. Sadhan Jha claimed that the spinning wheel space is not only a political symbol, but also a cultural representational arena that has been used and remade along political, national, and gender lines. Gandhi's act of political recodification of the spinning wheel did not erase its cultural significance; rather, it broadened and deepened its cultural value.

Gandhi's Feminine Sartorialist Approach as Morally Compatible Ambience

The years between 1920 to 1922 has been marked as the first significant Gandhian mass movement. This is when, Gandhi for the first-time made a symbolic interaction between women and Khadi/Charkha. How did Gandhi have been providing the movement a tinge of gender-inclusivity? This moral and structural adjustment of the movement could be easily grasped from Gandhi's own writings and speeches. It's not that Gandhi hadn't mobilised women in the national movement beforehand. For example, in 7th March 1919, Gandhi in his speech to the ladies during a protest in Bombay, as part of ongoing Rowlatt Movement, asked them 'to cooperate with men in the constitutional fight which they were waging against the Rowlatt legislation'. Just as a man, with one half

of his body inactive, could not do anything properly, so the Indian body would not be able to do its work properly if one half of it, namely, the women, remained inactive and so he would appeal to his sisters of India to join the Satyagraha movement in large numbers.¹⁸ Again in another meeting, one month later, Gandhi emphasised on the fact that women should be the necessary other half of this movement. He said in his speech in another public meeting at Bombay,

*"The Swadeshi vow can not be kept fully if women do not help. Men alone will be able to do nothing in the matter. They can have no control over the children; that is the women's sphere. To look after children, to dress them is the mother's duty and, therefore, it is necessary that women should be fired with the spirit of Swadeshi."*¹⁹

Interestingly, Gandhi had been trying to diversify his mobilisation, both in public and private. If the men were to channelise the spirit in the public, Gandhi found, women gender role would maximise the potential of the movement through women in the private. He was not talking about overturning gender-role, but emphasising on utilising traditional gender-role in favour of the movement. This is where, Khadi/Charkha would come up as a tool to accomplish that. In the same meeting, Gandhi further eulogised pre-colonial women, and their habit of home-spinning 'to preserve India's self-respect and honour'.²⁰ We can say that the future amalgamation between the idea of traditional women, championed by Gandhi and the Charkha/Khadi as traditional-feminine-honourable attributes in Gandhian philosophy had been going through the insipient phase; locomoted by the need of mobilising them to the movement. Gandhi referenced the spinning wheel in Hind Swaraj, yet he never encountered it in his lifetime. It was later presented to him by Gangabehn, upon his eventual settlement in India. This individual not only introduced the spinning wheel to Gandhi but also emerged as the inaugural organiser of the Khadi movement in India.²¹ Probably this preliminary association of Charkha and women in Gandhi's personal life made the ideological confluence easy. Gandhi had been directing the womenfolk into this traditional role very often. For example, in a speech to the women at Nadiad, Gandhi routinised a traditional Swadeshi women's day-to-day activity likewise;

*"Ladies, you have two or three hours in which you do nothing. You spend them in temples, telling the beads in temple is Dharma but at the present time, the real bhakti consists in this work for cloth. The Gita teaches that where dharma prevails, other things follow. Walking in the way of the Swadeshi dharma will ensure our uplift. Out of 24 hours of the day, you should spend some at the spinning wheel. Speak about it to your neighbours and your husband."*²²

This type of mobilising the women, even though keeping them within the private sphere, had some initial point of starting, but the coming of the Non-cooperation Movement catalysed the whole process. By the end of 1919, Gandhi had been synchronising femininity of Khadi/Charkha with women participation

issue; making the ambience compatible for the later by championing the former. He not only linked it with the Indian poverty issue and as its remedy; he made it very much interactive to the woman household chores. He professed that the 'most effective remedy was that they should start spinning wheels' while the harder sex should take to weaving. It would give honourable employment to women at their very homes.²³ But soon it became a question of poor and rich women. Gandhi needed a feminine unification for materialising his mass mobilisation in favour of the national movement. That's why Gandhi said,

"The best protection for the chastity for our poor women and to tell the truth, of all women, is the spinning. If our monied sisters are to devote some of their leisure hours to some useful work instead of gossiping or some other needless activity, they would engage their mind, hands and feet in a fruitful manner and if they were to take to spinning, they would serve a double purpose. You can learn spinning for yourself and by doing that work for a fixed period every day, you can set an example to your other sisters, and if you spin your yarn for free of charge, you can do that to the extent of helping your poor sisters by making it possible to pay them a higher rate."²⁴

Interestingly, bringing together 'rich' and 'poor' women, under the overarching identity of Swadeshi sisterhood, Gandhi had been rhetorising the needed unification for the movement. Charkha/Khadi became the answer to it. Even when talking about women education, Gandhi proclaimed the necessity of women in the spinning wheel as the education for their self-reliance and 'chastity'.²⁵ Now, Gandhi making Charkha/Khadi a cure-all answer to any kind of women problem could be a very crude analysis from his side, but as a rhetoric for mobilising women it became a good alternative. In case of women's 'honour', Gandhi's answer was spinning wheel; in case of poverty, the answer was the same. In case of Hindu-Muslim goodwill, Gandhi's answer was that the women of both communities should take back to spinning wheel.²⁶ Since the 1920, Gandhi's rhetoric of equating womanhood and Charkha/Khadi to further moral values increased.

Gandhi gradually incorporated varied moral valuation to signify the importance of women-Charkha/Khadi synergy throughout the 1920-22. Sometimes he associated the synergy with 'Bhakti' and 'Satyajuga'.²⁷ Sometimes he held this synergy as a fruitful pathway to impart 'Dharma' or preserver of Dharma.²⁸ While associating his idyllic spinning women with 'Dharma', he either demonise colonial state as 'Ravanarajya'²⁹ as an immoral opposite of his utopic 'Ramrajya', or asked women to be like 'Sita' with spinning-wheel.³⁰ This particular approach which Bayly already mentioned, was the flipside of the Gandhian rhetoric, but acted perfectly in mobilising the majority. Charu Gupta demonstrated that the practice of wearing swadeshi constituted a moral obligation for women in the pursuit of national liberation. Upper-caste Hindu women advocated for the dressing of deities in Khadi at temples in Allahabad and Agra.³¹ This led to some other irrepressible outcomes like in the North

India, Hindu nationalists and caste ideologues innovatively appropriated Swadeshi rhetoric to present Hindu women, particularly those from middle and upper castes, in specific manners.³² Gandhi even gone further by appealing to women's motherhood instinct, while asking them to bear the burden of Khadi clothes likewise;

*"During pregnancy, women cheerfully carry their load for nine months and suffer the severe pains of childbirth with joy. This is the time of birth of new India. Will you not be able to carry at least the weight of heavy clothes at this hour? You can make India free only if you bear this burden. If you wish to give birth to a new India, every woman must bear this burden not merely for nine months but for nine years."*³³

By appealing to motherhood instinct Gandhi wanted to propagate the mantra to the children. Sujata Patel argued that the woman as 'mother' who had 'innate', 'natural' capacities for 'wiseness', 'strength', 'courage', 'patience' and 'intuition' now becomes the symbol of the new political message and its strategy of non-violence.³⁴ For Gandhi, women could take active part by exhorting and encouraging 'their husbands and sons to pursue the path of duty and urged them to help vigorously and effectively in the building up of a free India by taking up Swadeshi'.³⁵ So, basically Gandhi started to associate Women-Charkha/Khadi synergy to symbolize moral high-ground of the nationalist cause; both as a way of mobilizing women to the nationalist cause and having a moral high-ground from colonial values, oriented around masculinity and immoral progress.

The Bengal Presidency responded favourably to the Gandhian initiative of Women-Charkha/Khadi, and Gandhi was cognizant of this reception. In a meeting occurred on January 25, 1921, Gandhi asserted that a spinning wheel should be present in every household and expressed his hope that within two to three months, every family in Bengal will possess Charkhas. He presented to the audience the example of the Vidyasagar's family engaged in spinning yarn.³⁶ In a meeting occurred on February 6, 1921, in Bengal, girls and young married women expressed to Gandhi their inability to wear jewellery, as they currently experienced a state of widowhood in the absence of Swaraj.³⁷ Gandhi recognized and advocated for regional assertiveness at multiple instances. At a public meeting in Bombay, he urged women to wear Khadi to honour his cause and noted that in Bengal and Orissa, women had generously contributed to the Tilak fund for this purpose.³⁸ As the movement gained momentum, women participants in Bengal demonstrated remarkable bravery. In 1921, women in Calcutta obstructed men by attempting to sell Khadi, leading to their subsequent arrest as reported in a newspaper telegram. The band of protesters comprised the dedicated partner of the President-elect, Chittaranjan Das, along with his widowed sister and niece. Before this incident, Gandhi anticipated that women would be exempted from the obligation of incarceration. However, the Bengal Government, in their commitment to impartiality, has conferred the honour

upon three women from Calcutta without distinction of sex.³⁹ Gandhi framed these incidents as a challenge directed at all Indian women. Rahul Ramagundam stated that this arrest exemplified a precedent for women nationwide who began selling Khadi in public spaces and on the streets.⁴⁰ At the grassroots level, Gandhi was impressed by the determination of Bengali women in their commitment to the ideals of Charkha and Khadi. Gandhi referenced an instance involving three distinct meetings: one for Marwari sisters, another for Assamese sisters, and a third for Bengali sisters. The Assamese and Bengali sisters attended the meetings wearing their simplest saris rather than their more expensive foreign attire. A sense of shame was prevalent among those lacking Khadi saris.⁴¹ Gandhi was surprised by the assertiveness of Bengali women concerning the Khadi ideology, the concept of Satyagraha, and their core values such as truth, poverty, and self-reliance. Gandhi's feminine Sartorialist approach established a moral high ground for the movement and its participants.

What factors contributed to the greater adoption of Khadi in certain communities, such as the Bengalis, compared to others? Lisa Trivedi contended that the swadeshi movement offered limited options for women's attire. A woman intending to wear Khadi would likely need to adopt a sari, representing a significant alteration in attire for individuals from regions such as Punjab, Rajasthan, or Gujarat, who are accustomed to different styles of clothing. In response to this limitation, Gandhi highlighted his recommendation that a woman must relinquish her provincial identity to attain national status.⁴² For instance, in case of the Tamil Brahmin women, very few adopted to Khadi, because as per a Tamil lawyer, who felt hardships in popularising Khadi among his community's women, mentioned that women in his community exhibited a strong preference for fashion, which hindered the adoption of Khadi. He identified the prevailing social standards as the primary barrier to the popularisation of Khadi clothing. The norms of comportment that delineate status within the community rendered it improbable for Tamil Brahmin women to opt for homespun attire.⁴³ But amidst these, Bengali women not only pioneered in this path, they even catalysed it in other provinces also. Sarladevi Chaudhurani's selection of a coarse white Khadi sari proved to be highly effective among the Punjabi women at the political meetings she attended.⁴⁴ But such cases were very rare ones.

One can argue from the imperial and statist perspective that 'Khadi' movement in 1921-22, as a constructive work, never felt the burn of the direct colonial attack; probably acted as one of the important aspects for which the authorities never found it truly threatening or 'anti-colonial'. In the previous year 1920-21, the report mentioned that 'Charkha' movement 'has not made very appreciable progress, though the demand for Khadi by local weavers increased; but it is difficult to say what effect the "Charkha" movement will have on the mills'.⁴⁵ The evidences show that various spinning mills like the Churchill Spinning Mill of Bombay continued to work even amidst 'Khadi' movement. In 1921-22's

Bombay administrative report, it was said that the export of Indian cotton to Japan increased to Rs. 6.62 crores; 'thanks to the "Khadi" movement there was a large demand for the coarser kind of cloth and a falling off of the demand for fancy goods'.⁴⁶ Even the general administrative reports provided positive reports regarding the improved handcraft designs made of white or enamel print on 'Khadi' sarees made by various 'Khadi' shops as a sign of improvement.⁴⁷ Now such changes in style and taste were due to the growing feminine interest on coarser fabrics owing to 'Khadi' movement; but this development had not been seen as a total threat; just like association of women and 'Khadi' movement had never been a 'threat' per se to the Imperial sense of public dissent. But the growth of 'Khadi' concerns was uneven everywhere; for example, in Sind, 'Khadi' institutes were 'closing for want of popular support', unlike Bombay.⁴⁸ So, it seems that the whole movement's approach was rather soft-anti-colonialism, for which, the imperial authority perceived it not as an optimum threat in one hand, while other states like Bombay, failed to muster the mass to the movement to such a level, which could have left a strike of fear. Based on this comparable example, one could deduce the fact of Bengal exceptionalism regarding the women-Charkha synergy.

'Women-Charkha / Khadi' as a Structure of Mobilisation: Case Study of Bengal, 1920-22

Bengal had become an exceptional ground for Gandhian constructive programme in which the 'Women-Charkha/Khadi' symbiosis had worked perfectly. But in this structural growth, different hierarchical position had been previewed by different women agents. Gandhi's ideals being filtrated through these women, kept the flow partly due to the Gandhi's success in making the new movement compatible for the women, but mostly because of the structure of filtration about which we are speaking off. At the top tier of the filtration process, we can name a few like, Saraladevi Chowdhurani. In the initial phase of the movement, Saraladevi became the 'poster girl' of Gandhi's 'Women-Charkha/Khadi' symbolic gesture. During April 1920, Saraladevi took the decision of wearing Khadi during the National Week. For her stand regarding Khadi to make it a popular attire among the learned and wealthy classes, Gandhi rejoiced much. He wrote,

"Hundreds of women have started spinning...but we don't get enough men and women to wear the cloth produced.... The swadeshi movement received the finest impetus from Srimati Saraladevi Chowdhurani. During the National Week, she expressed a desire to wear a sari and blouse of khadi. I have not so far succeeded in inducing any woman to wear a sari made of khadi.... Thus, the uncle (Rabindranath Tagore) and the niece, who have acquired a reputation in the counting for their artistic sense, did not reject khadi from that point of view at any rate. On the contrary, they introduced khadi as a dress for women in gatherings of rich people."⁴⁹

Saraladevi, Gandhi's close associate in this cause of Khadi, remained one of the most important personifications of the symbiosis about which we have spoken before. Rahul Ramagundam contended that Gandhi actively sought prominent women and men to serve as his Khadi ambassadors, making a deliberate effort to enlist influential figures from both the state and civil society in support of his cause.⁵⁰ The fact that Saraladevi Chowdhurani attended parties while dressed in a khadi sari, according to Madhu Kishwar, made her a fashion icon. To rally support for Khadi, she travelled throughout northern India. Gandhi looked forward to her and other women like her as examples of contemporary womanhood because they were selfless, determined, and eager to give their all to the cause.⁵¹ But Saraladevi didn't remain in the path of Gandhian constructive work for much time, although remained sympathetic to the cause. As per the stature, we can conclude that Saraladevi was the top tier of this symbiotic mobilisation's hierarchical structure. But not all workers had the position like Saraladevi in the process, but women with regional and local stature remained the main point of strength of this process.

At the middle ranking position, we would see a constellation of women workers who had filtered the message to the maximum impact. In Tangail, Mymensingh, a Mahila Samiti had been formed under Radha Sundari Devi and Bibi Fatima. The group was an ardent follower of Chittaranjan Das and received assistance and advice from his wife, Basanti Devi. They met once a week to discuss about Mahatma's message of Swaraj and Swadeshi, Chittaranjan Das's work, Khilafat issue and problems of British rule. They all were regular Khadi wearer and spun Charkha every day at least for four hours. Some of them were successful in converting their families, friends and neighbours into following the Charkha cult.⁵² Another such example was Basanti Devi⁵³, daughter of the Diwan of a princely state at Assam and widow of Chittaranjan Das, along with Urmila Devi⁵⁴ and Sunita Devi, sisters of Chittaranjan Das, took the regional leadership in organising Gandhian constructive programmes. This process of distribution was significantly simplified by the incorporation of interpersonal relations. At a later time, Urmila Devi would collaborate with Kasturba Gandhi in a number of other provinces as well.⁵⁵ They were the first women to court political arrest because of Khadi hawking, about which Gandhi himself was astonished, as mentioned earlier. This tier of women organisers was the provincial upper tier of this filtrated hierarchical structure, but personal relationship might have made that rhizomatic. Radha Sundari Devi and Bibi Fatima could be mentioned as the next regional tier of women workers, at the head of local women organisation, receiving partisan legitimacy as well as organisational help. This tier could be perceived as the most important tier in maintaining the proper dissemination of the Gandhian hegemony.

In 1922, numerous meetings were organized by Gandhian women activists and workers in various locations to mobilize women for the Charkha/Khadi movement. On 14th April 1922, under the supervision of Mahendra Chandra

Ganguly, Kamala Devi, Sarojini Devi, and Bibi Rahim convened another conference at Kalibari field, within the jurisdiction of Thakurnagar police station.⁵⁶ Kamala Devi, Sarojini Devi, and Bibi Rahim were the women that spoke at the event. The general body of the meeting discussed the program of introducing Charkha into every household in the neighbourhood, as well as the usage of Khaddar, spinning as a vocation for women, and the cultivation of cotton. On April 18, 1922, Kamala Devi, Sarojini Devi, and Bibi Rahim talked with the people of Katchery, who were under the supervision of Munshigunj Zamindary. They discussed the same goals among themselves.⁵⁷ On 22nd April 1922, another meeting had been arranged at Birajgunj, under Dinajpur police station.⁵⁸ Another meeting took place on 23rd April 1922 at Gandaria, under Kaharole Police Station, presided by Kasiswar Chakrabarty.⁵⁹ Berahram, which is under the jurisdiction of Thakurgaon Police Station, was the site of yet another gathering, similar to the ones in Rajsahi and Dinajpur. Similarly, on April 17, 1922, in the residence of Khirode Lal Brahmacharya of Baramanisha, in the Pabna district, Ananda Sundari Devi—the wife of Ram Chandra Sarkar of Kaiyakhola—convened a gathering, which she ably presided over. Swadeshi items, Charkha, and Khadi were the topics of discussion during the gathering, as was the boycott of foreign goods. About twenty-five Hindu women showed up.⁶⁰ In the district of Rangpur, the secretary of Nari Karma Mandir, wife of Babu Kunja Behari Mukherji, visited houses of the respectable gentlemen of the town in company with other ladies for collection of subscription for Tilak Swaraj fund and Khadi work, and by the second week of May 1922, collected Rs. 30/-.⁶¹ On 2nd July 1922, Kamala Devi, daughter of Late Ram Dayal Bannerji of Calcutta of Nari Karma Mandir, delivered a speech on boycott of foreign clothes and goods, introduction of Khadi and Charkha in Kushtia town.⁶² Nari Karma Mandir, initiated by C.R. Das in 1921 and overseen by Basanti Devi, Urmila Devi, and Suniti Devi, served as a foundational institution for the emerging Gandhian movement, similar to the role played by Sarojini Naidu and Maniben Patel in leading the Rashtriya Stree Sabha in Bombay.⁶³ In August 1922, Hemprobha Mazumdar, spouse of Basanta Kumar Majumdar, traveled to Jessore, Chittagong, Barisal, Nadia, Rajshahi, Khulna, and Rangpur to recruit female members from families sympathetic to Congress for participation in Charkha and Khadi work, Congress activities, and initiatives related to boycott and picketing.⁶⁴ Beforehand, as member of Nari Karma Mandir, Hemprobha Mazumdar along with Suniti Bala Mitter, Bagala Som and others organised procession in Calcutta and courted arrest on January 1922, and later on moved on to rural areas for spreading the idea of the movement.⁶⁵ Nari Karma Mandir started at Bhawanipur, Kolkata started as an urban organisational system.⁶⁶ On September 10, 1922, a meeting for women took place at the B.M. School in Barisal, attended by approximately sixty female participants. Sarojini Devi chaired the meeting, where Bidhu Bhushan Ghosh and Suresh Chandra Banerjee presented a discourse on the boycott of foreign clothing, advocating for the use

of Charkha and Khadi garments.⁶⁷

Local organizers such as Kamala Devi, Sarojini Devi, Bibi Rahim, and Hemprobha Mazumdar functioned as a regional middle tier, similar to Radha Sundari Devi and Bibi Fatima. Hemprobha Mazumdar was an organizer of Urmila Devi's Nari Karma Mandir. When Urmila Devi ceased her Congress and Khadi propaganda efforts, Mazumdar assumed responsibility and toured various districts in Bengal to continue this work. Following the closure of Nari Karma Mandir, she established a similar organization, Mahila Karmi Samsad. Additionally, she played a significant role in the Salt Satyagraha among village women in eastern Bengal and was elected to the Bengal Legislative Council in 1937. She subsequently aligned herself with Subhas Chandra Bose's faction and the Forward Block.⁶⁸ Hemaprobha, similar to Radha Sundari Devi, emerged in the women-centric participatory movement as a Khadi constructive worker, with her primary loyalty directed towards the provincial upper tier. The influence of Gandhian principles manifested through a feminine Sartorialist approach within established networks of partisan and organizational affiliations. Following the conclusion of the Non-cooperation movement in 1922, Bengal demonstrated the persistence of the Gandhian constructive programme, characterized by the ongoing integration of 'Women-Charkha/Khadi'. In September 1923, a group of women in Balaibania, Barisal, organized a women's organization called Nari Unnati Mandir, led by Shobha Rani Debi. The initiative aimed to educate young widows in various handicrafts and spinning, while also promoting literacy. That year, they organized an exhibition to sell the products of their apprentices prior to the Durga Puja festival of 1924. A meeting was organized by them for the women of the town to discuss the significance of Charkha and Khadi work in enhancing self-sufficiency among women. Here, they expressed their intention to establish a small Khadi production unit in the upcoming year. One hundred fifty women attended the meeting. The women, attending the meeting were requested to contribute to the cause.⁶⁹ Not all organizations resembled Nari Karma Mandir; however, other women's organizations, such as Shobha Rani Devi's Nari Unnati Mandir, were also part of the filtration structure. In the case of Sobha Rani Devi, despite lacking a robust structural position within the hierarchy, she can be classified as a meddling peripheral tier.

Spinning, marketing khadi, fundraising, recruiting new members, organizing pickets, and tirelessly lobbying for the eradication of untouchability as well as encouraging Hindu-Muslim cooperation were some of the activities that Madhu Kishwar proposed as the primary focus of women's engagement and conversation. As a consequence of this, the role that women played within the Gandhian movement was one of providing auxiliary support and help, instead of taking immediate action, which they refrained from doing so.⁷⁰ If, on the other hand, we take into account the active organization building that takes place at the provincial and local levels, this traditional view of Kishwar would

not be valid. The Bengali women had a significantly greater awareness of the organizational structure. This was partially owing to the experiences of Swadeshi and Boycott, and partially due to the fact that they had more tangible experience of the political atmosphere. Geraldine Forbes provided evidence that the protest campaign against Lord Curzon's division of Bengal received significant support from a huge number of women on a more widespread scale. In order to propagate the concept of radical nationalism and engage an audience that had previously been uninvolved in political activity, the Swadeshi movement utilized traditional means such as meetings, speeches, and petitions. Additionally, the movement made use of the press and public forums. This new audience consisted of Bengali housewives who would not have been able to attend political gatherings on a regular basis since they did not have access to formal education, autonomy, or leisure. The incorporation of swadeshi activities, like as spinning and weaving, into popular religious observances, such as Durga Puja, made it easier for a substantial number of women to take part in the celebrations. As an illustration, Lilavati Devi, Hemangini Das, and Nirmala Sarkar introduced spinning wheels and looms into their respective villages. This was done with the intention of motivating women to generate adequate numbers on a daily basis in order to manufacture their Durga Puja saris. In addition, other women were strongly encouraged to take the pledge of 'Mayer Kouta' (Mother's Chest), which required them to dedicate a handful of rice to their homeland on a regular basis. As a consequence of this, women would be reminded of the obligations that they had to their nation, children would gain first-hand experience with patriotism, and a reserve of rice would be formed.⁷¹ This atmosphere offered a natural background for Gandhi's Women-Charkha-Khadi synergy to act positively in the political arena, and it had worked out well.

Conclusion

The synergy between Women-Charkha/Khadi in the Indian nationalist struggle exemplifies a compelling case study of the agency-structure dilemma. Gandhi's charismatic leadership was important in organizing women for the campaign, utilizing his moral authority to evoke devotion and allegiance among his adherents. This agency was influenced by the structural framework of the movement, encompassing the prevailing social hierarchies and power relations among women leaders. The hierarchical arrangement of women leaders features prominent individuals such as Saraladevi Chowdhurani at the apex, followed by Urmila Davi and Basanti and in the regional upper tier, Bibi Fatima and Hemprobha Mazumdar in the regional middle tier or local tier, illustrating the intricate relationship between agency and structure. Although these women leaders demonstrated agency in promoting Gandhi's principles and rallying women for the cause, their actions were simultaneously restricted and facilitated by the structural environment of the movement.

Moreover, the movement's organizational model, characterized by a complex interaction between hierarchical and rhizomatic structures, illustrates the agency-structure dilemma. The institutionalization of Gandhi's charisma via the charkha and khadi movement established a strong organizational framework, allowing the Women-Charkha/Khadi synergy to attain significant scale and scope. The Women-Charkha/Khadi synergy in the Indian nationalist movement illustrates the intricate and dynamic relationship between agency and structure, revealing how individual agency is both facilitated and restricted by the structural framework in which it functions.

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