

March 2022

“Worthy of Emulation:” Mira Behn and Indian Independence, 1925-1959

Tamala Malerk
University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd>

 Part of the [History Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Malerk, Tamala, ““Worthy of Emulation:” Mira Behn and Indian Independence, 1925-1959” (2022). *USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.
<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/9405>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the USF Graduate Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

“Worthy of Emulation:” Mira Behn and Indian Independence, 1925-1959

by

Tamala Malerk

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History
Department of History
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Kees Boterbloem, Ph.D.
Darcie S. Fontaine, Ph.D.
Julia Irwin, Ph.D.
Bidisha Mallik, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
November 12, 2021

Keywords: British Imperialism, Women, Gender, Twentieth Century, Global History

Copyright © 2022, Tamala Malerk

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to husband, family, and friends, all of whom played an important role in the creation of this dissertation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my advisor, Kees Boterbloem, thank you for the quick edits, LinkedIn likes and comments, and kind words. To the rest of my committee, Darcie Fontaine, thank you for always answering my questions and becoming my mentor (even if you are just realizing it as you read this), Julia Irwin, thank you for taking my project on when literally everyone has you on their committee, and Bidisha Mallik, thank you for all the tips and resources and being a kindred spirit with the fervor to share Mira Behn with the world. Thank you all for your infinite wisdom.

To my husband, thank you for providing support and encouragement, especially during the moments when I just wanted to throw in the towel. To my parents, thank you for the love and the guest room. To my sister, Brandy, thank you for getting me through the rough patches. To my in-laws, thank you for loving me like your own child.

To Kiri thank you for the friendship and sticky notes. To Whitney, thank you for your warm welcome and knowledge of the DC and Philly areas.

To Matt King, thank you for the advice, guidance, and all of the letters of recommendation. To Sue, Tammy, and Theresa, thank you for the scans, the copies, and the quick information. You're the best.

To my cohort and fellow students in the USF history graduate program, thank you for the intelligent discourse and the laughs.

To the hard workers at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Swarthmore College, and the University of Pennsylvania, thank you. To Elizabeth Jones-Minsinger at Haverford College and Eric Sidwill at the Library of Congress, thank you for sending me digitized items. And to the customer service representatives I keep emailing at the British Library trying to get digitized items in the middle of a global pandemic, thank you for your patience and connecting me with different departments trying to help me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	iv
Covid-19 Statement	1
A Note on Spelling and Geography	3
Introduction, 1872-1925	4
A. Early Life	4
B. British Perspectives of India and the British in India.....	12
C. European Women in India.....	19
1. Memsahibs	19
2. British Feminists and Suffragettes	22
3. Female Christian Missionaries.....	24
4. Gertrude Bell and Annie Besant	26
D. Behn in Other Perspectives	28
E. Chapter Previews.....	33
Chapter One: A Foreigner in Gandhi’s Ashrams, 1925-1930	38
A. Introduction.....	38
B. A Brief History of the Indian National Congress and Khadi	40
1. Indian National Congress.....	40
2. Khadi.....	43
C. The Ashram	47
D. Mira Behn in Sabarmati Ashram	52
E. Mira Behn out of the Ashram.....	60
1. Working with Gandhi	60
2. Learning Outside Sabarmati	63
3. Grassroots Efforts in India.....	66
F. Conclusion	73
Chapter Two: The Bearings of Demeter: Mira Behn, Globe-Trotting Assistant Extraordinaire, 1931	75
A. Introduction.....	75
B. British and Indian Relations in the early 1930s and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact	76
1. The Gandhi-Irwin Pact.....	78
C. Gandhi, Mira Behn, and the Second Round Table Conference: London, England: September 1931	82
D. Mira Behn, Gandhi, and their Meetings with Romain Rolland and Mussolini: Villeneuve, Switzerland and Rome, Italy: December 1931	99
E. Conclusion.....	101

Chapter Three: A Leader Emerges: Mira Behn and Civil Disobedience 1930-1932	104
A. Introduction	104
B. The Salt March: The New Beginnings of the Civil Disobedience Campaign	105
C. Women and Civil Disobedience.....	109
D. Mira Behn and Civil Disobedience	112
E. Mira Behn and Richard Bartlett Gregg	113
F. News of India and the Suspension of Civil Disobedience.....	115
G. Weekly Reports, the Bombay Riots Reports, and the Resumption of Civil Disobedience.....	116
H. Conclusion	121
 Chapter Four: “A Prisoner has no Choice:” Mira Behn, Female Prisoners, and the Movement from Prison, 1932-1934	124
A. Introduction	124
B. The Colonial Prison.....	126
C. Female Prisoners	129
D. British Response to Mira Behn in Prison.....	136
E. Mira Behn and the movement Behind Bars	138
F. Conclusion	148
 Chapter Five: Flying Solo: Mira Behn in Britain and America, 1934.....	152
A. Introduction	152
B. Indian Independence in the British and American Perspective.....	153
C. British Tour: June-September 1934	159
D. American Tour: October 1934: Northeast America.....	165
1. New York/ New Jersey	167
2. College Tours and the White House	171
3. Race Relations	174
4. America and India Post-Behn	178
E. Conclusion.....	180
 Chapter Six: From Sindi to Solitude: Mira Behn in the Villages, 1935-1942.....	183
A. Introduction	183
B. India and British Relations in the Late 1930s	183
C. Sanitation, Typhoid, and Hut Building	186
D. The Sindi Experiment	190
E. Segaoon’s Sanitation	192
F. Segaoon to Sevagram: Gandhi Comes to Segaoon.....	190
G. Courting Controversy: Unrequited Love	192
H. Prithvi Singh	196
I. Fifteen-Month Silence	198
J. Conclusion.....	201
 Chapter Seven: War, and More: To Independence and Beyond, 1942 -1959	204
A. Introduction	204
B. Fighting Britain’s Wars: India in Global Conflicts.....	205

1. World War One.....	205
2. World War Two and the 1943 Bengal Famine	207
C. Mira Behn in Orissa	211
D. Quit India Resolution and Aga Khan Palace	215
1. Quit India	215
2. Justice Wickenden’s Report.....	216
3. Aga Khan Palace: August 1942-May 1944	218
E. Transitioning from the British raj to Independent India.....	222
F. Mira Behn in a Transitioning and Independent India.....	223
1.Kisan Ashram.....	225
2. Special Advisor to the United Province Government.....	227
3. After Independence	229
G. Conclusion	234
Epilogue.....	236
Bibliography.....	243
Appendix.....	261
A. Copyright Permissions	261

ABSTRACT

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is lauded for his work in helping to bring independence to India. Historians and authors are correct in asserting Gandhi's importance to the independence movement of India, but he did not do it alone. Gandhi was helped by followers, foreign and domestic, who believed in his vision of an independent India.¹ One of these disciples was Madeleine Slade, or as she would later be known, Mira Behn. Behn was born into an upper-class British family: her father an Admiral in the Royal Navy and her mother a housewife. Behn came upon a copy of French philosopher, Romain Rolland's biography of Mahatma Gandhi in the early 1920s. Upon reading that biography, Behn, unmarried and in her thirties, decided to leave behind her life of privilege in England and become a follower of Gandhi. She arrived at Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram on November 7, 1925 and worked with Gandhi, his movement, and in India until 1959. Behn appears sporadically throughout scholarship on Indian independence but is never given the attention her work towards independence deserves; most scholars tend to focus on Behn's emotional attachment to Gandhi.

Inspiration for this project began through a research paper, which is now published in the *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association 2020*. In this paper, I examined Behn's role in the movement through the lenses of gender, race, and class. This dissertation is an expansion of this paper where I incorporate Behn's publications, her international speeches, and

¹ Sometimes followers of Gandhi were also referred to as "disciples." Gandhi did not like when he was defined by others as a religious leader, and disciples has a religious connotation with it. I choose to use the term followers because of this. For the purposes of this dissertation, a "follower" of Gandhi is someone who adheres to Gandhi's methods and may also live in the Ashram for a time. They may be from India or from a foreign country.

her role both inside and outside of India as Gandhi's assistant and grassroots activist and teacher. I argue that through her open defiance to traditional British gender and societal norms, grassroots work and tours throughout India, international travels, and news correspondence, Mira Behn was vital to the Indian independence movement's success.

COVID-19 STATEMENT

This project was researched in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic which means that the project itself and what could be researched has changed shape since this project began as a 20-page seminar paper in Fall 2018.

Thankfully, I was able to get to the archives at University of Pennsylvania, Swarthmore College, and Howard University in summer 2019, so, there is still a strong traditional archival presence in the project. However, I was supposed to spend Spring 2021 abroad, buried in the archives, pouring over primary sources about Mira Behn and the fight for Indian independence from Britain. It became clear in the Fall 2020 that the world was not going to open up in Spring 2021 just for me to do research. One example is that I have corresponded numerous times with the British Library about digitizing resources but unfortunately they cannot remain open long enough for someone to digitize the materials for me. Though not all hope was lost.

A committee member of mine, Dr. Darcie Fontaine, shared the story of Natalie Zemon Davis having her passport confiscated during her research and being forced to reshape her project with this new barrier. What have I done since being Natalie Zemon Davis'ed? (Though on a much smaller scale).

Much of this project exist because of online digital archives, particularly the *British Newspaper Archive* and *Granth Sanjeevani* by the Historic Society of Mumbai. The advent of technology has been indescribably advantageous to historians and other researchers since the 1990s but Covid has definitely brought greater attention to what can be accessed virtually. Also, I would like to give a quick shout-out (or the academic equivalent there-of) to JSTOR which

expanded access to sources that my institution did not previously have access to during Summer 2020.

Because I had to use more secondary sources than I originally planned, this has become a far better project because instead of just learning about Mira Behn, the reader can gain greater insight into the world that Behn was inhabiting and interacting with.

I know that a major question for readers will be how can one produce a project about Imperial Britain and Colonial India without having accessed the physical archives there? My immediate answer is through digitized and printed primary sources, of which I am grateful that there are many. My long-term answer is this: I can produce a complete and well-written dissertation with the caveat that should this project expand into a book, that I will make it to those non-accessed archives in the future, just not in the time-frame for this iteration of the project: a timely completed Ph.D. program.

Tamala Malerk

July 2021

A NOTE ON SPELLING AND GEOGRAPHY

My dissertation will be written in American English. However, when quoting someone, I want to stay true to their use of language and if the spelling is in British English, I will use that instead. The name “Mira Behn,” has many iterations: Mirabehn, Miraben, Mira Ben, Mirabai, etc. For consistency, I refer to her as Mira Behn, however, again, if directly quoting a source, I will use the spelling that they use.

British India, also known as, the British Raj, consisted of parts of modern-day India, Pakistan, and Burma. When I reference India in this dissertation, I am referencing the British India of 1925-1947, unless otherwise noted. Many cities and provinces have changed names since Independence in 1947. Please note that I use the name of the area at the time of reference, not the modern name.

The movement for Indian independence is called a variety of things throughout the different scholarship on the topic: “The Freedom Struggle,” and the “Indian independence movement,” just to name two. For consistency, I refer to it as the “Indian independence movement,” sometimes shortened to “movement,” unless a source says otherwise.

The terms “West,” “Western,” “East,” and “Eastern,” are outdated and not commonly used in modern scholarship. However, this terminology was used by Behn, Gandhi, and other political and press figures during this era, so these terms appear frequently throughout this project in quotes and descriptions.

INTRODUCTION, 1872-1925²

I was to go to Mahatma Gandhi, who served the cause of oppressed India through fearless truth and nonviolence, a cause which, though focused in India, was for the whole of humanity.

-Madeleine Slade, *A Spirit's Pilgrimage*³

Early Life

Madeleine Slade garnered worldwide fame for her controversial choice to abandon her life of privilege and ease to become one of Gandhi's most devout followers and a vital contributor in movement for Indian independence. Slade was born to British naval officer, Edmond Slade, and his wife Florence on November 22, 1892. Her one sister, Rhona, was three years older.⁴ Slade experienced the typical childhood expected of girls born into the British aristocracy in the late nineteenth century.⁵ She grew up in privileged circumstances with little knowledge of the suffering experienced by the peoples of the Indian colony of the British Empire; yet, she would go on to have a vital role in securing Indian independence.

Like many upper-class girls, Slade was privately tutored at home, participated in lavish parties, and noted in her autobiography that when she played with her dolls, she provided them with a servant doll because she was accustomed to having a servant waiting on her family.⁶ She

² Portions of this introduction were directly taken from my March 2020 publication, Tamala Malerk, "There is no 'I' in Mahatma: Mira Behn and Indian Independence," *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association 2020*, 67-87.

³ Mira Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Digital Edition (Coward: Delhi, 1960), 52. I have seen the spelling of her father's name as "Edmond" and "Edmund." "Edmond" appears more often and in more scholarly sources.

⁴ Mira Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Digital Edition, 13. The two sisters were never particularly close. Rhona went to boarding school on her volition while Slade preferred the solitude of being educated at home by a governess.

⁵ Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia during British Colonial Rule*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 198.

⁶ Mira Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, (Coward: Delhi, 1960), 13, 27; It was hard for Behn to break this kind of mentality even later in life after everything she experienced with Gandhi. Even in the late stages of her life she still clung to this family tradition. Datt, her servant in Vienna, was not happy living without his family in India but Mira Behn could not let him go.

spent most of her early years at her maternal grandfather's country house with her mother, as her father was often away for two-year-long stretches.⁷ As a child, she witnessed firsthand the vast acceleration of the use modern technology by way of the introduction of motor cars, in-home telephones, and airplanes into everyday society. She laments in her autobiography that with these technological advances, "the quiet English country roads had forever lost their charm."⁸

As a young woman of fifteen, she resided in India while her father was stationed there as the Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies Station, a "major command of the British Royal Navy."⁹ Yet, she did not witness the "real" India, only the sort of secluded socializing of the upper-class Indians with the British aristocracy and officials, while attended by virtually invisible servants. She was only exposed to "the princes and a few very big financiers."¹⁰ According to Slade, "India meant nothing to me [then] but a life of social functions and formalities."¹¹

While she was exposed to the shallow and vapid life of the British upper crust, she was also a product of the "spiritual and intellectual curiosity" that abounded in the early twentieth century Western world.¹² She loved Beethoven, which led her to the Frenchman Romain Rolland (1864-1944), who had penned a biography of Mahatma Gandhi.¹³ Slade and the then highly

⁷ Mira Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Digital Edition, 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 19

⁹ *Ibid.*, 29; "East Indies Station," *Naval History Archive*, available at: https://www.navalhistoryarchive.org/index.php/East_Indies_Station, accessed July 14, 2021,

¹⁰ *Ibid.* The "princes" she is referring to are the "royalty" in the Indian Princely States that were not directly governed by the British Government. Often these provinces maintained an alliance with the British Government that was reluctant on both ends, but both sides preferred to avoid conflict. More can be found on the Princely States below.

¹¹ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 40.

¹² Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, 177.

¹³ Mira Behn spends roughly twenty percent of her autobiography, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, recounting her life before India. What I include here is far from extensive, but what I argue is pertinent to know to understand her decisions and experiences in India better. I do not go much into her life between World War One and her leaving for India in 1925. She had a short stint as a concert arranger and traveled to Germany, France, Switzerland, and Egypt. In her dissertation, Bidisha Mallik makes an astute observation about Behn's work as a concert arranger in post-World War One England. "Mira Behn's work to promote Germanic music in post-World War One England is a

celebrated Rolland corresponded for years, and in her correspondence to him often refers to him as her “dear father.”¹⁴ From the moment she read Rolland’s biography of Gandhi, she knew she wanted to follow Gandhi and be a part of his cause, even though prior to reading this book she had never before heard of Gandhi.¹⁵ She vividly describes her inner-transformation due to the biography in the Preface of *Bapu’s Letters to Mira*:

I read and read, and as I read the dawn in my heart glowed brighter and brighter, and by the time that I had finished, the Sun of Truth was pouring rays into my soul. From that moment I knew that my life was dedicated to Bapu. That for which I had been waiting for had come and it was this.¹⁶

Traditional gender and social norms would have a well-educated girl like Slade attend parties and functions until she found a British gentleman of good class and repute to marry, for whom to run a household, and to whom she would bear children. According to her autobiography, there was only one man in her life with whom she went out on a date, and she was so detached from the idea of dating and finding a husband, that she did not even realize that the man was attempting to court her.¹⁷ While she never married, Slade did fall in love twice in

burning instance how she employed the moral force of such spiritual inspiration to bridge the gap between England and Germany, to counter human alienation and self-interest, and thus to translate art in the service of shared human moral expressions” (Bidisha Mallik, “The Contribution of Mira Behn and Sarala Behn to Social and Environmental Transformation in the Indian State of Uttarakhand,” (University of North Texas, unpub. Doctoral Dissertation, 2014), 389.) This serves as an early example of Behn’s passion and dedication bringing something to fruition. However, it seems worthwhile to ponder that these concerts often involved the performance of the German pianist with whom she was in love with (see footnote 18).

¹⁴ Romain Rolland, *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence : Letters, Diary Extracts, Articles, etc.* (Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 2017), e-book, available at: <https://archive.org/details/romainrollandgan00roll/page/n9/mode/2up>, accessed April 30, 2020. Many of Romain Rolland Letters to Mira Behn and Gandhi were written in French, but Behn translated them to English for Gandhi to read. Behn herself wrote to Rolland in mostly English, and very rarely French.

¹⁵ Mira Behn. “Preface,” in Mahatma Gandhi, *Gandhi’s Letters to a Disciple*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950) [Reprint by Out-of-Print Books on Demand, 1990], 8-9.

¹⁶ Mira Behn, *Bapu’s Letters to Mira, 1924-1948*, (Navajivan Trust, 1949), 4, available at: <https://archive.org/details/bapusletterstomi00gand/mode/2up>, accessed May 1, 2020.

¹⁷ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 45-6; Her parents attempted to place her in situations where she could meet a “proper” husband. There is documentation in *The Times* in May 1911 of Lady Slade “presenting” Madeleine Slade to the Royal Court (Slade was one among hundreds, that was the custom for young women her age). “Wednesday’s Presentations,” *Times*, 26 May, 1911, 7 *The Times Digital Archive*, available at: <http://link.gale.com/apps/docs/CS117898426/TTDA?u=tamp4489&sid=TTDA&xid=fa9cead9>, accessed July 22, 2020.

her life: the first time shortly after World War One with a married German concert pianist, and then, later in life, with a much younger Indian man with ties to the Indian independence movement. Both times this love was unrequited.¹⁸ Slade's unconventional relationships with men and marriage were not the only way by which she challenged the norm.

British upper-class society saw itself as more sophisticated and civilized than Indian society's elite, and, indeed, racially superior. Before the First World War, virtually the entire British upper and upper-middle-class viewed itself as refined, advanced, and polished, superior to any in the world not only in terms of race, but also of class. Conversely, the British viewed all Indian society, even its leading strata, as savage and uncultured, and, therefore, in need of British rule to raise them as much as possible to the allegedly superior and refined standard of British civilization.¹⁹ When Slade began challenging traditional gender notions and ideals of British superiority by following Gandhi, her parents ultimately supported her. Her father went as far as

¹⁸ Of her first love, she states, "The joyous association of friendship with Lamond in the cause nearest my heart was developing into something else, something I had never pictured for myself. Now I came face to face with it[...] I never ceased to pray to God with all my heart and soul for guidance, not in the guidance, not only in the orthodox way, but as the spirit moved me," (Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Digital Edition, 45). She spent the post-World War-One-years organizing and promoting concerts in London and the surrounding areas, particularly for the married pianist she fell in love with. Advertisements for these concerts can be found in the May 18, 1923 issue of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, "Concerts, etc.," 4, and the May 19, 1923 and May 26, 1923 issues of the *Westminster Gazette*, "Queens Hall," 8, and "Concerts, Recitals," 8, *British Newspaper Archive*, available at: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>, accessed July 16, 2021.

¹⁹ For more on British ideas about Indian culture and Britain's role in India read Jon Wilson's *India Conquered*, and David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000). Many British did believe in the "civilizing" portion of the empirical mission because they truly believed in British cultural superiority. For more about this, see, A. Martin Wainwright, *The Better Class' of Indians: Social Rank, Imperial Identity, and South Asians in Britain, 1858-1914*, (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester UP, 2008). While anti-colonial sentiment was not the norm in Britain, Mira Behn was far from the only British person to criticize Britain's imperial rule in India. Edward Said argues that "there was always some form of active resistance," and Priyamvada Gopal builds upon that argument stating, "there were heterogenous but not unconnected arcs of criticism that can be said to constitute a dissident and frequency, outright anti-colonial inheritance in Britain forged over more than a century" (Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994, xii, available at: <https://archive.org/details/cultureimperiali0000said>, accessed July 20, 2021; Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anti-Colonial Resistance and British Dissent*, London, New York: Verso, 2019, 8).

to hire an Indian tutor to teach her Urdu.²⁰ Although Slade was in her thirties when she made her decision to join Gandhi, when her father still served as a military officer, I posit that he ultimately supported her decision. Slade was already challenging traditional British gender and class norms by remaining unwed at such an age, and she utilized this as an excuse to stay out of the public eye.²¹ Slade notes in her autobiography that it was “not easy” for a man who was socially and politically well-connected to have a daughter involved with Gandhi’s movement, but he ultimately allowed her to go.²²

This decision was not met without backlash. Slade became internationally known in the Western world for her decision to follow Gandhi, with Western papers even incorrectly reporting that her parents disowned her, because they could not believe that she, an upper-class British woman, would be submissive to an Indian man and could do so with their blessing.²³ This signifies that her choice was so unbelievable to those who published the news, that they wrongly published information supporting British superiority ideals, rather than admit that a British woman would put herself in a subservient position to an Indian man.

²⁰ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 61; It probably helped that Behn had a sister, Rhona, who adhered to the more traditional gender and cultural norms. Rhona married an English military officer and even spent some time in India as an officer’s wife.

²¹ Behn was obviously not the only spinster in England, for example the Bronte sisters were famously unmarried. However, with Behn’s father being such a high profile officer, the family could have faced extra scrutiny when not following social norms. Spinsterhood became increasingly common among financially independent middle class and working class women between 1870 and 1920 and this was not an uncommon thing for women of late Victorian society. Women traveled alone, were outgoing and pursued their own interests.

²² Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 64. Her older sister, Rhona, did follow the path that was expected of her by marrying an officer in the Indian Civil Service, Harold Vernon, shortly after the Durbar festivities of 1911. (Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Digital Edition, 37). This probably aided in Edmond Slade’s support of Slade, because at least one daughter was following protocol. While Behn states in her autobiography that Rhona’s wedding occurred shortly after the Durbar festivities, the newspaper announcements from that time feature articles stating that the wedding actually occurred Wednesday September 17, 1913. According to the September 20, 1913 issues of the *Surrey Advertiser*, “Wedding of Miss R. Warr Slade,” 5, *British Newspaper Archive*, and the *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser*, “Wedding at Wescott,” 5, *British Newspaper Archive*.

²³ S.T. Williamson, "Footnotes on a Week's Headliners; Their Differences. Mayor Walker's Pinch-Hitter. She Was an Admiral's Daughter." *New York Times*, March 15, 1931, Par. 1, available at: <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1931/03/15/100994514.pdf>, accessed November 2, 2018.

Immersed in Western superiority, newspapers across England and America did not refer to her by her preferred given Hindu name (given to her by Gandhi after she arrival in India), but insisted on using her English name, “Miss Slade,” until after her speaking tour in 1934. In 1932, the *New York Times*, fascinated with Slade, focused on the traditional gender roles she allegedly played in her service to Gandhi: how she waited on Gandhi, prepared his meals, and even missed out on London receptions because of her need to do his laundry.²⁴ Although she was serving an Indian man, she was performing tasks deemed appropriate to her gender. They chose to ignore the other tasks that did not fit the gendered bill that Slade supposedly performed. But despite the efforts to emphasize female subservience, Slade’s presence at Gandhi’s side piqued the public’s curiosity. This international attention would serve her well later in the movement for Indian independence.

After reading Gandhi’s biography, Slade foresaw how much of a culture-shock joining Gandhi’s cause might be for an upper-class woman. She was also someone who, when she put her mind to something, put her whole self into it. For this reason, Slade did not go straight to Gandhi. Instead, she chose to spend a year preparing herself for the ashram (village) life of Gandhi by learning Urdu, giving up meat, alcohol, and her bed, and working among peasants in Scotland.²⁵

The main goal for Slade during her training was learning to spin. According to Behn, spinning “touched every household in the village.”²⁶ Spinning was a way for the people of India

²⁴ S.T. Williamson, "About an Ambassador, a Yankee Democrat, An Alabamian and a Gandhi Disciple," *New York Times*, February 21, 1932, Par. 4, available at: <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1932/02/21/105784431.pdf>, accessed November 5, 2018.

²⁵ Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, 198-99; Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Digital Edition, 53-4. This is, in a way, telling of English views of the Scottish. Behn felt that working among the Scottish peasants would be equivalent to working with the impoverished people in India, or at least close enough to provide ample experience.

²⁶ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Digital Edition, 53-4.

to take back some of their independence from Britain by making their own cloth, rather than relying on purchasing British material produced by the British textile mills.

During her year of training, Slade began a correspondence with Gandhi that lasted until he died in 1948. She subscribed to Gandhi's weekly publication, *Young India*, so that she could stay current with the goings-on of the movement. Behn grew increasingly excited for her venture to India as she demonstrates in her second letter to Gandhi in May 1925:

The first impulse (to go to India) has never faded, but on the contrary my desire to serve you has grown ever more and more fervent... My being is filled with great joy and a great anguish. The joy of giving all I have to you and to your people and the anguish of being able to give so little. I pine for the day when I shall come to India.²⁷

While Slade was anxious to get to India, Gandhi displayed some hesitation about her coming, but, nonetheless, invited her to come to Sabarmati Ashram. He wrote back to her:

You are welcome whenever you choose to come... Only please remember that the life at the Ashram is not all rosy. It is strenuous. Bodily labour is given by every inmate. The climate of the country is also not a small consideration. I mention these things not to frighten you, but merely to warn you.²⁸

Slade was unfazed by Gandhi's warning. As her year of training ended, she bid farewell to her mother and sister in London, followed by a parting with her father in Paris. She made one last stop in Villeneuve to take leave of the man who placed her on this wondrous journey in the first place, Romain Rolland. As she bid farewell to Rolland, his parting words to her were, "How lucky you are!"²⁹ On October 25, 1925, Slade boarded the P&O liner for Bombay and left for India, never to see her parents again.³⁰ At 7:45 am on November 7, 1925, Slade arrived at Sabarmati Ashram and Gandhi deemed that she should hence be called "Mira Behn."³¹

²⁷ Miss Madeleine Slade, "May 29, 1925," in Mahatma Gandhi, Tridip Suhrud, and Thomas Weber, *Beloved Bapu: The Gandhi-Mirabehn Correspondence*, (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2014), 11-12.

²⁸ Gandhi, "July 24, 1925," *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 11

²⁹ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Digital Edition, 55.

³⁰ *Ibid.*; Suhrud and Weber, *Beloved Bapu*, 9.

³¹ Behn, *Bapu's Letters to Mira*, 2.

Throughout her almost thirty-five-year tenure working with the Indian independence movement, Behn went on grassroots tours of India teaching the people of the villages how to be self-sufficient and independent from British goods, assisted Gandhi at the Second Round Table Conference in London, produced internationally read publications on the movement, was imprisoned for her role in the movement, toured alone in Britain and the United States to spread awareness about the movement, and worked tirelessly towards ensuring India's independence during the grim days of World War Two. I argue that, through Behn's open defiance to traditional British gender, social, racial, and class norms, grassroots work and tours through India, international travels and news correspondence, she was a key contributor to the movement for Indian independence.³²

However, Behn was not the first British woman to venture to India. She was preceded by three different types of women who sojourned in South Asia, or whose independent and critical attitude undermined the legitimacy of the British colonial rule: the *memsahibs*, the British feminists and suffragettes, and individual remarkable women such as Gertrude Bell and Annie Besant. While these women may not have had a direct impact on Behn, they laid the foundation for British women traveling to India and other European colonies, and this set the context for which Behn entered India. To understand Behn and other Western women's roles in India one must understand the Western (primarily British) perception and reception of India.

³² Priyamvada Gopal groups Behn with other Western "dissenters" such as Annie Besant and C.F. Andrews, whom both worked with Gandhi at one point, but neither got as close to Gandhi as Behn did (Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*, 217).

British Perspectives and Receptions of India: The British in India³³

India is a geographical term. It is no more a united nation than the equator.

- Winston Churchill³⁴

The above quote from Churchill demonstrates a narrative that British imperialist supporters wanted the world to believe of India. If outside powers perceived India as a fragmented group of people whose only commonality was coincidental geography, then the British presence and imperial control would make more sense than if the outside world perceiving India as a united people. Ironically, it was the British presence in India that gave the people of India something against which to unite.

From about 1800 through 1947, the British reigned as a “supreme political force” in India, even if theirs was a regime constantly plagued by fear and doubt.³⁵ The British exploited India to staff their armies, and extract precious resources, while simultaneously exacting brutal violence on the local population whenever they felt their rule was faltering.³⁶ The British attempted to subjugate the peoples of India by synchronously imposing their culture and ideal of British superiority. Under the rule of the British Empire, India’s manufacturing sector was stunted to the benefit of British industrial production and imperial promulgation. British rule

³³ In the 1980s, a group of Indian scholars came together and formed the Subaltern Studies Collective, also known as, the Subaltern Studies Group to combat the primarily Western/British perspective of Indian historiography. The idea of “subaltern” was first referred to by Italian Marxist theorist, Antonio Gramsci who recognizes subaltern groups as people unable to “unite” to form a State and are typically ruled by a dominating class who impedes any attempt to unify (Antonio Gramsci, “Notes on Italian History,” *Gramsci: Prison Notebooks*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 52, available at <https://archive.org/details/Gramsci-History/page/n9/mode/2up?q=subaltern>, accessed August 7, 2021). For more on Subaltern Studies see El Habib Louai, “Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: Historical Developments and New Applications,” *African Journal of History and Culture (AJHC)* (January 2012): 4, no. 1, 4-8, available at https://academicjournals.org/article/article1381909550_Louai.pdf, accessed August 7, 2021 and Rosalind O’Hanlon, “Recovering the Subject Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia.” *Modern Asian Studies* 22, no. 1 (1988): 189-224.

³⁴ Amartya Sen, “Illusions of empire: Amartya Sen on what British Rule Really did for India,” *Guardian*, June 29, 2021, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/29/british-empire-india-amartya-sen>, accessed July 21, 2021.

³⁵ Jon Wilson, *India Conquered: British Raj and the Chaos of Empire*, London: Simon and Schuster 2016. 1, 5. The term “Raj” refers to the areas of India under the direct rule of the British.

³⁶ Wilson, *India Conquered*, 6,9.

helped to define the British image throughout the world as a superior imperial power, while India remained oppressed under Britain's regime.³⁷

The process was self-serving, wholly focused on the mother country rather than on the well-being or prosperity of the subcontinent: The British first utilized Indian knowledge of textile manufacturing and exported Indian cloth before using the British East India Company and the Industrial Revolution to wrest the textile industry from Indian control and replace it.³⁸ Indians were concomitantly forced to watch from the sidelines as the number of schools and institutes of higher learning in India were reduced, their country entered foreign wars without consultation, and the indigenous population left out of the administration of their own communities.³⁹

The East India Company established political and economic power on the coastlines of India throughout the eighteenth century and went on to be an alleged "agent of progress;" which was due to the British influence in India expanding further inland and came at the expense of the Mughal empire and other territories as well as rival European Powers, such as the Dutch and the French.⁴⁰

In 1857, "one of the major armed resistances that the British had faced during their colonial rule in India" occurred.⁴¹ The revolt began in May 1857 and lasted roughly eighteenth months. According to Shumais U.,

Almost two third of Bengal army including infantry, cavalry and artillery revolted against the English East India Company. The soldiers marched to Delhi and installed the Mughal

³⁷ Robert Johnson, *British Imperialism*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 205.

³⁸ Giorgio Riello, "The Indian Apprenticeship: The Trade of Indian Textiles and the Making of European Cottons," in eds. Giorgio Riello and Roy Tirthankar, *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 309-346, 310.

³⁹ Johnson, *British Imperialism*, 152, 207.

⁴⁰ Kathleen Wilson, *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 141. For more about the Mughal empire in India see Jon Wilson's *India Conquered*.

⁴¹ U Shumais, "Impact of the Revolt of 1857 in South India: The Case of Colonial Malabar." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress 77* (2016), 410-7, 410. The uprising is sometimes referred to as the Mughal Uprising, the Sepoy Rebellion, or the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857.

king Bahadur Shah II as the emperor of India. The revolt was soon joined by various rulers, feudal lords, peasants, artisans, priests and mendicants, native company officials and so on which transformed the revolt into a popular uprising.⁴²

The eighteen-month uprising against the EIC and Britain was ultimately suppressed, while it had lasting effects in India. It represented a key moment, for the people of India, who learned that they could come together and revolt against British rule. It also helped to solidify the differences between “ruler” and “ruled.”⁴³ However, according to Priyamvada Gopal,

relations between British colonial representatives and India subjects on the whole manifested a hardening of racial, religious, and cultural boundaries, with extreme otherness re-inscribed on the bodies of the ‘fanatical’ insurgents.⁴⁴

Because of the failure of the EIC to bring down the revolt on its own, in 1858, the British government abolished the Company and took a stronger and more direct-ruling position through its political administration of British India as well as managing “public institutions established by the East India Company.”⁴⁵ This shift in power was solidified when Queen Victoria was publicly declared Empress in 1887.⁴⁶ By publicly declaring Victoria as Empress, Britain underlined its position as an imperial power and publicly confirmed India’s status as a colony.

The British established a political and colonial hegemony in India that made the native people (seemingly) dependent not only on British products but British governance as well.⁴⁷ They created this dependence through economic exploitation and the psychological

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 81.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁵ Waltraud Ernst, *Mad Tales from the Raj: Colonial Psychiatry in South Asia, 1800-58*, (London: Anthem Press, 2010), 39.

⁴⁶ Wilson, *India Conquered*, 293.

⁴⁷ According to Dominic Mastroianni, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), Italian communist leader and theorist, “is perhaps the theorist most closely associated with the concept of hegemony ...[with] hegemony as a form of control exercised by a dominant class...[and] indicates ‘political predominance, usually of one state over another’” (Dominic Mastroianni, “Hegemony in Gramsci,” available at:

<https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2014/06/20/hegemony-in-gramsci/>, accessed August 5, 2021).

See also, Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Revised Edition, (New York: Oxford UP, 1977).

disempowerment of the native Indian male.⁴⁸ The British achieved this partly by controlling what the outside world learned about nineteenth and twentieth century India.

Edward Said argued that “the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes on the main connections between them.”⁴⁹ Imperial-era writers such as Rudyard Kipling would help control the narrative of the British in India by emphasizing the superior, powerful, and wealthy masculinity of the English man while at the same time emasculating the Indian male, attempting to undermine traditional popular stereotypes of the strong warrior-type Indian.⁵⁰ The British even turned an Indian classification, “Babu,” simply meaning, “Wealthy Hindu,” into a negative stereotype portraying these men as weak, cheap, and inferior to British men and, especially, effeminate.⁵¹ Although the British were very successful at controlling the narrative, there were those both inside and outside of Britain that had dissenting viewpoints. For example, Karl Marx predicted in 1853 that,

England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia...The Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie, till in Great Britain itself the now ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindoos themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether⁵²

⁴⁸ Women in India could be potentially exploited by European women as European women sought to work with Indian women to “improve” their lives (but not to the point that they did not need the European women) . There is more on this later in this chapter. More on women in India can be found in chapters three and four. Women in India would also work as domestic workers in the homes of British families in India.

⁴⁹ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xiii.

⁵⁰ Edward Said goes into depth on this topic in *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). He uses the example of Victorian-era, “cultural hero,” John Stuart Mill. He states that Mill “made it clear in his *On Liberty and Representative Government* that his views there could not be applied to India (he was an India Office Functionary for a good deal of his life, after all) because the Indians were civilizationally, if not racially inferior” (ibid., 13).

⁵¹ Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century*, (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995).

⁵² Karl Marx, “The Future Results of the British in India,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, August 8, 1853, available at: <https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/marx/works/1853/07/22.htm>, accessed July 21, 2021. The influences of Britain’s rule of India still impact India today. In a recent article by Amartya Sen, he argues that the “intellectual influence” from Britain and other European cultures “survives strongly today even as the military, political, and economic power of the British has declined dramatically” (Amartya Sen, “Illusions of empire,” *the Guardian*).

While news sources such as *The New-York Daily Telegraph* published Marx's ideas, the portrayal of India promulgated by writers such as Kipling was the idea that dominated the Western world. Scholars can clearly see the trope of India being an oriental society of inferior, half-savage, beings who needed to be ruled by a firm (masculine) hand in Katherine Mayo's 1921 book *Mother India*.⁵³ Mayo portrays South Asia as a land of savage tigers, loin-cloth-wearing men, starving children, and practicing "Sati," the act of burning a widow alive along with her dead husband, on an epic scale. Although making a caricature of the subcontinent's people, this book was the best-selling book about India in America throughout the early parts of the twentieth century. Although Western thinkers criticized these tropes before, they were particularly sharply challenged in the late 1970s in Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said describes the Orient as "almost an European invention" and critiques the popular Western notions that Asia was a "place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, [and] remarkable experiences."⁵⁴ To him, India, and other Asian countries were not places that needed to be fixed and controversially stated that "the answer to Orientalism is not Occidentalism."⁵⁵ Mayo's ideals and the extreme stereotypes are further challenged in historian Lata Mani's 1998 book *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*; in this work, Mani argues against the stereotypes.⁵⁶

Along with the East India Company, the British colonial office established the Indian Civil Service in the 1800s which placed a few thousand British men in administration of 300

⁵³ Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*, Ann Arbor, MI: U. of Michigan P., 2000, available at: <http://books.google.com/books?id=50-GAAAAMAAJ>, accessed April 23, 2020.

⁵⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁵⁶ Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*, (Berkeley, CA: U. of California P., 1998). Of course, there is much more scholarship on the topic outside of these two sources. For further reading, I also recommend Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*, (Durham: Duke UP, 2006).

million people across the British Raj.⁵⁷ The Indian Civil Service furthered promulgated British superiority by introducing British administrative practices that led foreign Western leaders to “admire” British rule in India.⁵⁸

Despite their blustering about their superiority, British imperialists lived in a constant state of fear of losing their control in India. John Darwin argues that the latter-day imperialists of the twentieth century felt that Victorian and Edwardian imperialists had left them with nothing but shells of buildings and sets of unfinished plans on how to maintain the South-Asian empire.⁵⁹ Colonial and metropolitan officials were always worried about uprisings, and the British had to rule through a mix of violent control and persuasion, which included working through different tribal and political leaders within the Princely States, the Indian polities not directly ruled by Britain forming most of the Raj.⁶⁰

There were over 600 Princely States in India; some, like Hyderabad, could be as large as other Indian provinces such as Bihar or Bombay; yet many were the size of private estates.⁶¹ They continued the disempowering and “othering” of the colonized male.⁶² Part of this was how some rules were established for the interactions between white women and Indian men: Indian men could only speak to a white woman if spoken to first, they were not allowed to touch or stare at a white woman, and relationships between white women and Indian men were strictly

⁵⁷ David Gilmore, *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), xiii.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, xix.

⁵⁹ John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).

⁶⁰ “Princely States” are the areas of India not under direct rule of the British, but rather led by princes and tribal in nature. It was more advantageous to the British to work with the Princely States and maintain some indirect power than try and force a direct rule due to previous actions and rebellions within the Princely States. The northern states, consisting of the Frontier Province, which included what is today Pakistan, , were fairly against British rule, even though they were not under direct rule. During the 1930s, the Frontier Province sought not only a separation from Britain, but also India.

⁶¹ S. Gopal, *The Viceroyalty of Lord Irwin, 1926-1931*, (London: Oxford UP, 1957), 123.

⁶² Native women could be exploited by European women as household workers or receivers of European women’s “philanthropy,” as will be demonstrated later in this chapter. More on indigenous women can be found in chapters one, three, and four.

forbidden.⁶³ If any of these rules were broken, Indian men, and even the white women, could be punished in a number of ways, including the use of severe violence.⁶⁴

The British worked hard to establish a society and culture in India that made it appear to the rest of the world that India needed British governance and “civilization” because India was socially and culturally inferior. Behn inherently attacked this notion by her actions because “white women who rejected their own religion and culture and accepted those of the colonized were a challenge to the ‘civilizing’ mission and concepts of the superior ‘master race.’”⁶⁵ It is with these perspectives in mind that I analyze the categories of European women who went to India.⁶⁶

⁶³ Arthur Herman, *Gandhi & Churchill: The Epic Rivalry That Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age*, (New York: Bantam Books, 2008), 31.

⁶⁴ Ibid; While Behn never engaged in a romantic relationship with Gandhi, she challenged these rules by allowing herself to be put in an inferior position to an Indian man. I cannot say whether Behn was deliberately disobeying the rules by following Gandhi or was just not paying any mind to them; either way, her publicly following Gandhi was noticed by the British government and the press and was heavily commented on.

⁶⁵ Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, 175; Behn did not openly reject her Christian past. She comments in a few separate interviews that she has not forsaken Christianity. But to an outsider looking-in, or reading the various news articles on Behn, she appears to betray the cultural ideals of British superiority and rejects the Christian ideologies by following a Hindu man.

⁶⁶ In the late twentieth century, Salman Rushdie coined the term “Raj Revival,” when there was an abundance of feature films, television programs, and documentaries created that seemed to imply that “despite mistakes, the British performed a valuable service in ruling India because of the backwardness of its people” (Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana UP, 1992), i). In addition to “Raj Revival,” there was also sentiment of “imperial nostalgia” as descendants of British workers in India commemorated their childhoods in India through memoirs...Charles Allen, who had departed India by age nine, argued that “good decent people...were vilified simply for being part of an historical process over which they had no control...,” while other descendants argue for the “positive balance sheet of raj endeavors” for their involvement in the “developed tea industry, postal service, railway system, civil service, and...democracy itself,” (Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 252, 259, 267).

European Women in India

Empire provided opportunities for maternal imperialist, feminist allies, and activists to test their independence from the constraints of patriarchal society.

-Chaudhuri and Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism*⁶⁷

Memsahibs

After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1867, travel time from Britain to India shortened from three to six months to three to six weeks. This led to a rise in the number of women who followed their British soldier-husbands/colonial officials to India. These women came to be known as “Memsahibs,” which roughly translated to “Master’s Wives.”⁶⁸ Many of these memsahibs stayed close to their homes in India and only visited the British-styled country clubs that colonial officials and British private citizens established. They hired Indian women to work as domestic help in their homes and only learned enough of the native language of the area (i.e., Hindi or Urdu) to communicate household duties to the Indian women, also known as “Kitchen Hindi.”⁶⁹

These memsahibs parroted the imperial propaganda of British superiority through their refusal to learn the language and respect the customs of the Indian people. Historian Ronald Hyam argues that the arrival of the memsahibs partially caused a deepening of the racial tensions that occurred in India.⁷⁰ I support his argument because prior to the arrival of memsahibs, many British soldiers would seek the companionship of Indian women, going as far as to father

⁶⁷ Chaudhuri and Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism*, 9.

⁶⁸ For more on memsahibs, see Margaret Macmillan, *Women of the Raj*, (New York: Random House, 1988) and Mary Ann Lind, *The Compassionate Memsahibs: Welfare Activities of British Women in India, 1900-1947*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 198). Historian Pat Barr challenges Lind and Macmillan’s perceptions of memsahibs by stating that not all memsahibs treated Indian women as merely “help,” that some of them performed charitable works. (Pat Barr, *The Dust in the Balance: British Women in India, 1905-1945*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989).

⁶⁹ Examples of “Kitchen Hindi,” and how it was used can be found in Rosemary Marangoly George, “Homes in the Empire, Empires in the Home.” *Cultural Critique*, no. 26 (1993): 95–127. 111,123, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354457> and D. Shoenberg, “Memories of India.” *Current Science* 77, no. 7 (1999): 983–86, 985. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24103677>.

⁷⁰ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*, (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990).

children with them and even remembering these Indian women and children in terms of their property of funds in their wills.⁷¹ The empire reluctantly turned a blind eye to these interracial relationships until the much more numerous arrivals of British women, for then it was believed that there was no longer any need for the interracial relationships to continue. It is perhaps not wholly coincidental that this segregation coincided with the development and diffusion of “scientific racism” in Britain as worded by debunked theorists (albeit then well-respected!) such as Herbert Spencer.⁷²

While memsahibs mostly stayed home and ran the households, there are several examples of them influencing cultures and impacting decisions in the Raj. Nupur Chaudhuri states that memsahibs were a “significant force in shaping the imperial world view of the Victorians” and that they “served as a conduit for the flow of culture from India to Britain.”⁷³ Because British military and civilian officials rarely stayed in India for the entirety of their lives or careers, memsahibs would return to England bringing with them the food and fashions of India while new memsahibs would bring the latest fashions and trends to India. Memsahibs also influenced legislature in the Raj.

The Ilbert Bill was passed in January 1884, which allowed native Indians to preside over criminal cases involving British subjects. However, memsahibs worked to limit the power of this bill. According to Mrinalini Sinha, the British in India feared that “isolated white women would become the victims of unbridled native lust” and the British workers and memsahibs argued that

⁷¹ For more on these relationships between British men and Indian women, see Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008).

⁷² Herbert Spencer, *Progress: It's Laws and Causes*, 1857, *Modern History Sourcebook*, 2020, available at: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/spencer-darwin.asp>, accessed July 20, 2020.

⁷³ Nupur Chaudhuri, “Shawls, Jewelry, Curry, and Rice in Victorian Britain,” in Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana UP, 1992), 231-246, 231-2.

“Bengali magistrates might intentionally misuse their powers over white women.”⁷⁴ Working in conjunction with the men, the memsahibs ensured that Bill was passed with the caveat that any British person on trial had a jury whose members were at least half European or British subjects.⁷⁵ Ironically, while memsahibs were often housewives and stayed in their private sphere, their participation in this movement was “unprecedented” and was more in line with the activists and suffragettes whom ventured into India not long after the arrival of the first memsahibs.

While Mira Behn had little in common with memsahibs, she did have a connection to them. Her own mother, after all, had been a memsahib when her father was stationed for two years in India when Behn was fifteen-years-old.⁷⁶ In her autobiography, Behn describes herself, her mother and older sister, as “an essential part of his (father’s) entourage because of the social side and the tremendous amount of entertaining involved.”⁷⁷ Because of her husband’s position, Behn’s mother was expected to host many parties for the elite in the area, and Behn was expected to attend. She did so reluctantly. Her sister, Rhona, would have made the perfect memsahib as she loved the dances and fancy dresses, whereas Behn had more of an interest in horses, cows, and sailboats than dancing with sons of the elite.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Mrinalini Sinha, “Chathams, Pitts, and Gladstones in Petticoats: The Politics of Gender and Race in the Ilbert Bill Controversary, 1883-1884,” in *Western Women and Imperialism*, 98-116, 98, 100.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁷⁶ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, Adobe Digital Edition, 29.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 26, 28, 30.

Memsahibs were not the only Western women in India. Some women came unaccompanied in search of ways of political, religious, and economic gain as well as charitable works.⁷⁹

British Feminists and Suffragettes

Margaret Strobel argues that European women (particularly upper-class European women) profited politically and economically through the oppression of colonized women.⁸⁰ Throughout the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, British women were struggling in the metropole. While women's rights movements had a lot of momentum in the later parts of the nineteenth century, there was much for women to be frustrated about. There were many middle-class and upper-middle-class nineteenth-century British women who wanted to work outside of their home, but they were constantly harangued and harassed by men whose masculinity was threatened by the thought of a woman taking his job.⁸¹

Things for these women only got worse with the onset of World War One. With many British men rapidly sent away from home to fight in the war on the continent, women were expected to put their fight for equal rights on hold in favor of supporting the war effort. Middle

⁷⁹ There were a few notable memsahibs who did not quite live up to the typical memsahib stereotype, such as Flora Annie Steel, who "was the wife of an Indian Civil Service (ICS) officer who lived in India for twenty-two years. During her stay in India, she proved her exceptional mettle in trying to befriend the natives, learn their languages, accompany her husband on his important tours, establish girls' schools, serve as the school inspectress, and leave her mark on India in numerous other ways. What is a more lasting legacy are her writings about British India. Her works range from novels (like *On the Face of the Waters*), short fiction (like "In the Permanent Way"), a collection of Indian folk tales (*Tales of the Punjab*), to guides for other memsahibs in colonial India (*The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook*)." (Susmita Roye, "Introduction," in *Flora Annia Steel: A Critical Study of an Unconventional Memsahib*, 12-52, (Alberta, CA: University of Alberta Press, 2017), 12).

⁸⁰ Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1991). In his work on Imperialism, English economist and social scientist, J.A. Hobson espouses the positive effects of British rule in India: "our success in India is commonly adduced as the most convincing argument in favour of the benefits accruing to subject races from Imperialism" (John A. Hobson, "Imperialism in Asia," in *Imperialism, A Study*, available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/hobson/1902/imperialism/pt2ch5.htm>, accessed August 7 2021). As more and more English women came to India, they would have been inundated with this idea that the British influence on India was completely positive and may have extended that to the idea that whatever they, as British women, did for Indian women would be positive and a complete improvement.

⁸¹ Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*, (Berkeley, CA: U. of California P., 1995).

and upper-class women were expected to support peace by providing support to soldiers at home as their wives, mothers, or sisters, and as the producers of future soldiers, while working-class women worked in the factories or as domestic workers.⁸² Women gained the right to vote after the war, but not much else happened in terms of women's rights and equality. Very few women held political office between the end of the First World War and the start of the Second World War. The eventual attainment of suffrage appeased some suffragettes and feminists and made them willing to perform their patriotic duty, but many moved on to the cause of India's self-determination to find the political voice that they were lacking at home.⁸³

Before the First World War, British feminists, however, tended to oppress Indian women more through charitable acts than they helped them.⁸⁴ They seemed to only help them enough to survive and made certain to ensure that the Indian women were dependent on their aid. Imperial women did not want Indian women to identify as members of a nation, but rather as members of small particular groups.⁸⁵ These feminists were promoting their own political agendas at the cost

⁸² Working-class and lower-class women took jobs in the factories to replace the men who had left.

⁸³ For more on Women and World War One see, Susan Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995), and Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War*, (Chapel Hill, NC: U. of North Carolina P., 1998). Grayzel's work builds upon Kent's, but Grayzel argues that women's attitudes towards rights' movements shifted throughout the war, whereas Kent argues that their ideals shifted only after the war. Ironically, for India, at the end of World War I, Wilson published his "Fourteen Points," for the world to see which called for territories occupied during the war to be evacuated, but for "colonies" only "A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined," which makes no implications for the sovereignty of nations in positions like India (Woodrow Wilson, *Fourteen Points*, January 8, 1918, available at: https://web.ics.purdue.edu/~wggray/Teaching/His300/Handouts/Fourteen_Points.pdf, accessed August 8, 2021). Lenin also discusses imperialism and the "imperial war" in his *April Theses* of 1917, but Russia/USSR also did nothing to alter Britain's imperial rule of India (Vladimir Lenin, *April Theses*, 1917, available at: <https://wp.stu.ca/worldhistory/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2015/08/Lenins-April-Theses.pdf>, accessed August 8, 2021).

⁸⁴ Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915*, (Chapel Hill, NC: U. of North Carolina P., 1995).

⁸⁵ Laura Nym et al. (eds), *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation, and Race*, (London: Routledge, 2000).

of the Indian women., It was only after the World War One that some of these feminists began to realize the need for Indian women’s agency and independence.

*Female Christian Missionaries*⁸⁶

According to Andrea Pass, “by 1920, 311 unmarried female recruits were serving the two leading Anglican societies in India – the high-Church Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) and the evangelical Church Missionary Society (CMS).”⁸⁷ These missionaries tended to walk a fine line in terms of involvement with the Raj. They would occasionally work directly for government programs, but more often than not, their work “supplemented the imperial government’s meagre provision of welfare” through education and medicinal work and they would often receive funds and prices from Viceroys or their wives.⁸⁸ Female missionaries tended not to make any “political statements” or support “Gandhian methods.”⁸⁹

Mira Behn had little in common with memsahibs and British feminists. Stereotypical memsahibs treated the Indian women as “help” and the feminists tended to patronize and oppress them with their form of charity. Later in life, Mira Behn would share some characteristics of the Christian missionary when she took a government position to aid in a transitioning India.⁹⁰ It is these interactions between memsahibs, feminists, missionaries, and Indian women that

⁸⁶ Note that this section is focusing on non-married female Christian missionaries, not the “missionary wives” of the early 19th Century. Clare Midgley states in her article “Can Women Be Missionaries? Envisioning Female Agency in the Early Nineteenth-Century British Empire,” that many mission societies refused “to employ women as missionaries in their own right until the late nineteenth century.” (Clare Midgley, “Can Women Be Missionaries? Envisioning Female Agency in the Early Nineteenth-Century British Empire,” *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 335–58, 336. <https://doi.org/10.1086/499791>).

⁸⁷ Andrea Pass, “Swaraj, the Raj, and the British Woman Missionary in India, c. 1917–1950,” *Transformation* 31, no. 3 (2014): 175–88, 175. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/90008218>.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 181, 183. They did, however, acknowledge the inevitable Indian independence and in the 1940s began promoting “Native” teachers in Christian schools to Principals so that they could eventually run independently of the mission’s help (*Ibid.* 184). Ironically, “unlike their compatriots in imperial service, they were not rendered redundant by the end of Empire,” yet, they were respected by the new leaders of India such as Jawaharlal Nehru. (*Ibid.* 185).

⁹⁰ However, that is where they commonalities tend to end. She made political statements and, obviously, openly supported Gandhi and his methods.

influenced how the women of India first approached Behn. Behn had to strip herself of her British identity by donning the clothing of the Indian woman as well as fully embracing the Indian culture in order to be accepted by the Indian women in the ashrams. Behn was not there to profit from the oppression of the Indian women. Her “success” was not based on a conviction about Indian women’s failure and inferiority, but, rather, Behn sought to help Indian women, and men, as equals, attempting to free themselves from the chains of economic and political dependence on Britain through teaching self-reliant skills across India.⁹¹ Behn, then, perhaps fits best in still another category of British women in India. While they were few and far between, there was a small minority of women born in the nineteenth century who wanted to travel to colonized lands and take up causes in favor of the indigenous people. According to Meenakshi Thapan, these women

yearned for fulfilment through a kind of spiritual quest, based on a deep affective sense of belonging, to another mainly spiritual and cultural tradition that appeared as some kind of exotic ‘other’ space to which they appeared to be inextricably and increasingly drawn.⁹²

Mira Behn was drawn to Gandhi after reading his biography in the same way she had been previously drawn to Beethoven. Besides Mira Behn, Gertrude Bell and Annie Besant were among the more famous protagonists who embodied this.⁹³

⁹¹ This is not to imply that the Indian people *needed* Behn, but rather that Behn’s intentions were to help them through Gandhi’s mission, rather than help herself.

⁹² Meenakshi, Thapan, “The New Missionaries: Spiritual Striving and Political Engagement in India,” *Sociological Bulletin* 67, no. 2 (2018): 141–55, 143. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48566216>.

⁹³ These three women all challenged race, cultural, and class norms by maintaining non-traditional attitudes towards marriage and relationships, leaving their home nations, and having careers outside of the home. There are other Western women who were involved somehow in Gandhi’s movement. Indeed, Behn was not even the first of Gandhi’s Western female disciples. According to Thomas Weber, there were a couple of Danish female missionaries already in India working with Gandhi in the 1910s and early 1920s. Behn stands out from them because she consciously went to India for Gandhi rather than just happen upon the movement while already in India (Behn was not the only one who “consciously” chose to go to India to work with Gandhi). More about these other followers can be found in Thomas Weber, *Going Native: Gandhi’s Relationship with Western Women*, (New Delhi: Roti Books, 2011).

*Gertrude Bell and Annie Besant*⁹⁴

Gertrude Bell was born in 1869 to an affluent British family and challenged gender norms from very early on. She never married, attended university, traveled globally, and had not just one career outside of the home but several. She left Britain to explore the Middle East. While she never ventured to India, she embodied the spirit of the affluent woman of the late nineteenth century who left her life of privilege to go to a land (or in her case lands) viewed by Western societies as racially and economically inferior. She was an assistant to Lawrence of Arabia and became known as the “Unofficial Queen of Mesopotamia.” Tragically, when she no longer found satisfaction in any of her explorations, she died in her 50s after consuming too many sleeping pills.⁹⁵

Annie Besant was born in 1847 to a formerly affluent family. While her parents had lost much of their wealth by the time of Besant’s birth, she still enjoyed an upper-class education.⁹⁶ Besant described herself as an “unhappy girl wife,” for she was married at the age of 20 to a local Lutheran preacher. Besant did not, however, resign herself to this fate: she proceeded to search for fulfillment and purpose in life beyond her loveless marriage. Easily influenced by others, though, she swayed her attentions to different causes. She was first devoutly Christian due to the wedding-bond to her preacher-husband. Then, she discovered atheism under the guidance of Charles Bradlaugh and found herself working for one of the first birth-control

⁹⁴ There are plenty of examples of individual women that I could have utilized, such as Margaret Noble, an Irish Protestant who went to India, opened a school for Hindu girls, and became “Sister Nivedita,” or Margaret Cousins, an English woman with a degree in music who came to India and helped form the All India Women’s Conference, (see Barbara N. Ramusack, “Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1865-1945,” in Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism*, 119-136. 124-126). I selected Annie Besant because she was a towering figure within the INC (before she went all Theosophic) and as such a trailblazer in “choosing the India side,” and I picked Gertrude Bell because of her “serial singleness” and other parallels to Behn.

⁹⁵ Janet Wallach, *Desert Queen: The Extraordinary Life of Gertrude Bell, Adventurer, Adviser to Kings, Ally of Lawrence of Arabia*, (New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 1996).

⁹⁶ Annie Besant, *Annie Besant: An Autobiography*. (Madras: Theosophical Pub. House, Fourth Edition, 1935).

movements in Britain, which cost her custody of her daughter in the divorce settlement with her husband.

Finally, she ventured to India in 1893 with the Theosophists, having fallen under the influence of Colonel Henry Steel Olcott. Like Behn, Besant would challenge the cultural superiority of the British Empire by her actions. By joining the Theosophists, who tended to juxtapose Christianity and Hinduism as different versions of the same world religion, she challenged “the discourse and the legitimacy” of the Empire.⁹⁷ Besant played a vital political role in the early years of the nationalist movement in India. She joined the Indian National Congress in 1913 even served as the President in 1917.⁹⁸ While she held a leadership position within the Congress, Besant and Gandhi rarely agreed on ideology and method. She and Gandhi “disagreed on the use and effectiveness of passive resistance,” and according to Besant biographer, Anne Taylor,

From the moment Gandhi arrived home in 1915, they were ill at ease with each one another. His dislike of her rampant propaganda has already been remarked; there were more fundamental differences. He was for levelling down in pursuit of equality; she wanted to raise standards through leadership by the elite.⁹⁹

Besant was a powerful force and became a leader for each cause she took up until she faded from the limelight in the early 1920s.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Mark Bevir, “In Opposition to the Raj: Annie Besant and the Dialectic of Empire,” *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 61-77. 61-62, available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26217453>, accessed May 1, 2020.

⁹⁸ Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant: A Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992), 295; Bevir, “In Opposition to the Raj 77; Behn and Besant seemingly never interacted because of the almost decade difference with their involvement in India. While they disagreed on a lot of subjects, Gandhi and Besant did correspond. In fact, a postcard sent to Besant from Gandhi sold for \$20,233.00 at an auction in the US (Revathi Hariharan (ed.), “1924 Postcard Signed By Mahatma Gandhi Auctioned For \$20,000 In US,” NDTV, June 15, 2018, available at: <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/1924-postcard-from-mahatma-gandhi-to-annie-besant-auctioned-for-20-000-in-us-1867757>, accessed May 1, 2020).

⁹⁹ Taylor, *Annie Besant*, 315-316.

¹⁰⁰ Unless otherwise noted, information on Besant came from her autobiography and Arthur Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*, (Chicago, IL: U. of Chicago P., 1963).

The memsahibs, British feminists and suffragettes, and women like Annie Besant provide the historical context for post-World-War-One British women's interactions with Indian women. This checkered past was something with which Mira Behn had to contend. Obviously, Behn was not the first woman to travel to India, but by traveling alone, she became part of a small minority of women who sought fulfillment outside of traditional gender roles. Behn, Gertrude Bell, or Annie Besant proved that women could venture out on their own into the colonized lands and make a meaningful life for themselves that went beyond being good spouses, mothers, or daughters (and as forefights for a good cause). Behn worked hard throughout her career with the Indian independence movement to shatter the image of Western superiority throughout India and the Western world. It is with the legacy of the women who preceded Behn and the Western attitudes towards India in mind that I will analyze Mira Behn and her importance in the Indian independence movement.

Mira Behn in Other Perspectives

Mira Behn's name first appeared in the *New York Times* and British newspapers in the 1920s because of the captivating story of her travels to India. The English and Americans could not believe how an upper-class British woman could abandon a life of luxury and ease to follow Gandhi.¹⁰¹

Her autobiography, released in 1960, is a very humble and modest explanation of the life she chose to live. It is not quite clear how reliable it is as a source (autobiographies never are); however, her perspectives allowed me to shape the timeline of events that occur within this narrative.¹⁰² According to Philippe Lejeune, "As opposed to all forms of fiction, biography and

¹⁰¹ Multiple articles throughout the 1930s published in the *New York Times* describe these attitudes.

¹⁰² On that note, biographies are also based on the subjectivity and objectivity of the author. Krisha Murti Gupta's work on Behn is useful because he provides us with a series of writings written by Behn and insight into who Behn was; however, it must be kept in mind that he was her assistant. This dissertation, while biographical in nature,

autobiography are referential text[s]: exactly like scientific or historical discourse, they claim to produce information about a ‘reality’ exterior to the text, and so submit to a test of verification.

Their aim is not simple verisimilitude, but resemblance to ‘the truth.’”¹⁰³ From this, we can understand that what is presented to us as a reader is the “truth” that Mira Behn chooses to share to the world. Estelle C. Jelinek focuses primarily on women’s autobiographies and notes how,

In contrast to the self-confident, one-dimensional self-image that men usually project, women often depict a multi-dimensional, fragmented self-image colored by a sense of inadequacy and alienation of being outsiders or other.¹⁰⁴

Behn very much fits into this description as she seemingly minimizes her accomplishments and spends much of her autobiography discussing Gandhi. Within the pages, she writes tales of her devotion to Gandhi, soberly dictating what she did (and remembered, whilst believing it important), with little elaboration or urgency to assess how vital her role truly was.¹⁰⁵

In 1954, Eleanor Morton wrote *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi*, a book which features snippets and stories of numerous women involved with Gandhi and his movement including his wife, Kasturba, Sarojini Naidu, Lady Mountbatten, and, of course, Mira Behn.¹⁰⁶ Morton’s text is insightful; however, her bibliography is wanting in comparison to the kind of information that

focuses on certain aspects on Behn’s life, while glossing over earlier and later stages of her life. Krishna Murti Gupta, *Mira Behn, Gandhiji's Daughter Disciple: Birth Centenary Volume*, (New Delhi: Himalaya Seva Sangh, 1992).

¹⁰³ Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, (Minneapolis, MN: U. of Minnesota P., 1989), 22.

¹⁰⁴ Estelle C. Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women’s Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present*, (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1986), xiii. For more on women’s autobiographies see Trev Lynn Broughton and Linda R. Anderson (eds.), *Women's Lives/Women's Times: New Essays on Auto/Biography*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁵ Mira Behn’s autobiography is useful when getting insight into Behn’s inner-thoughts and recollections. I find it to be a reliable source, with the caveat that what she chose to leave of her autobiography, I have been able to supplement with correspondence, diaries of others, and newspaper articles.

¹⁰⁶ Eleanor Morton, *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi*, London: Reinhart, 1954. E-book, available at: <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.150009/page/n3/mode/2up>, accessed April 20, 2020. Gandhi refers to Naidu as his “spiritual wife.” Lady Mountbatten was the wife of the final Viceroy of India prior to independence. Eleanor Morton was a Quaker who met Mira Behn personally when Behn came to speak at Pendle Hill, the Quaker Graduate School of Religion and Social Studies.

she provides, and it seems that her writings are mostly based on her minimal interactions with the women (largely in the form of rather brief interviews), which makes this work far from an exhaustive oral history.

Secondary sources released between the 1990s and today include book chapters, journal articles, unpublished dissertations, and similar essays that describe not only the life of Behn but of the world that surrounded her as well. In her 1995 text, *The White Women's Other Burden*, Kumari Jayawardena describes the context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Western world that influenced many upper-class white women, not just Behn, to abandon their lives and seek a life where they could help others in what the Western world considered developing countries.¹⁰⁷

For this study, I utilize three editions of the correspondence between Behn and Gandhi, which were released in 1949, 1950, and 2014, respectively, as well as correspondence from the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Behn herself edited and wrote the preface to *Bapu's Letters to Mira, 1924-1948*, which contains personal notes, contextual notes, and afterthoughts about the letters, and the way that it is styled allows me to access what letters Behn chose to leave out of the collection.¹⁰⁸ The 1950 edition includes a preface by Behn and an introduction by an American ally of the movement, Dr. John Haynes Holmes, and the 2014 compilation includes editor's notes and an introduction by Tridip Suhrud and Thomas Weber. The 2014 edition includes secondary information about the life of Behn and Gandhi, but it is very much limited in terms of Behn's life in relation to Gandhi. In both the 1950 and 2014 editions, the information is exceedingly one-sided, because only a handful of letters from Behn to Gandhi

¹⁰⁷ Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, 5. What makes Behn stand out from some of these other women was that she was not traveling to India to specifically aid with the problems in India, but rather, to work specifically for Gandhi, the person.

¹⁰⁸ Mira Behn, *Bapu's Letters to Mira*. For this collection, Mira Behn chose 386 out of 650 letters total.

appear, since only his letters to her fully survived.¹⁰⁹ Because Behn's relationship to Gandhi created interest, most sources (including Behn herself) only look at Behn through Gandhi's life, rather than at her life or her own actions that had little or nothing to do with Gandhi. The nature of these sources forces scholars to learn about Behn through Gandhi, which is why Gandhi himself is so prevalent, even in this study.¹¹⁰

There is only one monograph, outside of her autobiography, that solely focuses on Mira Behn herself: the 1992 text by Behn's former assistant, Krishna Murti Gupta, *Mira Behn, Gandhiji's Daughter Disciple: Birth Centenary Volume*. Gupta worked for Behn from 1946 to 1952 and wanted to release letters that Behn wrote him and other luminaries of the independence movement in India as well as texts that Behn had written and published for *Young India* in relation to life in India and the movement.¹¹¹ This 1992 text is one of the most vital texts to this study because Gupta's publications of Behn's words about the movement allow for a perspective that no other scholar utilized for this study seems to provide. Through these sources, I am able to compile a picture of Mira Behn that demonstrates how vital she was to the movement for independence in India rather than a mere background player who simply did Gandhi's chores, or a mesmerized disciple.

According to Kumari Jayawardena, Behn became internationally known for her "daring political stand," and "subversion of gender, class, and racial expectations."¹¹² Secondary scholars

¹⁰⁹ Behn mentions in several sources how she made it a priority to always hide her collection of letters from Gandhi with a "non-suspect" friend if an arrest or any kind of imperial trouble was imminent. Gandhi was less attached to correspondence in general. He would typically reuse correspondence, ripping away clean parts away from used paper, and utilizing the backs of correspondence to write new letters.

¹¹⁰ One of my aims in this study is to demonstrate how Behn thrives and shines in her own light away from her relationship with Gandhi. It is impossible to divorce the two subjects because there would be no study of Behn without Gandhi's existence, but I aim to look at Behn as much as possible through her own actions and reactions rather than through Gandhi's actions and reactions.

¹¹¹ Krishna Murti Gupta, *Mira Behn, Gandhiji's Daughter Disciple: Birth Centenary Volume*, (New Delhi: Himalaya Seva Sangh, 1992), v.

¹¹² Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, 195.

of Behn note her unconventional relationship with Gandhi, as well as devotion to, and some say obsession with, Gandhi.¹¹³ I do not attempt to dispute these claims of Behn's emotional attachment to Gandhi. In fact, I incorporate the attachment within the study to further that point. Her emotional attachment did at some points prevent her from reaching her full potential within the movement for an independent India.¹¹⁴

More recent scholarship has focused on Behn's environmental work and tends to ignore discourse on the importance of her work for the movement for Indian independence. However, some of this literature, such as Bidisha Mallik's unpublished dissertation "The Contribution of Mira Behn and Sarala Behn to Social and Environmental Transformation in the Indian State of Uttarakhand," does contain valuable biographical and contextual information about Behn, even if it does not focus on her work in the movement for independence. Mallik's work notes that Behn "advanced and extended Gandhi's constructive program, his philosophy on alternative readings of modernity, for social change, economic development, and sustainability," and that ultimately Behn was a "visionary thinker and leader."¹¹⁵ I build upon Jayawardena's and Mallik's statements and demonstrate Mira Behn's importance in the movement. I argue that through Behn's open defiance of traditional British gender and social norms, grassroots work and tours

¹¹³ Two scholars that very much allude to the devotion/obsession school of thought are Thomas Weber and Sudhir Kakar. Weber in *Going Native* and his editorial notes in *Beloved Bapu*, uses the terms "obsession" and "devotion" in both texts to note Behn's feelings towards Gandhi and posits Gandhi's agitation towards Behn's feelings. Kakar's, *Mira and the Mahatma* is a novel that relies on primary source information to construct a fictional "what-if" romantic story between Gandhi and Mira Behn (Sudhir Kakar, *Mira and the Mahatma*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2004). Kakar, a psychoanalyst, is not the first to argue that there was a romantic connection between Behn and Gandhi, especially with the focus on Behn's infatuation. However, I posit that the sources speak more to a father/daughter relationship, rather than a romantic one. This becomes especially evident when she shifts the paternal affection she feels towards Romain Rolland to Gandhi (see Chapter Two).

¹¹⁴ Her attachment to Gandhi is very pronounced in the early years, especially after she is separated from Gandhi for the first time. It is, ironically, when she is separated from Gandhi that she does her most influential work for the movement even if she displays such despair during their separations.

¹¹⁵ Mallik, "The Contribution of Mira Behn and Sarala Behn," 4,9.

through India, international travels, and news correspondence, she was vital to the success of the movement for Indian independence.

Chapter Previews

Chapter One chronicles Behn's arrival in India in 1925, her assimilation into the Ashram lifestyle, and her "All-India Tour." As a Western woman, Behn did not automatically thrive in the Ashram lifestyle. She had to prove herself not only to Gandhi but also to the other inmates at Sabarmati Ashram.¹¹⁶ She subsequently accompanied Gandhi on his December 1925 trip to the session of the Indian National Congress. She spent the first years of her time in the movement, however, learning about and acclimatizing to her new surroundings. Through her "All-India Tour," Behn taught self-sufficiency skills across various villages across the Raj. By encouraging Indians to make their own cloth and grow their own food rather than rely on British cloth and goods, Behn challenged the concept of British cultural superiority. Behn also proved through this tour that she was a dedicated member of Gandhi's ashram and could be vital to the success of the Indian independence movement.

Chapter Two examines Behn's role as Gandhi's assistant in the 1931 Second Round Table Conference in London. After the Conference, Behn and Gandhi ventured to Rome and Switzerland where Behn helped to cement European connections and allies for the movement. Gandhi knew that her class status and race might be vital when presenting his arguments both in India and the world. Gandhi understood the social implications of having a white British woman standing behind him at public events, as well as her openly admitting to doing Gandhi's laundry, cooking, and cleaning for him. This was a defiant political statement in the teeth of the establishment. It spat in the face of the British superiority that the empire was promoting. Her

¹¹⁶ Behn never completely fit in with the members of Sabarmati because she felt that many there were not as dedicated as they should be. Her attitudes towards the Ashram and those within it play a role throughout this study.

actions brought about international attention, not least from *The New York Times*. This image of a white woman serving a man of color threatened to shatter the image of British superiority.

Chapter Three discusses the Civil Disobedience Campaign, particularly its high point of the Salt March. While Behn did not participate in the Salt March, her non-involvement can be linked to later decisions made by Gandhi about her overall involvement in the campaign. The Salt March occurs right before Behn's "All-India Tour" (Chapter One) but is the pivotal event for Gandhi's Civil Disobedience Campaign which runs through 1932. The primary analysis of this chapter is focused on Behn's work with Gandhi's press and the creation of her publications between 1929 and 1932. It is her refusal to cease publication of her *Weekly Report* that has her intermittently imprisoned between 1932 and 1934.¹¹⁷

Chapter Four argues that even though she was in jail for almost two years, Mira Behn was able to contribute to the movement from behind prison walls. India's colonial penitentiaries played a dichotomic role as being symbols of imperial power and colonial resistance. Run by the British, the colonial prison demonstrated imperial authority over Indian subjects through its racist and class-based rules and principles. The jail also became a place for protestors to martyr themselves through intentional arrest and incarceration. Female political prisoners were vital to the movement by "gaol-going" and fasting in prison became popular among Gandhi's followers because of their non-violent character. While she could help keep the movement alive incarcerated, Behn ultimately realized her skills could be better utilized.

¹¹⁷ There is some overlap between chapters one, two, and three. I aim to stay as chronologically framed as possible; however, the ways that these themes and events play out lead to some overlap. Civil disobedience officially began in 1930 but carried over through 1932, and in some ways until independence in 1947. Because her press work correlates to her arrest in 1932, it makes sense, to me to put the chapter on the international tours with Gandhi before the chapter on Civil Disobedience movement so that the press chapter can easily flow into the prison chapter.

While Gandhi did not allow Behn, or many women for that matter, to participate in the Salt March of 1930, Behn had more than proven her immense value to the Indian independence movement through her work in India, Europe, the press, and in prison.

Chapter Five demonstrates that Gandhi was ready for Behn to promote the movement by herself globally. She toured Britain giving speeches and speaking with workers and politicians during the summer of 1934. After this, Gandhi allowed Behn to be the face of the movement in the United States in the fall of 1934. This was particularly beneficial for him, for the United States was a nation racially divided at that time, and a white woman publicly speaking for the movement may have had a better chance at reaching more people than a man of color.¹¹⁸ She spent two weeks in America speaking at numerous churches and universities across the Northeast. She spent thirty minutes in the White House meeting with Eleanor Roosevelt, who was fascinated by Behn and her story. Behn was able to use this tour to challenge misinformation about herself, Gandhi, and the movement that the British diffused. After the tour, she returned to India to continue her efforts towards the movement.

Chapter Six explores Behn's post-global tour years before World War Two and includes Behn's time in the Wardha district helping Gandhi to establish an ashram as well as aiding with sanitation problems and cholera outbreaks. This is also a time in Behn's life where she faced serious emotional upheaval and forced herself into a fifteen-month silence.

Chapter Seven explores Behn's role in World War Two, the Quit India Initiative, and Behn's life in India after independence in 1947. During World War Two, the Indians not only met with continued oppression from the British, but also had to face the looming threat of the Japanese coming in and taking over, creating yet another potential barrier to freedom for the

¹¹⁸ Gandhi also believed that he was needed more in India.

Indian independence movement. Behn spent this time working in the villages to promote swaraj and help Indians not succumb to either British or Japanese pressures. In 1946, she opened and ran her own ashram separate from Gandhi. She accepted a position with the government where she focused on raising food quality and quantity in the rural areas of India. She worked in that position for a few years until she ultimately decided in 1959 that her work in India was complete.

This study concludes with an examination of Behn's life in Europe after she leaves India and her legacy after her death in 1982.

The scope of my project is biographical in nature, but with a focus on her work in the independence movement. Most of these chapters focus the 1930s because that is when the movement for independence was at its peak and more fervent and her role at its most pivotal. However, readers will find pertinent information to Behn's pre-India life in the introduction and in independent India and Europe in chapter seven and the epilogue. It should be kept in mind that I am not investigating the overall validity of Gandhi's work and influence in India, but rather the vitality of Mira Behn role within the struggle for Indian independence.

Mira Behn challenged everything that was the norm for an upper-class British woman in the early twentieth century. As a child she never fit in with other girls, preferring solitude to the company of others her age. As she aged, she never found her place in English society. She had little interest in dating, never married, and left England to live in India; there, she spent a substantial portion of her life publicly in a subservient position to a man of color and his movement that defied British superiority and authority. She appears only sparingly in studies of Western women in developing nations and Western women who aligned themselves with Gandhi. Only her former assistant has dedicated an entire monograph to Behn, and it consists mostly of Behn's own work, or documents containing what Behn's contemporaries had to say

about her. This study aims to be the first lengthy treatise of Behn and her involvement in the movement for Indian independence.

CHAPTER ONE: A FOREIGNER IN GANDHI'S ASHRAM: MIRA BEHN GOES TO INDIA, 1925-1930

Introduction

As I entered, I became conscious of a small spare figure rising up from a white *gaddi* and stepping towards me. I knew it was Bapu (Gandhi), but, so completely overcome was I with reverence and joy that I could see and feel nothing but a heavenly light. I fell on my knees at Bapu's feet. He lifted me up and taking me into his arms said, "you shall be my daughter."

-Mira Behn, *Bapu's Letters to Mira* ¹¹⁹

At 7:45 am on November 7, 1925, Slade arrived at Sabarmati Ashram, located in Gujarat, a region along India's western coast. Upon her arrival, Gandhi deemed that she should be called "Mira Behn."¹²⁰

Behn was named after Meerabai, the 16th Century mystic poet and Hindu god Krishna devotee, due to the similarities that Gandhi perceived between the two women. The comparisons between the two can be drawn between their unwavering devotion: Meerabai to Krishna and Behn to Gandhi, having already demonstrated her devotion to the cause with her year spent in Scotland. Behn went on to be devoted to Gandhi and his cause for the rest of her life.¹²¹

When Behn arrived at the ashram she walked into a world for which sleeping on the floor, giving up meat and alcohol, and all the spinning yarn in the world could have never

¹¹⁹ Behn, *Bapu's Letters to Mira, 1924-1948*, , 6-7. "Bapu" is an affectionate term that many who interacted with Gandhi referred to him as; it translated to "father." "Gaddi," is Hindi for padding. Gandhi named her after the sixteenth-century Hindu princess, Mira Bai. There are several variations on the spelling of Mira Behn: Miraben, Mirabehn, Mirabai, Mirabahen, Meerabahen, and even, Miriam. I chose to use Mira Behn because that is the spelling that appears on Behn's autobiography, as well as many times Behn and others would use "Mira" to refer to the name, hinting at a separation between the words. If there is a difference in spelling in rendering direct quotations, I use what the author uses.

¹²⁰ Behn, *Bapu's Letters to Mira*, 2.

¹²¹ Just like Mira Behn, there are several different spelling variations of Meerabai. For more on Mira Behn's comparison to her namesake, Meerabai see, Akshaya Kumar, "Latter-Day Meeras: From Nationalist Icon to Subaltern Subject," *Indian Literature*, 51, no. 2 (238), Sahitya Akademi, 2007, pp. 176-95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23340623>.

prepared her. Sabarmati Ashram contained a motley mix of people who lived there for a variety of purposes, but all were curious as to who this English upper-class woman was who now entered their community. While Slade had prepared vigorously for ashram life, she was not well-versed regarding the complexities of Indian culture. When introduced to Gandhi's wife, Kasturba, affectionately known by those in the Ashram as "Ba," Kasturba could not help but stare at Behn's feet.

Ba was very small and dignified, folded her hands and said sweetly, "How do you do," but she kept looking at my feet. "She is looking at your shoes," Bapu said, "because our custom in India is to take off our shoes before coming into the kitchen." I rushed out to the veranda and took mine off at once. Bapu laughed. Thus my new education began.¹²²

Ba and Behn did not get off to the best start. Indian women were predisposed to being suspicious of English women due to the experiences that many of them had with interactions with Western women since the British occupation of India began. Behn had a lot of work to do to carve out her right place in the ashram. Meanwhile, the India that Behn entered in 1925 was also, itself, changing.

This chapter will focus on Behn's early years in India, from 1925 to 1930. During these years, India went through a metamorphosis in terms of its efforts towards obtaining independence. When Behn joined Gandhi's ashram in 1925, Gandhi placed a lot of self-rule efforts in his khadi program, on which Behn spent a lot of her time working during her first five years in India. Between 1925 and 1930, Behn learned carding, spinning, and weaving skills. She also spent a great amount of time learning Hindi. These skills were utilized by Behn during these years when she went on grassroots effort tours through Indian villages, educating villagers on khadi and Gandhi's ideals. Behn also accompanied Gandhi on his own grassroots tours acting in an "assistant" type role. I argue that immediately within these first few years in India, Mira Behn

¹²² Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 66-67.

challenged gender, class, and cultural norms to the benefit of those both in the ashram and the villages. Typically, women did not occupy places of power, but, as a high-ranking representative of Gandhi's movement, speaking for Gandhi and of his ideals, she educated villagers in a self-sufficing task of making cloth and spoke from a position of being a woman with authority.

Throughout these first few years, she also put herself publicly and consistently in a subservient position to Gandhi by assisting him by sweeping and bringing him his food, etc. I argue that by performing these actions as an upper-class English woman, she made a chink in the British argument of racial and cultural superiority, as well as proving that she was vital to Gandhi and the movement for Indian Independence. To better understand the new world that Behn entered in 1925, one should understand what the Indian National Congress, Khadi, and an ashram meant.

A Brief History of the Indian National Congress and Khadi

Indian National Congress

The Indian National Congress (INC) formed in 1855 as a group of middle-to-upper class politicians. The membership of the INC included people adhering to a variety of different religions and ideologies including communists, socialists, centrists, left-liberals, rightists, Hindus, and Muslims (with the Muslims being in the minority).¹²³ Women were not only allowed to participate as members but also assume leadership positions.¹²⁴ In the beginning, the Congress supported the British Raj; however, by the early twentieth century, Congress' established goals and missions geared towards less direct British rule and ultimately, independence from Britain. This was partially due to the fact that the British used Indian soldiers and supplies throughout

¹²³ Subhir Sinha, "Democratic Trajectories I: Congressism, Anti-Congressism, and Composing the 'People-as-a-Whole,'" in *Indian Democracy: Origins, Trajectories, Contestations*, eds Alf Gunvald Nilsen, Kenneth Bo Nielsen, and Anand Vaidya, (Pluto Press, 2019), 88-101, 88-9.

¹²⁴ Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, (London/New York: Verso, 2016), 93.

World War One in return for the promise of reforms after the end of the war only for the British to deny reforms and pass the Rowlatt Act of February 1919. This decree gave the British even more power in India, particularly allowing for trials without juries and indefinite internment of suspects.¹²⁵ Following the Rowlatt Act, the Amritsar Massacre occurred in April 1919 in which British forces, under the direction of Brigadier-General R.E.H. Dyer, opened fire on a crowd of close to 20,000 people in Amritsar because they had started a *hartal*, a voluntary closing of shops and suspension of work as a form of protest against the Rowlatt Act; Dyer's troops killed over a thousand Indians.¹²⁶ After the British failed to uphold wartime promises made to the native people, post-World War One India was a place ready for new leadership that would uphold promises and not put into place oppressive Acts, but the INC needed something to give itself greater legitimacy, power, and prestige.

The INC suffered from several identity and leadership issues and was considered a “flabby organization” until Gandhi assumed leadership in 1919 and created a new congress constitution that changed “this flabby body into a disciplined organization streamlined for political action.”¹²⁷ Gandhi was able to achieve this through several steps. As a result, he was able to stabilize the INC and turn it into a permanently operating political organization rather than a group of people who met on an annual basis.¹²⁸ He also aligned himself with the Muslims

¹²⁵ Over 1.3 million Indians served in World War One with 47,000 killed and 65,000 wounded. “The Rowlett Act was seen as a poor reward for loyalties displayed and sacrifices made in Britain’s war effort,” (Talat Ahmed, *Mohandas Gandhi: Experiments in Civil Disobedience*, (London: Pluto Press, 2019), Kindle Edition, 75).

¹²⁶ The Amritsar Massacre is also known as the “Jallianwala Bagh Massacre,” (ibid., 107); Sterling P. Olmsted, Mike Heller, and Ruth Olmsted (eds.), *Mohandas K. Gandhi: The Last Eighteen Years: A Nonviolence and Social Change Source Book*, (Wilmington College Peace Resource Center: Wilmington, 2011), 211. For more on Amritsar and its lasting impacts in India see Amandeep Singh Mandra and Parmjit Singh, *Eyewitness At Amritsar: A Visual History of the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh Massacre*, (London: Kashi House CIC, 2019).

¹²⁷ D. Rothermund, “Gandhi as a Politician,” *India Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (1970): 362-67, 364. While the Congress was politically powerful or stable prior to Gandhi, they were particularly progressive and allowed women as members, with even a few assuming the presidency of the Congress.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 365.

in the INC to bring about greater unity within the Congress.¹²⁹ However, his greatest achievement within the INC came from outside of the Congress.

According to Tom Kemp,

Gandhi's ability to lead did not arise from the absence of other capable men, but from the fact that he alone was able to link the movement to the peasant masses of India, and thus provide it with that social basis which made it such a formidable force.¹³⁰

The Congress itself as a middle-class organization did not appeal much to the impoverished masses of India. Gandhi believed that the salvation of India would not come from the British, or even, solely, the Congress itself, but only through the empowerment of the masses in the villages of India.¹³¹ Gandhi was a firm believer in *ahimsa*, meaning “non-violence,” and believed that non-violent, non-cooperative resistance would be the most powerful tool against British oppression. His first attempt at these campaigns after he assumed leadership in the INC was a series of *satyagraha* campaigns between 1919 and 1922.¹³²

¹²⁹ Muslims were a minority in Congress but made up a large enough percentage to matter in terms of voting and deciding on matters. Also, by aligning with the Muslims, Gandhi gained a “foothold” against those who found him too “extreme” of a dissenter, or, on the other end of the political spectrum, those who found his methods not extreme enough against the British (D. Abul Fazal, “The Leadership Crises in Congress: Muslims and the Rise of Gandhi,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 62, 2001, 456-62, 457,460-1). The INC had a secondary semi-alliance with the League of Nations. India was the only non-sovereign or non-self-governing state allowed to join the League. India participated in the 1919 Paris Peace Conference and, from 1929 onward, an Indian (rather than a British-born) person assumed leadership of the three-person India delegation at the League. However, many felt that this only allowed the British more votes within the League and after 1919, the INC no longer tried to bring its demands before the League (Maria Framke, “India’s Freedom and the League of Nations: Public Debates, 1919-1933,” in *Asia After Versailles: Asian Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Interwar Order, 1919-1933*, ed. by Urs Mathias Zachmann, (U. of Edinburgh P.: Edinburgh, 2017)).

¹³⁰ Tom Kemp, “Leaders and Classes in the Indian National Congress, 1918-1939,” *Science and Society* 28, no.1, (Winter 1964): 1-19, 9.

¹³¹ “To many of India’s educated elite, Gandhi seemed to represent a rejection of progress.” (Denis Judd, *The Lion and the Tiger: The Rise and Fall of the British Raj, 1600-1947*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004, 131). Gandhi believed that the salvation of India would come by returning cloth work back to the villages, rather than rely on new machinery. This belief challenged what the elite were raised to believe as “success” and “modern.”

¹³² Satyagraha: A movement of peaceful political resistance, made popular by Gandhi. These types of resistances could be hartals, writings, marches, non-violent law-breaking resulting in arrest. Satyagraha comes from the two Sanskrit words, *satya* meaning truth and *agraha* meaning sticking to or adhering to, hence, the word means fighting untruth or injustice by sticking to truth/justice and is very different from civil disobedience or peaceful protest as we understand in the Western context. Bidisha Mallick aptly explained it to me as Gandhi called it actively resisting injustice (rather than passively or peacefully resisting injustice) through nonviolent means and with acceptance of punishment as a necessary corollary. This is important to understand what aspect of this Gandhian thinking appealed to Mira Behn and why.

In 1919, the Amritsar Massacre, mentioned above, occurred in response to these campaigns. A second set of civil disobedience movements was launched at the June 1920 INC meeting in Allahabad.¹³³ However, the Indian masses were neither ready, nor properly equipped to practice widespread non-violent protests and boycotts against the British authorities. When the British retaliated against these campaigns, violence often broke out. In August 1921, 10,000 peasants in Mapilla rose against British authority in a violent rebellion that took the British over six months to “crush” and resulted in 2,339 Mapillan deaths, 1652 Mapillans wounded, 43 government casualties, and 26 government representatives wounded.¹³⁴ Because of the frequent violent outbursts, Gandhi ended the protests in 1922. Yet, he still needed a way to incorporate the masses into the Congressional ideals of ending British rule. He found this in his promulgation of then creation and diffusion of the homemade-fabric, *khadi*.

Khadi

The spinning-wheel is the external symbol of internal reform, and its universal re-adoption in India ensures her economic salvation and frees millions of Indian peasants from growing pauperism.

- Mahatma Gandhi¹³⁵

Cloth and clothing have a rich history in India. Between the sixteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries in India, clothing was used as a tool of authority; authority was symbolically “transmitted” from one person to another through a set of clothes known as *khilats*.¹³⁶ According to scholar Bernard S. Cohn, the “most powerful khilat” was a robe/garment taken directly off

¹³³ Ahmed, *Mohandas Gandhi*, 85.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 88. Ahmed got their information from Robert L. Hardgrave, “The Mapilla Rebellion, 1921: Peasant Revolt in Malabar,” *Journal of Modern Asian Studies* 11, no. 1, (1977): 57-99, 91.

¹³⁵ Mahatma Gandhi, “India’s Freedom,” *Selected Letters of Mahatma Gandhi*,” edited by Shriman Nayarayan, (Navajivan Publishing House: Ahmedabad, 1969), available at: https://www.mkgandhi.org/selectedletters/13indias_freedom.html, accessed September 29, 2020.

¹³⁶ Bernard S. Cohn, “Cloths, Clothes, and Colonialism: India in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Cloth and the Human Experience*, eds Annetta B. Weiner and Jane Schneider, (Washington DC, and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 304-54, 313, available at: <https://archive.org/details/clothhumanexperi00wein/mode/2up>, accessed August 20, 2020. India is known at this time as Mughal India after the dynasty which ruled most of the subcontinent.

one's body and placing it on a subject as a sign of honor.¹³⁷ Also, "in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an Indian would place his turban at the feet of his conqueror as a sign of complete surrender."¹³⁸

Cloth and clothing were also a huge part of the Indian economy as India was a major exporter of textiles prior to British rule. However, thanks to British industrial domination in the nineteenth century, India went from the "world's greatest exporter of cotton" to a "major importer of cotton yards and piece goods."¹³⁹ The British believed that "traditional" Indian clothing, much like Indian customs and culture, "was something to progress and civilize."¹⁴⁰ This belief led to the destruction of Indian manufacturers and the end of "hand-spinning" of cotton yarns.¹⁴¹ The British also encouraged Western-styled dress and style to imply westernization, modernization, and wealth ("civilization"); therefore, many Indians began wearing British clothes in a Western-style to imply that they too were modern, educated, and, indeed, even civilized. Due to a lack of available and affordable Indian cloth, many poorer Indians were forced to wear British-made cloth as well. This led, in part, to the destruction of Indian cloth production and the ruination of many Indian villagers. Knowing this history, Gandhi sought to recover this ruined part of the Indian economy by returning the cloth industry back to the masses of India in what was known as the Swadeshi movement.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Ibid., 313-314.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 314.

¹³⁹ Susan S. Bean, "Gandhi and Khadi, the Fabric of Indian Independence," in *Cloth and the Human Experience*, eds Annetta B. Weiner and Schneider, (Washington DC, and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 355-376, 361, available at: <https://archive.org/details/clothhumanexperi00wein/mode/2up>, accessed August 20, 2020. For more on India's economy and the cloth trade, see my "Introduction" as well as *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850*, eds Giorgio Riello and Roy (Tirthankar, Leiden: Brill, 2009).

¹⁴⁰ Lisa N. Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana UP, 2007), xix.

¹⁴¹ Bean, "Gandhi and Khadi, the Fabric of Indian Independence," 361.

¹⁴² Swadeshi means made in India, by Indian people, for use by Indians. The Swadeshi Movement promulgated the idea of restoring India's economy and obtaining self-rule by no longer being dependent on imported British goods.

According to Lisa Trivedi, Gandhi began “linking India’s economic dependency on foreign cloth to her political subjugation,” in the early 1920s.¹⁴³ He began working with the INC to establish programs so that the general population in the villages could once again start making their own cloth at home again. This cloth became known as *khadi* or *khaddar*. Gandhi and the INC founded the All-India Khaddar Board in 1921, and in 1923 and 1924 the board was able to raise close to 3,000,000 rupees in funding.¹⁴⁴ The purpose of the Khaddar Board was to train khadi workers from all over India so that they could return to their villages, or even travel to new ones, and teach the general populaces spinning and carding skills. Khadi became such a large project for Gandhi and the INC that in 1924 Gandhi founded the All-India Spinner’s Association “to assume responsibility for the production and sale of khadi.”¹⁴⁵ Yet, it was not enough for Congress to support the creation and production of khadi, they had to promote its use as well.

Gandhi was not ignorant of the cultural and status implication of the clothing worn by Indians. Khadi was to be the great unifier in this land of different castes, classes, and religions.¹⁴⁶ Membership in the INC consisted of primarily middle-class people and Hindus of the higher castes. Each congress member had to spin a certain amount of yarn every day in order to participate and vote in Congress. Congress members had to wear khadi for any congress function. By adorning khadi, they could help forge a bond between themselves and the lower

¹⁴³ Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi’s Nation*, xx.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 13; 3,000,000 Rupees in 1923 is equivalent to \$ 936013.13 US in 1923 or in modern-day money, \$22,488,013.29 US in 2015 Historical Currency Converter (test version 1.0), available at: <https://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html>, accessed September 30, 2020.

¹⁴⁵ Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi’s Nation*, 12.

¹⁴⁶ Class and caste are not interchangeable terms, whereas Muslims did not fall into the Hindu caste system. Although there are more nuanced and intricate differences, Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi simply and succinctly describe the difference as “‘Caste’ is defined primarily by social honour... ‘Class’ is defined primarily by the ownership of property,” (Joanna Liddle and Rama Joshi, *Daughters of Independence: Gender, Caste, and Class in India*, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1986). According to Nicholas B. Dirks, “for many Nationalists, caste had to either be discarded all together or acknowledged as a cultural inheritance that could be seen as another glorious, if frequently degraded aspect of Indian civilization that had to be returned to its original religious and cultural form,” (Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001), 279, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400840946>, accessed April 27, 2021).

classes in India. Trivedi words Gandhi's ideas perfectly by stating "Khadi clothing transformed a colonized body into an Indian body."¹⁴⁷ By making and wearing khadi the Indian people could be united in a task against the rule of the British while supplementing their incomes.

Gandhi used his weekly published periodical, *Young India*, to educate and inspire the general populace about the importance of khadi:

I am more than ever convinced that without the spinning wheel the problem of India's poverty cannot be solved. Millions of India's peasants starve for want of supplementary occupation. If they have spinning to add to their slender resources, they can fight successfully against pauperism and famine.¹⁴⁸

He used *Young India* to reach not only the male workers of India but to bring women into khadi work as well:

And not only is the use of khadi necessary for the success of the swadeshi programme, but it is imperative for every one of you to spin during your leisure hours. I have suggested to boys and men also that they should spin. Thousands of them, I know, are spinning daily. But the main burden of spinning must, as of old, fall on your shoulders. Two hundred years ago, the women of India spun not only for home demand but also for foreign lands. They spun not merely coarse counts but the finest that the world has ever spun. No machine has yet reached the fine-ness of the yarn spun by our ancestors.¹⁴⁹

He published *Young India* in a variety of languages, so it had the potential to reach a high amount of the general populace. He knew that there was a severe unemployment issue in India and khadi could help alleviate it. Khadi, as something that could be created from home, allowed for women and children to participate in the production, and thus, created more income opportunities. Indian women were constricted to the private sphere; i.e. they typically did not

¹⁴⁷Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation*, 68. Many INC members and those of the general populace understood the symbolic importance of wearing khadi, however, there were also a large number who did not always follow protocol. Differences in the quality of thread count could easily distinguish someone as a member of a higher or lower class/caste. Ibid., 100; Another example is when the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru was married, she adorned a sari made of khadi, but it was not pure white coarse khadi, it was dyed the traditional Kashmiri pink. Bean, "Gandhi and Khadi, the Fabric of Indian Independence," 372-373.

¹⁴⁸ Mahatma Gandhi, "The Wheel of Fortune," *Young India*, April 6, 1921, in *Wheel of Fortune*, (USA: Gonaval Press, 2007) (originally published 1922), 73.

¹⁴⁹ Gandhi, "To the Women of India," *Young India*, August 11, 1921, *CWMG*, vol. 24, 78.

work outside the home, could not publicly interact with men outside of the husband or relatives, and primarily focused on raising the children. Prior to the British take-over, women manufactured home-spun cloths, and Gandhi promoted this historic knowledge when promoting khadi.

As time went, the INC moved their focus from khadi creation to other means of political detachment from the British. The center of khadi production moved away from the attentions of the INC to Gandhi's ashram.

The Ashram

The Ashram set out to remedy what it thought were defects in our national life from the religious, economic, and political standpoints.

- Mahatma Gandhi¹⁵⁰

Gandhi claimed that his ashrams were "his finest achievements and that the successes and failures of those communities were merely reflections of his own strengths and weaknesses," but, while ashrams are often usually associated with South-Asian gurus and became known as a sort of hippie-style or Walden-style communes in the 1960s, Gandhi's ashrams were much more strict in terms of rules and procedures than anything one might see at a hippy commune.¹⁵¹

Gandhi's ashrams were self-contained communities of people who lived and worked together in an environment that did not distinguish between class, religion, caste, or gender. According to

Karine McLaine,

In classical Hinduism, an ashram was a forest hermitage, a place on the outskirts of civilization to which a renouncer could retreat. There, having abandoned society and attachments to household life, renouncers could practice physical and mental discipline to

¹⁵⁰ Mahatma Gandhi, *Ashram Observances in Action*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 2011), 6 [originally published around 1955 with the introduction being written in 1932], available at: <https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/ashramobservance.pdf>, accessed October 1, 2020.

¹⁵¹ Mark Thomson, *Gandhi and his Ashrams*, (Mumbai: Popolar Prakashan Pvt. Ltd, 1993), 4, available at: https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/Gandhi_and_his_Ashrams.pdf, accessed August 18, 2020.

pursue an experimental knowledge of ultimate reality that would lead to freedom from the bondage of transmigration.¹⁵²

Gandhi based his own ashrams on the classical Hindu ashram model in the sense that these ashrams were places of experimentation. However, they differed in the sense that the Hindu model was a privatized sphere, secluded from society and maintained strict caste rules and guru-disciple relations. (Gandhi did not see himself as a guru).

In his communities, he had “ashramites,” as they were called, practice small-scale experiments in terms of diets, living conditions, and taught them about civil disobedience, so that he could see what could be successful for India on a larger scale. His first ashram experiment in India was the Sabarmati Ashram.¹⁵³

Sabarmati Ashram was founded on May 25, 1915, in the Gujarati capital Ahmedabad because Gandhi felt he could best help people from his native province and language; furthermore, the city was a “major growth center of mill-made cloth.”¹⁵⁴ Gandhi could feel at home here, where many already knew him, and propagate khadi to attack the reliance on mill-made cloth. He opened the ashram with twenty members, but, in a few months, the population rose to sixty men, women, and children.¹⁵⁵

Aside from living quarters, Sabarmati Ashram consisted of “a school building, a dining hall and kitchen, a library, and the Vanatshala, in which handlooms were installed,” all made of mud brick; Gandhi also insisted on having “good latrines and urinals and a quick drainage

¹⁵² Karine McLaine, “Gandhi’s Ashrams: Residential Experiments for Universal Well-Being in South Africa and India,” *Utopian Studies*, 3, (2019), 462-485, 473, available at: <http://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/744695>, accessed September 4, 2020.

¹⁵³ Also known in its earlier days as the Satyagraha Ashram.

¹⁵⁴ Thomson, *Gandhi and his Ashrams*, 105. Sabarmati was his third major international community. His first two were in South Africa where he spent some of his younger years as a lawyer, (McLaine, “Gandhi’s Ashrams,” 473).

¹⁵⁵ Gandhi, *Ashram Observances in Action*, 7.

sewage system.”¹⁵⁶ The ashram’s only mode of transport was the “Ox-ford”: “an old Ford that had to have a team of oxen hitched to it before it would go anywhere.”¹⁵⁷ According to Mark Thomson, ashramites were required to adhere to nine vows: Truth-telling, *ahimsa* (non-violence), *brahmacharya* (celibacy), *swadeshi* (refusal to use foreign-made cloth), fearlessness, control of the palate, non-stealing, non-possession, and acceptance of untouchables.¹⁵⁸

Membership in the ashram was not automatic, in fact, Gandhi urged many to think long and hard about committing to the vows of permanent residence in the ashram. Mira Behn had to wait a year, and Gandhi made an exception for her to join for he wanted primarily Indian-born ashramites.¹⁵⁹ Some women and children lived in the ashram simply because their husbands wanted to take part in Gandhi’s experiments. There were many who were in the ashram because of their love or idolization of Gandhi, not necessarily because of their fervent belief in his ideals. The religious worship of living holy men (and women) was a long-standing Indian tradition, and Gandhi seemed to fit into this model, at least for some of his followers. This led to a few conflicts in Sabarmati.

Brahmacharya was required of all ashramites, married or unmarried, young and old. Gandhi observed very early on that “few will observe it for life,” meaning some left the ashram after getting married, with the implication being that they would not be a married couple that observed celibacy.¹⁶⁰ Ahimsa did not just mean non-violence in protests against the British, it

¹⁵⁶ Thomson, *Gandhi and his Ashrams*, 117. Gandhi of course did not pay for all of this himself. By the end of 1925, “merchant and industrialist friends of Gandhi had donated approximately 200,000 Rupees to the Ashram for the land and buildings alone and were paying not less than 18,000 a year for upkeep,” (ibid., 106). In fact, Sarojini Naidu, a female Indian leader in the INC once noted that “It costs a great deal of money to keep Gandhiji living in poverty,” (Ved Mehta, *Gandhi and His Apostles*, (New Haven, CT/London: Yale UP, 1976), 56).

¹⁵⁷ Mehta, *Gandhi and His Apostles*, 20.

¹⁵⁸ Gandhi, *Ashram Observances in Action*, 7; Thomson, *Gandhi and his Ashrams*, 107.

¹⁵⁹ According to Thomson, Gandhi “typically discouraged” foreign and overseas applicants. These included literary and philosophical scholars and people trying to send their delinquent children, (Thomson, *Gandhi and his Ashrams*, 129-130).

¹⁶⁰ Gandhi, *Ashram Observances in Action*, 31.

meant non-violence against all creatures, including poisonous snakes, pests, rodents, and even tigers. Specifically, ahimsa means “not to hurt any living creature by thought, word, or deed, even for the supposed benefit of that creature.”¹⁶¹ This vow of ahimsa meant that removal of ants and other pests from one’s living spaces could prove tricky. Yet, the hardest vow for many ashramites was the vow not to recognize untouchability.

“Untouchables,” nowadays referred to as *Dalits*, were Hindus (and others) who were considered so “low” in Indian society that they were not even part of the caste system, literally outcasts.¹⁶² Untouchables were required to work the worst jobs and could not gather water from the same wells as other members in Indian society. For caste Hindus, it was considered a sin to interact with them. A few months after the founding of Sabarmati, Gandhi admitted an untouchable family. At first, many of the ashramites avoided the family. Even Gandhi’s wife, Kasturba, almost left because of the untouchables.

Things came to such a pass that Kasturba should either observe Ashram rules or else leave the Ashram. But the argument that a woman in following her husband’s footsteps incurs no sin appealed to her and she quieted down. I do hold that a wife is bound to follow her husband in what she considers sinful. But I welcomed my wife’s attitude in the present case because I looked upon the removal of untouchability as a meritorious thing.¹⁶³

Eventually, the ashramites gave-in to Gandhi’s way of thought and accepted the untouchables; yet the above quotation demonstrates that not only was Gandhi serious about the removal of untouchability, but also about blurring the rigidity of women’s constraints in Indian society. When founding Sabarmati, “emancipation of women from some customary bonds was

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 23. Gandhi struggled with this one himself, stating in the text that “in my heart I do not harbor the necessary love, fearlessness, and readiness to die from a snakebite,” (ibid., 24).

¹⁶² The caste system is a long-practiced custom by Hindus that people are assigned their social grouping into one of four groups by “birth” rather than skills or knowledge. For more on the caste system see “Hinduism: The Caste System and Reincarnation,” available at: <https://philosophy.lander.edu/oriental/caste.html>, accessed March 2, 2022.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 44.

insisted upon... therefore, women in the Ashram enjoy full freedom.”¹⁶⁴ Gandhi believed that women should have the same access to facilities as men in terms of education and set up learning spaces in the ashram for anyone who was illiterate to learn how to read and write.¹⁶⁵ He also wholeheartedly disagreed with child marriage:

Women cannot make any progress so long as there are child marriages. All girls are supposed to be duty bound to marry and that too before menstruation commences, and widow remarriage is not permitted. Women, therefore, when they join the Ashram, are told that these social customs are wrong and irreligious. But they are not shocked as they find the Ashram practicing what it preaches.¹⁶⁶

Gandhi wanted to break all caste and class barriers within his ashram with the goal of spreading these ideas to the whole of India. Regardless of age, gender, religion, or caste, all ashramites practiced prayer, rising early, and khadi. Khadi was integral to life at the ashram. At Sabarmati, and other ashrams that were founded inspired by Gandhi, khadi technical schools were built where people were trained not only how to create khadi, but also, how to teach others how to create khadi. An article appeared in an issue of *Young India* promoting the profit-potential of khadi: “After a month’s training, a friend worked twelve to fourteen hours daily for a number of days and thus proved the possibility of earning three annas a day.”¹⁶⁷

A typical day in the Sabarmati Ashram began at 4:00am, and ashramites spent the day in prayer, communal eating, labor, classes, education, and the “retiring bell” rang at 9pm every day.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 58.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 59.

¹⁶⁷ Maganlal K. Gandhi, “Model Weaving School,” *Young India* July 21, 1921, in Mahatma Gandhi, *Wheel of Fortune*, (Gonoval Press, 2015), 81. Maganlal was Gandhi’s cousin, who was one of the people who Gandhi charged to lead Sabarmati when he was away.

¹⁶⁸ Gandhi, *Ashram Observances in Action*, 71.

Gandhi made everyone rise so early because he believed that “if peasants don’t rise early, crops will die- why should ashramites be any different?”¹⁶⁹ Life at the ashram was not as picture-perfect as Gandhi hoped. “To err is to be human,” he understood, and he had to deal with the occasional break of Brahmacharya, lying, or stealing; but Gandhi was prepared for this and dealt with each situation gracefully as it came (usually by fasting himself, very rarely was someone dismissed from the ashram). And one British woman was very devoted to the vows of the ashram and Gandhi’s ideas, working very hard to prove it. This woman was Mira Behn.

Mira Behn in the Sabarmati Ashram

Though Bapu himself was all and more than I had pictured, the Ashram proved a different matter and I had to make a big effort to readjust my expectations. I had imagined to myself that the ashramites would be a compact group, whole heartedly of one mind about Bapu’s ideals. Instead I found a heterogeneous collection of one or two hundred people, men, women, and children of all ages and all degrees of faith, from fanatical ascetics to skeptical family members.

– Mira Behn, *The Spirit’s Pilgrimage*¹⁷⁰

A tiny blurb appeared on page 16 of the October 29, 1925 issues of the *West Sussex Gazette* simply stating, “Miss Madeleine Slade: Daughter of Admiral Sir Edmond John Warre Slade, has gone to India to help Gandhi.”¹⁷¹ This tiny blurb in the back pages of a newspaper speaks volumes about the total impact that Mira Behn had on the entire movement. When she first went to India, she was merely a figure of curiosity, but then she proceeded to bloom into a figure of significance in the Indian independence movement. Behn went on to edit papers and books for Gandhi, assist him at the Round Table Conference, undertake her own grassroots tours across India and the world, as well as found several publications dedicated to India’s independence movement and self-government. However, she began her journey into the movement by humbly staying, working, and learning in Sabarmati Ashram.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷⁰ Behn, *The Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 60

¹⁷¹ “Miss Madeline Slade,” *Western Sussex Gazette*, Thursday, October 29, 1925, 16, *British Newspaper Archive*.

When Behn initially arrived in India she was questioned by a *Bombay Chronicle* reporter who described her as “the young English lady who has recently become a convert to Gandhi’s cult.”¹⁷² Behn “hesitantly” posed for a picture but would only state,

I am glad to see you, but I have nothing to give to the press. I am going straight to see my Master at Ahmedabad and then decide on my future plans.¹⁷³

With this statement, even before reaching Sabarmati and Gandhi, Behn challenged traditional British race and gender norms by referring to Gandhi as her “Master.” As previously discussed in the Introduction chapter, Indian men were not permitted to publicly associate with British women on pain of severe punishment, up to and including the death penalty for certain interactions. Not only was Behn associating herself with an Indian man, but she was also associating herself with the man attempting to gain Indian independence from Britain, and referred to herself in a subservient position to him. This left many in the media to conclude Behn’s departure from Britain to mean her complete renunciation of a Christian religion. Several British newspapers describe her as a “convert,” and having a “new faith,” with that faith being Hinduism or “Gandhism.”¹⁷⁴ Her newfound “faith” later puzzled the American media as well. Arthur Brisbane (1864-1936)’s syndicated column, as rendered in the *Fort Myers Press* in 1930, questioned, “How will Madeleine Slade be received when she appears for Judgement? To what heaven, Hindu or Christian, will she be assigned?”¹⁷⁵ The focus on her supposed defection from

¹⁷² “For Her Master: Miss Slade Arrives in India,” *The Bombay Chronicle*, November 7, 1925, 7, *Granth Sanjeevani*, available at: <https://granthsanjeevani.com/jspui/>, accessed August 7, 2021.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ “Admiral’s Daughter Renunciation,” *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, Saturday, January 16, 1926, 4, *British Newspaper Archive*; “Gandhi’s Woman Convert,” *Belfast Telegram*, Saturday, January 16, 1926, 10, *British Newspaper Archive*.

¹⁷⁵ Arthur Brisbane, “Brisbane Column,” *The Fort Myers Press*, Tuesday Afternoon, March 25, 1930, 12. This was a syndicated column with the following statement preceding the actual column, “The Press does not necessarily agree with the views of Mr. Brisbane but reproduces them as from the highest paid editorial writer in the world.”

the Christian God garnered so much attention that Gandhi and Behn eventually felt that she needed to make a statement to the press:

I have not thrown Christianity overboard, in embracing Hinduism. Baptized and confirmed a Christian, I never was an orthodox Christian in my heart. Neither am I now a Hindu. I first came to understand the teachings of Jesus through Mahatma Gandhi and the Hindu scriptures.¹⁷⁶

The small blurb from October 29, 1925, was only the beginning of how newspapers would question and portray Behn in terms of who she was and how she was involved with Gandhi and the movement.

As we saw, Behn arrived at Sabarmati Ashram on November 7, 1925. In her autobiography, Behn describes how she took care of various jobs to which she was assigned at the ashram with a sense of candor and pride. There is no tone of resentment in her statements. She joined the Chinese student, Shanti, in latrine duties and took up the study of carding, spinning, and Hindi, attending to a “chronic invalid who needed about one hour’s treatment daily,” as well as the task of teaching Shanti English.¹⁷⁷ She goes on to describe handling one’s needs on top of one’s ashram tasks: “Then, there was my own cooking, cleaning bathing, and clothes-washing to be done, not to mention time for eating what one had cooked.”¹⁷⁸ She additionally states that “I remember that my daily routine was so tightly packed that even minutes taken in going from one part of the Ashram to another were written down.”¹⁷⁹ While she took on these traditional ashram roles, Gandhi had other plans for her as well.

Within a month of her arrival, she began editing the English version of Gandhi’s publication, *Young India*.¹⁸⁰ She also traveled with him to Wardha for the December 1925 INC

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. Brisbane quotes Behn in this article.

¹⁷⁷ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 67.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Gandhi, *CWVG*, vol. 33, 247.

opening session. Gandhi spent close to a year of rest in 1926 at the Ashram, which allowed Behn an unprecedented amount of access to him. By the middle of 1928, Gandhi had grown to trust her enough to proofread his autobiography, and with Gandhi's trust came the trust of Gandhi's secretarial staff, especially his primary secretary, Mahadev Desai.¹⁸¹ Yet, this kind of attention from Gandhi was a double-edge sword to Behn in multiple ways.

From her earliest days in the ashram Behn believed that

from early morning to the last thing at night, I lived for the moments when I could set eyes on Bapu. To be in his presence was to be lifted out of oneself.¹⁸²

Like many others at the Sabarmati Ashram, she was enthralled by Gandhi the man. She noted as early as May 1926 that "Every time I was separated from Bapu, I used to suffer excruciatingly, and if the separation was too long, my health used to break down."¹⁸³ Behn is not exaggerating with this statement. Over the course of her time in India, Behn proved that she could be independent of Gandhi and accomplish a lot away from his physical presence, yet she always returned to him whenever given the opportunity. This led to a back-and-forth relationship between Behn and Gandhi, where he constantly derided her for having such an attachment to him, rather than his ideals, yet he welcomed her into his inner-most circle and encouraged her behavior, with neither Behn nor Gandhi ever seemingly finding that "correct" balance of how much interaction the two should have.

In an April 1927 letter to Behn, Gandhi wrote, "You must forget me in the body [... y]ou can't have it forever [... y]ou must do the work in front of you," but three days later sent a note stating, "Though you absolve me from having to write you I cannot deny myself the joy of

¹⁸¹ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 62, 73.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁸³ Behn, *Bapu's Letters to Mira*, 12; She did not see Gandhi as a "guru" or "god-like" as others did, but as a father-figure.

writing to you every Monday.”¹⁸⁴ In fact, his letters to Mira Behn were longer than the ones he sent to other people in the ashram, which led to some envy. In a letter to an ashramite named Prabhavati, for example, Gandhi scolds Prabhavati for being

too greedy. However long my letter you will find it too short... The letter meant for the whole Ashram is always long. Since Mirabehn cannot read Gujarati, I write a long letter to her. All other letters are short and to the point.¹⁸⁵

Prabhavati was not the only ashramite to have some discord with Mira Behn.

Behn’s autobiography and interviews paint a picture of mostly bliss and contentment at Sabarmati. In 1926, the *Bombay Chronicle* printed a “faithful reproduction” of a conversation between an Indian man, Acharya Kripalani and Mira Behn during which she responded to his question of, “How do you like your life at the Ashram,” with, “That is hardly to be asked [, for e]very day is a day of joy and peace.”¹⁸⁶ Yet, while Mira Behn espoused constant contentment, other sources imply that things did not go off to the best start for Mira Behn upon her arrival to the ashram. Mira Behn was committed to the ashram lifestyle from day one. She partook in all of the dieting experiments, some of which caused her long bouts of constipation. She also went through a self-imposed seven-day fast as a “spiritual journey” which caused her to lose ten pounds.¹⁸⁷ She observed all of the vows and noted how Gandhi believed that Behn was acting too “hasty” in terms of adorning Indian clothing and the cutting off all of her hair.¹⁸⁸ As noted in the Introduction, Indian women were hesitant in terms of believing the motives and actions of European women. When Behn cut off all her hair, she noticed that “they (the women of the ashram) were practically all against the cutting of the hair... that with a closely cropped head, I

¹⁸⁴ Mahatma Gandhi, *CWMG*, vol. 38, 253, 257.

¹⁸⁵ Gandhi, *CWMG*, vol. 50, 17.

¹⁸⁶ “The Call of Sabarmati,” *The Bombay Chronicle*, Friday, August 20, 1926, 9, *Granth Sanjeevani*.

¹⁸⁷ Gandhi, *CWMG*, vol. 36, 182.

¹⁸⁸ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 67.

should become conspicuously different from other women, and find it a bar to natural association.”¹⁸⁹ In her autobiography, she mentions that she tended to cook alone and wondered “where was I to fit in,” yet she was very vague in terms of what this meant. However, there is a discussion with Romaine Rolland noted in his diary about how others felt antipathy towards Behn, and how hard life was for Behn when she first arrived at the ashram.

She (Kasturba) looks askance on outsiders, and Mira had a hard time at the beginning with her. When Mira went into the kitchen to prepare her meals, she would arrange for there to be nothing left but things most likely to revolt her, so as to make her leave the Ashram. Gandhi had to intervene, he ended up saying to Mira, “This is intolerable. Do your cooking separately in your room.”¹⁹⁰

Not only was Behn shunned by Kasturba Gandhi and other ashram women, but her lodgings were also worse than she let on in her autobiography. In the same diary entry, Rolland continued describing Behn’s situation:

Mira’s room is constantly being crossed by columns of ants of all sizes who share her food with her; lizards and huge spiders run across her walls and snakes come and go all the time, most of them venomous.¹⁹¹

Rolland’s diary is not the only place that seems to challenge the sense of comradeship and instantaneous contentment that Behn displays in her own letters and autobiography. In 1976, the Indian novelist Ved Mehta published his text *Mahatma Gandhi and his Apostles*, in which he writes about the interviews he conducted with several of Gandhi’s former ashramites and associates, including an interview with Mira Behn. One female ashramite stated about Mira Behn that “she was the daughter of an English admiral and liked to lord it over everyone,” where another female ashramite noted Behn’s overzealousness with “Sister Mira was best at editing

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 69.

¹⁹⁰ Rolland, *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence*, 200.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 201. Behn had to follow the non-violence vow, so these animals had to be dealt with in a manner that did not harm them, making it much harder; Note that these creatures did not just solely wander into Behn’s room, but this was an issue across the ashram.

Bapu's English and at treating cuts, sores, and fevers, but she aspired to do everything."¹⁹² While Behn herself demonstrated her willingness to do everything and anything for Gandhi, this may have come off as arrogance or haughtiness to other ashramites. It did not help that Behn's father did send 50 British pounds a month during the early years of her stay at Sabarmati, which would be a significant amount of money coming into Sabarmati from one individual, a constant reminder of the wealth and privilege Behn came from.¹⁹³

Behn is more forthcoming in her autobiography about her fervent belief that many of the women at Sabarmati were not there from their own volition but rather because "their husbands or relatives had thrown in their lot with Gandhi."¹⁹⁴ This weighed on Behn and left her "unimpressed" with many at Sabarmati because they appeared not as committed to Sabarmati vows and procedures as she was.¹⁹⁵ Some may not have appreciated her judgmental attitude in this regard, if she indeed showed her disapproval about this. It also may not have helped Behn's reception when Gandhi constantly chided the other ashram women about not comparing to Mira Behn. In one December 1926 letter to the ashram women Gandhi states how

Mirabehn's life should set you all thinking... She does not waste a single moment. I expect such devotion, sacrifice, and purity from you.¹⁹⁶

And just one week later he again sang her praises and encouraged the ashram women to follow her lead:

I want you all sisters to listen to them (Behn and Chi Maganlal) very carefully, try to understand them and reflect over them. In my view, she (Behn) is at present the ideal woman worker among us.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² Ved Mehta, *Gandhi and His Apostles*, 12,18.

¹⁹³ Mahatma Gandhi, *CWMG*, vol. 43, 411.

¹⁹⁴ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 60.

¹⁹⁵ Thomson, *Gandhi and his Ashrams*, 129.

¹⁹⁶ Gandhi, *CWMG*, vol 37, 407. In *CWMG*, Mira Behn is spelled as one word.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 420.

In another letter, Gandhi even stated how the women's behavior would be close to intolerable to Behn: "If Mirabehn were there, she would find it difficult to work with so much noise..."¹⁹⁸

So much praise, especially of an outside European woman, may have caused resentment amongst the Indian women of Sabarmati. Be that as it may, Behn was eventually accepted amongst the ashramites, much like the untouchable family was. There is one incident that may have helped Mira Behn be more accepted by the ashramites, particularly the women.

One reason that Mira Behn was initially ostracized was her refusal to go into seclusion during her monthly periods. When menstruating, she was considered similar to an untouchable because women were expected to stay away from the general public during their menses as they were considered unclean.¹⁹⁹ She and Gandhi corresponded about this and Gandhi guided her to follow her heart. She continued to refuse to go into seclusion when she had her period. In a letter to Kishorelal Mashruwala Gandhi notes the impact that Behn's refusal had on the ashram.

A couple of women who had not during their periods joined others for meals for fear of criticism followed Mirabehn's example and joined. That gave rise to some discussion... It had been agreed that any woman, who, like Mirabehn, wished to join others for meals during her periods could do so. She must observe three rules: she should not enter the kitchen for the four days of menses; even from the outside the kitchen she should not look at the food being cooked or at the water used for cooking; she should not touch the cooked food.²⁰⁰

While restrictions continued to be placed on women, and some women still had concerns, Mira Behn helped to change the overall attitudes towards menstruating women and allowed them to show themselves in public, (even if this meant just the small audience of the ashram society), where they were not previously permitted to be. It was not just in Sabarmati where Behn worked

¹⁹⁸ Gandhi, *CWMG*, vol. 42, 334.

¹⁹⁹ Gandhi, Suhrud, and Weber, "Introduction," in *Beloved Bapu*, 3.

²⁰⁰ Mahatma Gandhi, *CWMG*, vol. 48, 339.

to improve women's lot, however, Gandhi saw early on that Behn could be a powerful tool outside of the ashram as well.

Mira Behn out of the Ashram

Gandhi believed in Behn's potential so much that he sent her out of Sabarmati Ashram on numerous occasions to perform a variety of tasks. The tasks can be broken down into three categories, with each category having a different meaning and outcome: The times she left the ashram with Gandhi; when she left the ashram for her own learning purposes; and when she left the ashram to go all over India utilizing grassroots efforts to promote khadi and Indian independence.

Working with Gandhi

Just over a month after arriving at Sabarmati Ashram Gandhi choose to have Mira Behn accompany him to Wardha for the 1925 opening session of the Indian National Congress. She subsequently accompanied him to the 1929 INC meeting as well. She had several roles as his attendant at the congressional meetings. She served Gandhi his tea and stood guard at the door when the meetings were in progress to keep people from interrupting.²⁰¹ At the 1925 session, she took on the job of helping Gandhi with the latrine inspection. She had to do the "smelling part" of the inspection because Gandhi claimed he had "no sense of smell whatsoever."²⁰² By doing these jobs, Behn continued to demonstrate her earnest desire to do whatever Gandhi wanted her to do. It was very unbecoming for an upper-class British woman to serve an Indian man, let alone take-on dirty latrine duties, and now she was doing it outside the general privacy of Sabarmati Ashram for even more people to witness. Nonetheless, with Gandhi continuing to

²⁰¹ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 91.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 65. Infectious intestinal diseases such as cholera or dysentery were widespread in India; therefore, these duties had serious significance.

choose to bring Behn with him to INC sessions, she got to cultivate relationships and friendships with members of INC and further ingrain herself into Gandhi's inner circle. He also brought her with him to many public meetings between 1926 and 1930 and on his khadi tour in 1929.

During these events, she took on a similar assistant-type role as she did at the Congress sessions. She describes a typical day on the khadi tour in her autobiography:

The general instructions sent around were for a room for Bapu (affectionate name given to Gandhi, meaning father) to be cleared of all furniture, where a gaddi should be placed on the floor and covered with khadi, a bathroom nearby with clean appointments and fresh raw vegetables, fruits, and goat's milk.²⁰³

After insuring that Gandhi had everything he needed for his stay, Behn joined up with Gandhi and other volunteers at the end of whichever khadi presentation Gandhi was doing that day to help collect money from the crowds for the cause stating that "Rich and poor, young and old vied with one another to shower their jewelry into our bags."²⁰⁴

These public meetings also put her in the eye of the public. Much of the general Indian populace responded well to Behn, but she also caught the attention of British colonial reporters. Many of the British and Indian newspapers sympathetic to the British used vocabulary about Behn like those demonstrated earlier in this chapter. They called her a convert, but also chose to highlight her upper-class British origins, albeit never in a too overtly mean or demeaning way. However, there were some British periodicals, such as *The Sphere*, that reflected their disapproval of Behn and her choices:

The really pathetic figure was that of the English woman, Miss Slade, daughter of Admiral Sir Edmund Slade. Originally a handsome woman, she was now burned black by the sun in which she went about with her head shaved, wearing only a sort-of scanty bust-bodice and a sari! A very large part of her was naked, a fact which shocked the Indians beyond measure, only the poorest of Indian peasant woman wears her clothes in that

²⁰³ Ibid., 86.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 88.

fashion... Here was a scion of a ruling race, a woman of family, acting as sweeper, the lowest of all occupations for Gandhi.²⁰⁵

The reporter of this scandal, Michael Pym, demonstrates not only the racism typical of so many of her compatriots but also the class issues between the British upper class and Indian outcast. She implies with her statement that it would have been (even if just marginally) better for Behn to adorn the clothes of a wealthy Indian woman rather than the fashion of the poorest of the Indian populace. Her description of Mira Behn's skin as "burned black" perpetuates the British ideals of white-skinned supremacy: a "lighter" skin color made a woman more beautiful. With just her looks alone, she challenged British superiority. She further amplified this challenge, even if it was unconscious on her part, by publicly acting in a subservient manner towards Gandhi and performing the "lowest" of acts by sweeping. As if this were not enough, she did more than just challenge the British narrative by playing the role of a humble assistant to the Indian leader in attending these public meetings.

She also performed carding and weaving demonstrations. Again, her presence in itself allowed for some traditional gender and social barriers to be broken. Indian women mainly remained secluded in their homes and were constrained in their movements to the private sphere. On top of traditional barriers, local police also put out advance warnings to the public anytime that Gandhi came to a village, out of fear that his visit might incite rebellion. Gandhi wrote to the Ashram Women of one experience in 1927, where Behn had been able to reach close to 50 village women who had been denied access to Gandhi:

They are terror stricken. Because of some policemen's threat, they do not even come anywhere near me. I left Mira Behn in a house and went; immediately after fifty women surrounded her and began to ask her questions.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ "Gandhi India's Firebrand:... Foreign Journalist's Gross Vilification," as appeared in *The Bombay Chronicle*, October 23, 1929, 7, *Granth Sanjeevani*. This article originally appeared in *The Sphere* and was written by Michael Pym (1889-1983). Pym saw Gandhi and his followers at a conference in Gujarat.

²⁰⁶ Gandhi, "Letter to Ashram Women," December 12, 1927, *CWMG*, vol. 41, 22-3.

This reaction by the Indian women was exactly what Gandhi wanted and expected from Behn. Behn garnered much attention from Indian men and women when she went on her solo khadi tours and public meetings, once she had acquired the language skills necessary to communicate with many of the Hindi-speaking Indian population in the villages.

Learning outside of Sabarmati

In November 1926, Mira Behn was sent to Kanya Gurukul, a girls' education center in Delhi, the northern part of India, to learn Hindustani (Hindi). A secondary reason Gandhi may have sent her, which becomes evident in their correspondence, was to reduce Mira Behn's platonic infatuation with him that had been constant in the year since she joined Sabarmati. Gandhi was not often present at the ashram; however, Behn came an at unprecedented time when Gandhi just happened to be at the Ashram for a longer-than-normal stretch. This afforded her attention and interaction with Gandhi that others may not have received or were not used to seeing. Because of this prolonged interaction, Behn became attached to Gandhi and being in his physical presence. She admits in her autobiography that her willingness to go to Delhi had been in part because

I felt too in my heart that the separation from Bapu would be less hard if I went out into a new surrounding rather than stay on in the Ashram without him... When I look on that time I can see how I was progressively crushing my natural independence of nature and putting myself wholly under another's will.²⁰⁷

From Gurukul, she moved to Bhagwadbhakti Ashram in March 1927 followed by a further move to an ashram in Wardha.²⁰⁸ She spent most of 1927 and 1928, when she was not

²⁰⁷ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 74.

²⁰⁸ Though the timeline is hard to get down exactly, I have used her autobiography, as well as the published correspondence, and *CWMG*, to make my best estimations. She was with Gandhi around December 1927 because that is when he writes about the experience with the 50 women in the village. It is hinted in her autobiography that she, at least briefly, returned to Sabarmati in September 1927.

with Gandhi or on a small solo tour, learning Hindi at different schools and ashrams. She enjoyed herself most at Wardha Ashram, where she felt the people subscribed more to Gandhi's ideals and what her vision of ashram life was supposed to be. While at Wardha she experienced a "severe attack" of malaria which only previewed years of health-related maladies to come; she notes in her autobiography that "from then on, I got malaria practically every year for 25 years."²⁰⁹ While she did enjoy her time at Wardha, it seemed that no matter where she went, either for learning or on tour, she could not escape her desire to be constantly in Gandhi's presence and her intense "awe" of the man. In her autobiography she writes how a visit from Gandhi reduced her to tears, "I fled into the garden and burst into tears...[for t]he incident was making him still more convinced that I must accustom myself to separation."²¹⁰ There is further evidence of her own realization of her attachment to Gandhi when she writes to him in May 1927 that

You are indeed father and mother and what is more than all, you are Bapu, my Bapu, in whom I live, and in whom I have that utter confidence that only boundless love can inspire- And it is Bapu alone who can make me what I should be.²¹¹

As previously stated, Gandhi believed in Mira Behn's potential to help the masses of India. Yet, he very quickly realized that her infatuation with him could get in the way. Early on in their relationship, even if I suggest that it being more one of father and daughter, and far from romantic, he warmly encouraged her to maintain her independent nature and not to "cling" to him.²¹²

In April 1927 he wrote to her

I must write to you on this fasting day to acknowledge your letter containing extracts from Beethoven. They are good spiritual food. I don't want you to forget your

²⁰⁹ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 80.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 77

²¹¹ Behn, "May 27, 1927," *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 56.

²¹² Gandhi, "March 22, 1927," *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 42.

music or your taste for it. It would be cruel to forget that to which you owe so much, and which has really brought you to me.²¹³

However, as the years went on and her attachment to him did not appear to wane, he grew more agitated with her:

You want to be with me in my tours occasionally, it is true; you want to come to the Ashram leaving your work at least every four months. You recognize these desires as limitations. I make allowance for them...If you were not what I have described you to be, you would die, but they are symptoms of a deep-seated disease which has not rejoiced over my drawing attention to the disease and courageously strive to overcome it. Instead, you simply collapsed, much to my grief and anxiety. This disease is idolatry. If it is not, why hanker after my company!²¹⁴

These separations had an adverse effect on Mira Behn's physical as well as mental health as demonstrated in the above excerpt. For years she suffered health problems related not only to the Indian climate, but also related to grief about being separated from Gandhi. Ironically, it was when she was separated from Gandhi that she is most impactful with the movement as is demonstrated later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters. Gandhi learned that the hardhanded effort on his part to wean Behn from her attachment was not conducive to Behn accepting separation and also sent her apology letters.

Now that you are away from me, my grief over having grieved you is greater. No tyrant has yet lived who has not paid for the suffering he has caused. No lover has ever given pain without being more pained. Such is my state. What I have done was inevitable. Only I wish I did not lose temper. But such is my brutality towards those I love most. But now that you are away from me, I can think of nothing but your extraordinary devotion.²¹⁵

This back-and-forth of affection and rejection from Gandhi went on for the entirety of Gandhi and Behn's relationship. While her attachment towards Gandhi sometimes may have kept Behn from reaching her full potential, it did not always have that effect. Between 1926 and

²¹³ Gandhi, "April 13, 1927," *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber 45.

²¹⁴ Gandhi, "Letter to Mirabehn," June 24, 1929, *CWMG*, vol. 46, 153.

²¹⁵ Gandhi, "Letter to Mirabehn," November 20, 1929, *CWMG*, vol. 47, 466-7.

1930 Behn went out on a series of public meetings and khadi tours, culminating with her All-India Khadi Tour in 1930.

Grassroots Efforts in India

In late November 1926, about a year after she joined Gandhi's movement, Mira Behn gave her first public speech in Ahmedabad to a "large concourse of women."²¹⁶ This speech was covered by both *The Bombay Chronicle* and the *Times of India*. *The Bombay Chronicle*, which was an Indian Nationalist periodical, repeatedly misspelled Mira Behn's English name as "Adeline" instead of "Madeleine," but would use her correct name in future articles, or at least took the time to edit the incorrect spellings. With this first speech, Behn attempted to make a connection with the women of Ahmedabad by speaking to them woman-to-woman. She stated how her "Indian sisters had made a deep impression upon her," and she repeatedly disavowed Western ideals and education.²¹⁷ Yet, she challenged European cultural norms by stating that a "woman need not dedicate her life to a husband, but she could devote it to God," and at the same time catered to traditional Indian ideals by stating how "service and humility are woman's birthrights."²¹⁸ Behn used this speech to encourage Indian women to begin making their own khadi. She concluded with a powerful statement harking back to Indian's women's former glory in cloth-making:

India is by nature a land of agriculture and cottage handicraft[s]. Indian women are by nature a pattern of devoted service. Today India is in deep distress. How then can her daughters best employ their powers of devotional help? Surely through the spinning wheel, the very emblem of humility and service. Spinning has always been regarded as woman's specialty. In the English language, the old word for an unmarried woman is actually spinster (one who spins). Let spinsters of India therefore awake in ever-growing numbers to the message of the spinning wheel and show their brothers that they have not forgotten their ancient calling. (Followed by loud and prolonged cheers).²¹⁹

²¹⁶ "Woman of East and West," *The Bombay Chronicle*, November 25, 1926, 5, *Granth Sanjeevani*.

²¹⁷ "God's Lovely Creation," *The Bombay Chronicle*, November 29, 1926, 9, *Granth Sanjeevani*.

²¹⁸ "Woman's Birthright," *Times of India*, November 25, 1926, 5, *Granth Sanjeevani*.

²¹⁹ "God's Lovely Creation," *The Bombay Chronicle*, November 29, 1926, 9, *Granth Sanjeevani*.

Through this speech, Behn was careful not to incite full-blown rebellion against traditional Indian ideals, but rather, to demonstrate how women could still fulfill these ideals through working with khadi. This became a pattern throughout Behn's grassroots efforts in India. She inspired women to work with the Indian independence movement in whatever way made them feel comfortable. She challenged gender notions when necessary, but succeeded, for the most part, in not alienating women who may not have been comfortable completely disregarding their traditional customs. This first speech is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to how Behn inspired and worked with the Indian women, and generally the Indian village populace as a whole.

Between 1927 and 1930, Behn visited numerous schools, villages, and towns with the purpose of educating the population, particularly women, about the benefits of khadi. In making these visits, Behn connected the men and women of India to the Indian independence movement through khadi. She was also able to inspire the women of India to break through some of the traditional gender barriers they faced.²²⁰ During one visit to Delhi she noted that "some hundred women and children turned up" and that purdah, the wearing of a veil, "was not in evidence" while the women allowed Devadas Gandhi, Gandhi's son, to come into the garden where the women were present.²²¹ This is evidence that, again, Behn aided these women in ways that made them feel comfortable but also allowed them to be educated by the movement. In a letter to Gandhi, she describes a typical day of educating the women in India:

I had to open the proceedings each time by introducing myself! Then I would talk to them about the advantages of good slivers and of carding at home, and then take my bow and card and make slivers in front of them. They were all very keen and all wanted to

²²⁰ As will be demonstrated throughout this work, Behn differed from the British feminists who came before her by wishing to help others through Gandhi's vision of an independent India, rather than the British feminists who only wanted to help to a certain extent.

²²¹ Behn, "October 21, 1928," *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 126.

have a sliver each to spin with- and then would come a regular rush where each woman and girl would bring up her little piece of yarn spun out of the sliver for my inspection. I would test the yarn with my finger, some was good, but much was too weak and would break easily- the amusement and enthusiasm was delightful, and we had much laughter and excitement.²²²

Behn also broke through gender barriers with these visits by educating men as well as women. Many Indian men did not consider women as educational leaders, but it is noted in several sources that both men and women attended Behn's workshops. It seems that the men were not just curious about khadi, but other subjects that they believed Behn would be knowledgeable about as well.

The boys...who made up the Ashram school, handed me a sheet of paper on which was written a request that I should give them a lecture on the following subjects: 1. "What appeals to you in Indian life," 2. "The khadi movement and Gandhi ideals," 3. "the French Revolution," 4. "The difference between French and Indian social customs."²²³

Behn's race and class may have had a part in breaking those gender barriers. These Indian men may have believed that because of her upbringing she, even as a woman, would have valuable knowledge to convey them.

Behn's visits were important in the fact that they were not only educational for the people, but it allowed Gandhi to learn about the people in the villages that Behn went to without him. In May 1927, Gandhi wrote about how Behn informed him that many women in these local villages were "extremely good" but "terribly ignorant" about "the simplest things." (Perhaps demonstrating some of that arrogance and haughtiness that other ashramites complained about).²²⁴ Behn later wrote to Gandhi how people in the Bijoyla area were spinning before she

²²² Behn, "October 25, 1928," *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 130-1.

²²³ Behn, "October 25, 1928," *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 130.

²²⁴ Mahatma Gandhi, "Letter to Ashram Women," May 19, 1927, *CWMG*, vol. 39, 466.

got there but it was of “poor quality.”²²⁵ She also reported to Gandhi when a village was not receptive to her education. In one letter she wrote that

The poor women want so much to learn, and the whole village could be aided thereby, but some of the orthodox men have set up this cry, and so I have been asked not to come again until some compromise is arrived at.²²⁶

This kind of reconnaissance work on Behn’s part helped Gandhi to be better informed on how to educate the people in different areas in India based on their knowledge of khadi and the independence movement in general.²²⁷ Through this work, Gandhi learned what areas needed to learn about khadi, which areas were lacking in which resources, and in which areas Behn could be more successful in versus areas where Gandhi should send a male representative in her stead. Behn also engaged in extended stays in some villages where she garnered in-depth knowledge about certain areas.

Behn not only educated Gandhi about what she learned from the villages, but also an international audience by way of Gandhi’s publication, *Young India*. She wrote about her experiences in the Bihar region in a multi-part article series, “Bihar Experiences,” for *Young India*, which appeared in the December 26, 1929, and January 2, 1930 issues. She also wrote an article for the January 1, 1930, issue entitled “Independence Day.” Through these articles, readers of *Young India* were educated about the plights of the Indian villages. Behn describes an area in Bihar where “wars, misrule, and ...exploitation” led to widespread “poverty and sorrow.”²²⁸ Behn writes how families struggled because men from Bihar had to go to Calcutta to find work and were usually unable to send much back home which left the women clinging “to

²²⁵ Mira Behn, “October 2, 1928,” *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 114.

²²⁶ Mira Behn, “February 19, 1929,” *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 206.

²²⁷ Behn was not the only person in the ashram tasked with this duty.

²²⁸ Behn, “Bihar Experiences I-II,” *Young India*, December 26, 1929, in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 86.

their (spinning) wheel as their one hope in life.”²²⁹ She describes how in thousands of villages there was

no aid for the helpless widows, no hope for aged, no work for the unemployed... (and) no schools for the little children... I saw those countless homes without milk, without ghee (butter) – no fats with which to nourish even the growing children- only a little rice water, a little bread and taxed salt. I saw the starving cattle tied up by the cottage doors, and the weary, haggard men and women, work out with long years of under-nourishment and sickness.²³⁰

She did not just describe a poor and miserable Indian state. She also wrote of khadi competitions in the villages and how she learned a new way of cleaning cotton in Bihar, and how the people of Bihar pronounced her name “Meeroo Bohin.”²³¹ Through these articles, Behn painted a picture of true village life in India for her readers. It also gave her editorial and journalistic practice on which she later relied when she began producing her own international publication, *Weekly Reports*, which aided Gandhi’s Civil Disobedience Campaign.²³² The years she spent learning carding, weaving, spinning, and Hindi, and going on grassroots visits to villages culminated in Mira Behn’s All-India Khadi Tour in 1930.

The multi-month All-India Khadi Tour had many similar goals to Behn’s smaller village visits; yet, Behn’s All-India Tour differed from those visits in numerous ways. Gandhi set out on the first leg of his Civil Disobedience Campaign in March 1930; when Mira Behn tried to join him, he informed her that her primary task was to keep the khadi program alive in his absence.²³³ This tour, which began in July 1930, could not officially be considered part of the Civil

²²⁹ Behn, “Bihar Experiences III-IV,” *Young India*, December 26, 1929, in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 89.

²³⁰ Mira Behn, “Independence Day,” *Young India*, December 26, 1929, in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 77.

²³¹ Mira Behn, “Bihar Experiences I-II,” *Young India*, December 26, 1929, in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn, Gandhiji's Daughter Disciple*, 87; Mira Behn, “Bihar Experiences III-IV,” *Young India*, December 26, 1929, in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 90.

²³² See Chapter 3 of this dissertation for more information on the Civil Disobedience Campaign.

²³³ Eleanor Morton, *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi*, (London: Reinhart, 1954), 157, E-Book, available at: <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.150009/page/n3/mode/2up>, accessed April 20, 2020; Khadi creation and promotion was a part of Gandhi’s bigger project known as the Constructive Program.

Disobedience Campaign, and was the first time that any of Behn's work throughout India was labeled by the press, particularly *The Bombay Chronicle*, as "propaganda." For the tour, Behn visited Bombay, Ahmedabad, Patna, Calcutta, and Madras.²³⁴ She went to these areas armed with the knowledge that she gained during her earlier visits, so she knew what each area needed in terms of education. This tour was the first time that Behn got to really interact with the police in India.

Mira Behn's association with Gandhi was well publicized and known by the time she went on this tour. She had spent over four years publicly being subservient to an Indian man and vocally chastising British culture and superiority. While she educated the public on khadi, Gandhi openly defied British laws and encouraged boycotts. The British Government was growing more weary and irritated with Gandhi's actions and had begun to ban public meetings. Needless to say, this tour did not go unnoticed by the British government. Instead of finding anxious crowds awaiting her at each area, she found signs of police intimidation and abuse. In Rajamehendri she found how,

no member of the public was too be seen. They had all been beaten up. The driver of the car which had been brought to meet me had been severely beaten to the point of being incapacitated.²³⁵

In July of 1930 Mira Behn visited a Congress hospital and her findings ended up published in *The Bombay Chronicle*:

I have seen several hospitals lately filled with wounded victims from lathi charges. Today the cases I have seen have been particularly bad- the last case, a dying Musselman with his wife and bother sitting by. The more I see of these things the more clarity I know that swaraj is coming faster and faster.²³⁶

²³⁴ Associated Press, "Gandhiji Keeping Well," *The Bombay Chronicle*, July 17, 1930, 1, *Granth Sanjeevani*.

²³⁵ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 114.

²³⁶ Behn, "Swaraj is Coming: Impressions After a Visit to Congress Hospital," *The Bombay Chronicle*, July 19, 1930, 1, *Granth Sanjeevani*.

She notes in her autobiography that police typically followed throughout the various routes and that she had to be “very careful to keep just on the safe side with my actions and speeches because my standing instructions from Bapu were not to court arrest deliberately.”²³⁷ Nonetheless, in September 1930, Mira Behn was escorted to jail for the first time.

When Mira Behn arrived in Calcutta on September 9, 1930, there was a women’s procession awaiting her at Howrah Station. However, before she could greet the women, she was harassed by a police officer:

An Englishman jumped into the carriage, preventing me from getting out. He said he was the Deputy Commissioner of the Police and handed me a notice forbidding me to join the women’s procession which had come to receive me and take me through the city... “I warn you a lathi charge has been ordered if you try to join the procession...” No sooner had we crossed the center of the bridge that the lathi charge was ordered. I was not struck, but everyone around was hit at.²³⁸

In her attempt to join the procession, Mira Behn was taken, unscathed, to the police station. The Women’s Procession was covered by papers all across India and Britain. After Behn was removed from the scene, there are reports of stones being thrown at police and upwards of thirty women were arrested.²³⁹ *The Bombay Chronicle* reported that after Behn was taken by the police that

The processionists then came along Harrison Road towards college square where a large crowd joined the procession. Police made several charges and dispersed the crowd. About thirty women were arrested by the police at college square where the procession terminated.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 94.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

²³⁹ From Our Own Correspondent, “Calcutta Procession Dispersed,” *Times*, 10 Sept. 1930, 12, *The Times Digital Archive*, available at: <https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/apps/doc/CS202973994/TTDA?u=tamp44898&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=149b79ac>. Accessed July 22, 2020; “Women Riot in Calcutta,” *The Yorkshire Post*, September 10, 1930, 9, *British Newspaper Archive*; “Calcutta Disturbance,” *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, September 10, 1930, 5, *British Newspaper Archive*.

²⁴⁰ Associated Press, “Mirabai Arrested and Released,” *The Bombay Chronicle*, September 10, 1930, 1, *Granth Sanjeevani*.

While the others she was with faced arrests and according to some sources, violence, Mira Behn walked away from the event unscathed and not in prison.²⁴¹ She was not arrested formally, probably due to her race and class, but this was only the first of several interactions with the police and jail through her work with the Indian independence movement.

Conclusion

Between 1925 and 1930, Mira Behn completely immersed herself in Gandhi, his movement, and its goal of educating the populace about the benefits of khadi. During this time, she became more proficient in Hindi (however, she struggled with the language for a long time), taught others how to make their own cloth and clothing, edited Gandhi's autobiography and English correspondence, and developed lasting relationships with Gandhi and his inner circle. She also delivered public speeches and cultivated writing and journalistic skills. During this time, Behn proved that she could handle ashram vows and living, being more fervent and strict in her faith and vows than many Indians who surrounded her. She proved through her actions both in and out of the ashram that she was a valuable asset to the movement. She could teach others how to spin and create khadi, she could write inspiring and informative news articles, she could reach people who Gandhi could not.

Mira Behn grew and changed as a person during these first few years in India. She did not return to England upon the death of her father in 1928, but she did visit her sister in Bombay that same year. She took pride in the fact that during her visit with her sister at the Taj Mahal Hotel she ran into a white lady who "drew in her skirts as she passed me as if fearing contamination."²⁴² This proved to her that she was succeeding in detaching herself from her upper-crust English identity and truly becoming a part of Gandhi's movement. She also changed

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 73.

by becoming less independent in her behavior and found herself very dependent on Gandhi's attention and approval. Yet, Mira Behn's transformation was not the only change occurring during these years.

In the first five years that Behn was in India, there were major changes affecting India, the United Kingdom, and the world. Beginning in 1929, the INC grew tired of waiting for the British to give India independence, so it began to openly protest and demonstrate in an intensified campaign against the government and encouraged others to do so through the Civil Disobedience Campaign. This campaign frustrated the British Government and led to Gandhi's invitation to the Second Round Table Conference in London in 1931 to discuss the nature and extent of Britain's continued involvement in India. Gandhi chose to bring Mira Behn with him to this Conference. She proved that she was vital to Gandhi in India. This was her chance to prove it on an international stage.

CHAPTER TWO: THE BEARINGS OF DEMETER: MIRA BEHN, GLOBE TROTTING EXTRADONAIRE

It was just then that we all began to notice the constant attendance of a rather statuesque figure just behind him in most of the photographs which abounded. Who was this? It was a woman not Indian, obviously European of some sort, dressed in Indian clothing, head bowed, eyes cast down, never speaking always there. The man himself was small, the woman large.

-Vincent Sheean, 1960.²⁴³

Introduction

The decade of the 1930s was the most active time for the Indian independence movement. It involved the continuation of the Swadeshi (Khaddar) movement, the beginnings of the Civil Disobedience Campaign, globalized speech tours in promotion of the independence movement, and a series of Round Table Conferences about the continued role of the British Empire with regards to Indian governance. It was during this decade that Mira Behn acquired global fame for her in the movement for India's independence.

Mira Behn worked hard to improve the lives of indigenous Indian people and to get the word out about the movement for Indian independence to the greater Western world. As the previous chapter demonstrated, Behn spent some years learning and cultivating skills that would make her a valuable asset to the movement both in India and internationally. At the Second Round Table Conference and Gandhi's trips to Switzerland and Italy, Behn got a chance to demonstrate to Gandhi and other high-ranking members of the movement just how valuable she could be.

Beginning in September 1931, Mira Behn traveled with Gandhi to participate in the Second Round Table Conference on India in London. In December 1931, Gandhi and Behn

²⁴³ Vincent Sheean, "Forward," in Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 3-8, 4. Sheean wrote this in reference to all of the pictures that Behn was appearing in because of the Second Round Table Conference.

traveled to Switzerland and Rome to meet with the Gandhi biographer and French anti-imperialist-intellectual, Romain Rolland, and the Italian Fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini. This was Behn's first time returning to her native country since leaving for India in 1925. In her "personal-assistant" like position, Behn acted as chef, translator, interpreter, communicator, organizer, and a myriad of vital roles in support of the movement for Indian independence. Through their travels to the UK, Switzerland, and Italy, Mira Behn captured the attention of the many in the public and in the media and garnered skills that helped her later on in the movement when she traveled internationally to promote the movement. To understand the impact of the Round Table Conference and the other travels with Gandhi better, one must have an understanding of the context of the development of British-Indian relations during the early 1930s.

British and India Relations in the Early 1930s and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact

The truth is Gandhi-ism and everything it stands for will have to be crushed.

-Winston Churchill, 1930²⁴⁴

The early 1930s was a tumultuous era for the British Empire both politically and economically. The ill-digested legacy of World War One and the Peace of Paris were palpable to people all over the globe and a sense of foreboding arose about the outbreak of another major war, even before Hitler came to power in Germany in January 1933. The global economic market crash of 1929 had severe repercussions in India, making manifest the flimsiness of its economy. It compounded the strains which Britain and its empire faced ever since August 1914. In particular, Britain experienced domestic political tensions over the issue of India's fate. Winston Churchill, then an outspoken MP and frequent government minister, openly criticized

²⁴⁴ Arthur Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill: The Epic Rivalry that Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age*, (New York: Bantam Dell, 2008), 347.

how the Viceroy of India, Lord Irwin, was governing India. As demonstrated by the above quotation, Churchill made no secret of his utter detestation of Gandhi and his movement.

Between 1930 and 1932, three Round Table Conferences were held in London to discuss matters related to India's position within the Empire, which were attended by representatives from the United Kingdom, the British Raj, and the various Indian States.²⁴⁵

The Indian National Congress, the political party of Gandhi, boycotted the first and third conferences. For the First Round Table Conference, the India National Congress President, Jawaharlal Nehru, laid down the following conditions, which the British government was to accept if it wanted to have Congress representatives attend:

1. All discussions at the proposed conference to be based on creating full Dominion Status for India.²⁴⁶
2. There should be predominant representation of Congress at the Conference.
3. General amnesty of political prisoners.
4. The Government of India was to be constituted/organized from that point onward, as far as it is possible under existing conditions, on the lines of a Dominion government.²⁴⁷

Nehru fully expected that the British would not agree to the conditions and when they indeed did not, he announced that Congress boycotted the Conference. In a kind of about-face, Congress then proceeded to send Gandhi as their sole representative to the Second Round Table in September 1931. This was evidently informed after Gandhi's successful negotiations with Lord Irwin in March 1931, which had resulted in the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.

²⁴⁵ William Roy Smith, *Nationalism and Reform in India*, (Kennikat Press: New York/London, 1938), 99. Smith errs on the years.

²⁴⁶ Dominion Status refers to a semi-independent position that some countries in the Empire, such as Canada and Australia, held. It implied some semblance of self-governance.

²⁴⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru*, (Cornwall: Cornwall Press, 1942), 146-7. While the British would not agree to these conditions for the First Round Table Conference, concessions toward them appear in the terms accepted for the Second and Third Conferences.

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact

One reason, I believe, why Gandhi seems to us so wavering and ambiguous and constantly in danger of compromising is that, by reason of his thorough-going method of non-violent resistance, he is bound always to try to encourage the latent spirit of decency that is in every man,- even a capitalist or imperialist,- and by acting as if that man were going to do the decent thing, and telling such men in advance that he expects them to do what is really right.

- Richard Bartlett Gregg, *American Gandhi Disciple*, 1931²⁴⁸

Viceroy since 1925, Lord Irwin (the later Viscount Halifax) faced political backlash in Britain because of his inability to cope with the ongoing Civil Disobedience Campaign in India, began by Gandhi in 1930. It boycotted British products particularly British cloth, liquor, and salt and culminated in protests throughout the Raj against British rule. Following Irwin's orders, the British authorities asserted their dominance through the use of violence against protestors and the arrest of campaign leaders, including Gandhi. The 1930 Civil Disobedience Campaign garnered much attention from the press globally, which did not always present British rule in the most positive light. To curtail this bad publicity, Irwin released Gandhi and some of his supporters from jail in January 1931 and on several occasions between January and March 1931, met with Gandhi in an attempt to negotiate to end the boycott and strike a compromise between Gandhi's movement and Britain.²⁴⁹

One British Liberal Party-politician and MP from 1931 to 1935, Robert Bernays (1902-1945), was present during the Gandhi-Irwin negotiations and kept a diary during this time. Bernays spent five months in India prior to the negotiations and his diary allows us to gain an understanding of the perspective of a progressive member of the British political establishment and its view on Indian independence and Gandhi during this time.

²⁴⁸ Richard Bartlett Gregg, "Gregg to Roger (N. Baldwin) May 7, 1931," Richard Bartlett Gregg papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Book and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

²⁴⁹ Walter Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown: The British Betrayal of India*, (Edenborough: Birlinn Limited, 2016), 83.

During his time in India, he formed the opinion that he had not realized how the British had “completely ignored the social problem in India,” and that the British had “merely been policemen.”²⁵⁰ Politically speaking, Bernays did not agree with the viceroy and felt that Irwin had “reduced the etiquette of (the) Viceregal court,” which may have affected his perception of the viceroy at the beginning of the negotiations.²⁵¹ However, because of his time in India, he was inclined to side with Irwin’s compromises with Gandhi during the negotiations.²⁵²

During the negotiations, Bernays got to meet Gandhi and Behn and he provides the perspective of an English person meeting Behn after her first five years in India. In his diary, Bernays provides his impression of Mira Behn several times. He discussed how

She (Mira Behn) and I did not get on well together... She [is] usually very much on the defense when talking to Englishmen nowadays... Will they (the English) not say that Gandhi, with all his saintliness, get a kick out of being waited upon by a white woman? Certainly, it has an effect on his supporters. All their lives they have suffered insults... and here is an English girl, an admiral’s daughter, who humbles herself in the dust, is content to do the most menial duties if only she can be near and serve their Holy Man... How she is taken for granted. She is Gandhi’s ayah, his nurse... I am told she actually shampoos his legs every night. This will shock the people at home.²⁵³

Bernays was present throughout the entirety of the negotiations. He noted the “atmosphere of royalty” surrounding Gandhi and how the viceroy was “friendly, courteous, and frank” during the negotiations.²⁵⁴

On March 4, 1931, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed: It called for the release of thousands of political prisoners in India and the withdraw of extreme measures taken against participants in the Civil Disobedience Campaign in exchange for Gandhi ending the boycott of

²⁵⁰ Robert Bernays, *Naked Fakir*, (London: Camelot Press Ltd., 1931), 15.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁵² In his diary he noted that, “I realized for the first time that kuddar (khaddar) is not necessarily a weapon against the English. Amongst a population where the average earnings are only enough to produce one meal a day it is unjustifiable for villagers to clothe themselves in the products of Lancashire,” (*ibid.*, 17).

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 94, 172, 261.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 92, 150.

British-imported goods and the Campaign and his agreement to attend the Second Round Table Conference later that year.²⁵⁵ In an interview, Irwin discussed some of the compromises made by both sides:

We have given more than I like about Salt, but I don't think we could have gotten away with much less. We concluded with the old man telling me that he was going to throw his whole heart and soul into trying to co-operate in constitution-building...He (Gandhi) was quite firm about not restarting civil disobedience till the end of the conference discussions anyhow, and hoped never.²⁵⁶

The Pact met with a mixed response in both India, Britain, and even across the world in the United States. In India, there were some who felt that the Pact conceded too much to Britain. There were many in Congress who “disliked” the Pact but there was no one who would “openly challenge Gandhi.”²⁵⁷ Yet, there were also those in Congress who agreed with Gandhi’s decisions. Thirty years onward, one Congress member wrote how the Pact was “a historical memorial of what two God-fearing men could achieve though history placed them in opposite camps.”²⁵⁸ Gandhi was in his sixties and had been fighting injustice in South Africa and India for over three decades when the Pact was signed; after spending so much time and resources fighting, one can surmise that he most likely believed the Pact to be a path, at least temporarily, to ending the violence against Indians fighting for home-rule, and perhaps a beginning toward the end of British rule in India.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 86; Smith, *Nationalism and Reform in India*, 404. The buying and selling of homemade Indian salt was permitted with this agreement as well as long as it was done on a small scale. Some sources say March 4, while some say March 5. A March 4 1931 *The Times* article stated that an agreement was reached between Irwin and Gandhi at 1:30 am on Wednesday March 4, 1931 and would be confirmed later that day (see From our Special Correspondent, “Viceroy and Mr. Gandhi,” *Times*, 4 March 1931, 14, *The Times Digital Archive*, available at: <http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS236135542/TTDA?u=tamp44898&sid=TTDA&xid=83e3a9c6>, accessed July 22, 2020).

²⁵⁶ Lord Irwin, “Interview with Irwin,” *CWMG*, vol. 51, 201.

²⁵⁷ Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill*, 354.

²⁵⁸ Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*, 86.

In the United States, after reading about the Gandhi-Irwin negotiations in the press, some allies of the independence movement felt Gandhi had gone “insane” for even considering making concessions regarding the Civil Disobedience Campaign.²⁵⁹ One American Gandhi disciple, the lawyer and social philosopher Richard Bartlett Gregg, initially believed that Gandhi only signed the Pact because he was worn down from his prison sentence and age; it was only after he received more dispatches from India stating how Nehru stood beside Gandhi as he signed the Pact that Gregg realized how significant the Pact was to all leading the movement.²⁶⁰ Nehru was younger and stronger than Gandhi and many followers of the movement looked to him for guidance as many believed that he would eventually take over from Gandhi as the practical and symbolic leader of the movement. As more and more information was released globally about the Pact, it became ever more apparent that both sides could benefit from the temporary truce in search of a more permanent settlement. However, Britain itself was divided on the issue.

King George V believed that Lord Irwin deserved “the very greatest credit for bringing about this temporary truce with Gandhi and the (Indian National) Congress.”²⁶¹ International attention paid to British authorities beating Indians in the streets was not the best look for the monarchy. However, the Churchill wing of the Conservatives, who were dedicated imperialists, believed that Irwin demonstrated “defeatist tendencies” and that the Pact was “another contemptible example of Irwin’s liberal weakness.”²⁶² It appeared that due to the political and economic climate in Britain in 1931, the Churchillian Conservatives’ viewpoint held the public’s sway. In April 1931, Lord Irwin was replaced as viceroy by Lord Willingdon, who viewed

²⁵⁹ Gregg, “Gregg to Roger N. Baldwin March 5, 1931,” Richard Bartlett Gregg papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Book and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania. For more about Gregg and other kinds of American involvement in the Indian independence movement, see Chapter Five.

²⁶⁰ Gregg, “Gregg to Roger N. Baldwin March 11, 1931,” Richard Bartlett Gregg papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Book and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

²⁶¹ Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*, 84.

²⁶² Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill*, 350; Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*, 83.

Gandhi as “really dangerous and (an) opportunist.”²⁶³ Around this same time, many Parliamentary members were replaced by those whose conservative ideals “were not sympathetic” to the Indian National Congress.²⁶⁴ It was in this volatile political climate that Gandhi, Mira Behn, and several others came to London in September 1931 to attend the Second Round Table Conference.

Gandhi, Mira Behn, and the Second Round Table Conference: London, England: September 1931

We all felt at once the power of the ‘Raj.’ We were no longer free agents. Rules and taboos were in the air, all very polite and courteous, but there all right.

- Mira Behn²⁶⁵

The British and the Indian National Congress had different expectations and goals for the Second Round Table Conference. The British delegates placed all their “bets” for the Conference on the completion of troubles with India (i.e. no more civil disobedience and continued British rule over India in some form), while most of the Congress leadership firmly believed that nothing would come from the Conference.²⁶⁶ Gandhi went to the Conference feeling somewhere between the two extremes. He saw the Conference as an opportunity to “secure for the India National Congress an equal partnership with the British in the exercise of overall political power in India.”²⁶⁷ It was clear almost from the start of the Conference that an “equal” India was never on the table for the British.

The complete list of delegates for the Second Round Table Conference consisted of 108 members composed of 19 British delegates, 19 Indian State delegates, and 70 British Indian

²⁶³ Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*, 91.

²⁶⁴ Frederick G. Pratt, “The Indian Round Table Conference: Second Session,” *Pacific Affairs* 5, no. 2, (February 1932): 151-167, 152.

²⁶⁵ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 133.

²⁶⁶ Gregg, “My dear Sister,” Feb. 3, 1931,” Richard Bartlett Gregg papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Book and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania; Nehru, *Toward Freedom*, 207-8.

²⁶⁷ D.A. Low, *Britain and Indian Nationalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 119.

delegates.²⁶⁸ Of those who represented British India, many were of British descent; however, there was not one British woman delegate attending the Conference.²⁶⁹ As previously stated, Gandhi was the sole delegate from the India National Congress. While it may seem imprudent for the Congress to have dispatched only one delegate, this was by design as it was supposed to send a message that Gandhi represented a unified Congressional voice as well as allowing for the rest of Congress to remain in India and continue working towards their goals in ways that were not impeded by the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.²⁷⁰ The demands which Gandhi was to represent were:

1. Complete independence, not however, excluding partnership at will on absolutely equal terms with Britain, and determinable at the instance of either party, subject to the discharge of mutual obligations or adjustments being made therefor. Complete independence necessarily includes full control in the hands of the responsible Government over the defense forces and external affairs and finance.
2. Such safeguards as may be proved to be necessary in the interests of India would be accepted by the Congress. Congress is quite willing that the nation should take over all the legitimate obligations, but insists upon all examinations by an impartial tribunal of all the obligations that the nation be called upon to bear.
3. The Congress is a national organization, and it is committed to a purely national solution of the question of minorities, but it will, if necessary, accept the principle of special reservation of seats in the Legislature for Muslims and Sikhs, and this it would do as necessary evil because of historic reasons.
4. With regard to the so-called Untouchables, their cause has been and is the special care of the Congress, and it would be unjust to treat them separately and thus give untouchability a legal status when every attempt is being made to do away with the evil

²⁶⁸ “The Round Table Conference,” *Belfast News Letter*, August 5, 1931, 1, *British Newspaper Archive*.

²⁶⁹ “The Round Table Conference,” *The Vote*, July 24, 1931, 240, *British Newspaper Archive*; “British Women Demand Inclusion at Round Table Conference,” *The Scotsman*, August 14, 1931, 5, *British Newspaper Archive*. It seems likely that any female British politicians were not included in the Conference because this was a way for the British Government to create a divide between British women, who were fighting for their own rights during this era, and the issue of Indian independence. In this regard, it reminds one of the divide created between white women and African American males in America prior to women receiving the right to vote because the vote was presented by those in power (wealthy white males) as a “or” situation for women and African American males rather than an “everyone can vote” situation. Also, even though they had the vote, politics was still very much a “man’s game” in Britain, and very few female MPs existed to represent Britain in the first place.

²⁷⁰ Nehru, *Toward Freedom*, 207.

altogether. In a self-governed India there would be no political disability placed upon anyone on the ground of race, creed, or colour.²⁷¹

While Gandhi was the sole congressional representative, he did not travel to London alone. Among those who accompanied him were Mira Behn, his son Devadas Gandhi, his private secretary, Mahadev Desai, and freedom fighters, Sarojini Naidu and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya.²⁷²

By the time that Gandhi, Mira Behn, and company arrived in London on September 12, 1931, Gandhi had become a world-renowned figure thanks to numerous biographical publications and the international press coverage of his Civil Disobedience Campaign in India.²⁷³ In fact, one of Mira Behn's first tasks upon arrival was to help Gandhi get through the throngs of people cheering for him as they departed the ship.²⁷⁴ Numerous newspapers were fascinated with the khadi-adorned Mira Behn, Gandhi in his khadi and loin-cloth, and the contents of Gandhi's luggage which included "changes of loin cloth, three spinning wheels, four blankets, spare set of false teeth, some handfuls of dried raisins, and books, including Thoreau's 'Civil

²⁷¹ This was reiterated in a manifesto by the Commonwealth of India League and printed in *The Times*. "Mr. Gandhi's Departure," *Times*, 7 Dec., 1931, 12, *The Times Digital Archive*, available at: <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS202450311/TTDA?u=tamp44898&sid=TTDA&xid=60b97a6f>, accessed July 22, 2020. These demands were similar to the ones stated by Congress for the First Round Table Conference; however, they added the stipulation about untouchability. Independence was not Gandhi's only goal for India, for he also dreamed of an India free from caste obligations and restrictions. Gandhi himself came from a higher caste and the Congress itself was middle-class in nature. Gandhi never achieved his dream of abolishing the caste system even after independence was achieved in 1947.

²⁷² Our Own, "Mr. Gandhi to Sail," *Times*, 28 August, 1931, 10, *Times Digital Archive*, available at: <http://link.gale.com/apps/docs/CS169551131/TTDA?u=tamp4489&sid=TTDA&xid=TTDA&xid=6b7484e3>, accessed July 22, 2020. "Freedom fighter" was a term used by some sources to describe a person involved with events pertaining gaining India's independence; both Naidu and Malaviya at some point served as the President of the Indian National Congress, (see "Past Party Presidents," *Indian National Congress*, available at: <https://www.inc.in/en/leadership/past-party-presidents>, accessed July 23, 2020). Naidu worked with Gandhi from 1920 onward. She also campaigned for women's rights and was the first Indian woman president of the Indian National Congress, (Jayawardena, *Feminism*, 100).

²⁷³ Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill*, 364.

²⁷⁴ "Cheered by Crowds," *The Liverpool Echo*, September 12, 1931. *British Newspaper Archive*, 6; "Heckled By Pressmen," *Birmingham Gazette* September 12, 1931, *British Newspaper Archive*, 7. Behn struggled to protect him from the crowds, but he emerged unscathed.

Disobedience.”²⁷⁵ The focus on these specific items calls attention to the various iterations of the movement going on in India for Indian independence: the Swadeshi movement which called for the making, wearing, and selling of khadi, Indian-made cloth, and the temporarily ceased Civil Disobedience Campaign. When Gandhi and company stepped off the ship, Gandhi was ordered by the British Government to travel by car, and the rest of the company was ordered to travel by train in order to prevent mass public meetings.²⁷⁶

For the duration of the Conference, which lasted September through December 1931, Gandhi and Mira Behn stayed at Kingsley Hall, owned by Quaker and Gandhi supporter Muriel Lester. The Conference itself was held at St. James Palace, a few miles away from Kingsley Hall, which meant that Gandhi would have to spend his “off” hours during the day closer to the Palace.

While from the start, Gandhi “was the centre of interest” for the Conference, that interest did not translate into any real solutions for the Indian population.²⁷⁷ In his opening speech for the Conference he stated that, “Per chance it might be possible for me to convince the British Ministers that India is a valuable partner, not led by force [but] by the silken cord of love.”²⁷⁸ Rather than embrace Gandhi’s partnership, the British staged useless meetings and relegated him to tasks that were fated to fail from inception. For example, he was assigned the task of unifying the “Minorities Committee,” which consisted of representing the opinions from the Muslims, Hindus, “untouchables” caste, and Sikhs- an impossibly complex task and one that never came

²⁷⁵ “Heckled by Pressmen,” *Birmingham Gazette*, 7. This list appeared in a variety of newspapers in one form or another.

²⁷⁶ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 133.

²⁷⁷ Pratt, “The Indian Round Table Conference,” 154.

²⁷⁸ Mahatma Gandhi, “Opening Speech to the Round Table Conference, London. September 15, 1931,” in *Gandhi: The Last Eighteen Years*, eds Sterling P. Olmsted, Mike Heller, and Ruth Olmsted, (Wilmington, NC: Wilmington College Peace Resource Center, 2011), 50.

into fruition.²⁷⁹ In her autobiography, Mira Behn describes the challenges that Gandhi faced from day one of the conference:

Inside the Conference Hall, Bapu's battle was from the beginning tough and relentless. The atmosphere was unsympathetic if not hostile, and the composition of the Indian delegation was artificial.²⁸⁰

Gandhi delivered speeches, attended meetings day and night, but ultimately found that his voice was not being used to bring about change for the Indian people at the Conference. Rather than waste his time, he concluded that a real change among the English public could occur outside of the Conference. This decision ultimately placed additional tasks on Mira Behn's shoulders, while she was already in charge of a lot related to the Gandhi and the Conference.

Mira Behn's deep involvement with tasks relating to the Conference had begun with the Gandhi-Irwin negotiations in January 1931. She sat in on meetings with Gandhi and Irwin and once the decision to attend the Conference was made, was placed in charge of getting the entire party of people accompanying Gandhi organized.²⁸¹ Mira Behn herself was relatively well known to the UK and global press because of the public and media attention given to her when she initially left for India in 1925. She began to reemerge in the UK press when word got out that she too would be attending the Conference with Gandhi. Attention to her in the press increased through the untimely death of her mother in July. The press, no matter which newspaper or its political leanings tended to refer to Behn as "Miss Slade" and often referenced her lineage as the daughter of English Admiral Edmond Slade. The articles about Behn with regards to the death of her mother, Florence Slade, reinforced the very social, economic, and gender ideologies that

²⁷⁹ For more on this see Pratt's "Second Round Table Conference," and "Round Table Conference: Search For Solution of Minorities Problem," *The Lancashire Daily Post*, October 1, 1931, 8, *British Newspaper Archive*. Much like Gandhi was to be the sole voice for the Congress, the British seemingly expected that the "minorities" of British India be represented with unified opinions despite glaring caste, class, and religious differences.

²⁸⁰ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 142.

²⁸¹ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Digital Edition, 99, 101; Morton, *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi*, 161.

Behn challenged and distanced herself from when she initially left for India. Her mother's obituary says little about Florence Slade herself, but rather refers to her as the wife of Edmond Slade, and mother to Madeleine Slade, the woman who defected to India- depriving Florence of any identity; in fact, the title of the article is "Death of Lady Slade: Mother of Mr. Gandhi's Home Rule Convert."²⁸² Mira Behn herself is presented as a mystifying character by the UK press.

Reporters of that era could not comprehend as to why Behn would willingly leave behind a life of luxury, as well as renounce her hefty inheritance, to follow Gandhi. One newspaper went as far as to publish an article about her with the headline "White Girl Mystic who Renounces Wealth and Luxury: Society Beauty Throws Away Her Paris Frocks To Follow Bare-Footed Cult Of The East."²⁸³ Numerous papers incorrectly reported that Behn had "lived in a cell since her association with Mr. Gandhi."²⁸⁴ Gandhi was not ignorant of the implications of having a previously wealthy white British woman being constantly photographed in a position of subservience to an Indian man. Behn was aiding the movement through these photographs by simply demonstrating that the British were not inherently superior to the Indians. These photographs may also have served a separate purpose for Behn. According to Arundhati Virmani, by wearing the Sari, (and also being photographed in it), Mira Behn was able to

²⁸² "Death of Lady Slade: Mother of Mr. Gandhi's Home Rule Convert," *Western Daily Press, Bristol* July 15, 1931, 6, *British Newspaper Archive*.

²⁸³ "White Girl Mystic who Renounces Wealth and Luxury: Society Beauty Throws Away Her Paris Frocks To Follow Bare-Footed Cult Of The East," *The People* July 19, 1931, 4, *British Newspaper Archive*; "Miss Slade Loses Legacy by Vow," *Daily Herald* September 23, 1931, 9, *British Newspaper Archive*. Florence Slade had an estate of £10,231 which in today's value (July 2020) would be worth £701,528.18, (see Pound Converter, <https://www.in2013dollars.com/uk/inflation/1931?amount=10231> available at: Accessed July 7, 2020). The entire estate went to Mira Behn's sister Rhona Vernon.

²⁸⁴ "A Mahatma's Disciple," *Belfast Telegraph*, September 1, 1931, 1, *British Newspaper Archive*. The same article was reprinted the same day in *The Shields Daily News* and *Daily Herald*. British culture inherently contained an air of racial, social, and religious superiority to the Indian population during this era.

demonstrate her “Indianness.”²⁸⁵ Virmani notes how Behn wears a plain sari, but other Indian nationalists, such as Sarojini Naidu, wore their saris with earrings and necklaces. This not only challenged British superiority but challenged classist elitism as well. She also used other garments to challenge British and classist superiority. She commonly wore a simple skirt and blouse, a “thick scarf” as an upper garment, and occasionally a “calico veil” to cover her shaved head.²⁸⁶ It was noted by Gandhi and others that she was “very economical” in her use of khadi.²⁸⁷ As discussed in Chapter One, Mira Behn had to prove herself to the ashramites and the indigenous people that she was not just another memsahib or typical British feminist. Perhaps through the donning of these simple clothing garments and even shaving her head, as well as being photographed and internationally promoted being dressed in this style, she was not only demonstrating that the British were not inherently superior, but also (further) demonstrating to herself and the Indian people where her true loyalties laid.

While Behn did not speak at the Round Table Conferences (she only attended the Second), she was a topic of discussion at them. Her work with Gandhi’s periodical *Young India* was already evoked by Hindu Mahasabha Party leader, Dr. Moonje in a November 19, 1930 speech at the First Round Table Conference. *The Times* recalled Moonje’s speech as

[In] *Young India*, Miss Slade, one of the daughters of the British people, a daughter of Admiral Slade, had written “as to the ways of British oppression.” He quoted a passage describing alleged cruelties and gross indignities and ending: “The whole affair is one of the most devilish, cold-blooded, and unjustifiable in the history of nations.”²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ Arundhati Virmani, “Le Sari à L’européenne. Vêtement Et Militantisme En Inde Coloniale.” *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire* no. 36 (2012): 129-52, 145.

²⁸⁶ Mahatma Gandhi, “Letter to Narandas Gandhi,” May 5, 1933, 78-79, 79; Halidé Edib and Mushirul Hasan, “The Trio Around Mahatma Gandhi,” in *Inside India*, 1-4, October 2012, Oxford Scholarship Online, 3, available at: <https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195699999.001.0001/acprof-9780195699999-chapter-7?print=pdf>, accessed February 20, 2022.

²⁸⁷ Gandhi, “Letter to Narandas Gandhi,” May 5, 1933, 79. Thanks to Dr. Bidisha Mallik for helping me to form this paragraph.

²⁸⁸ “The Round Table,” *Times*, 20 Nov. 1930, 9, *The Times Digital Archive*, available at: <http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS151200628/TDAA&xid=103ca54a>, accessed July 22, 2020.

This coverage in *The Times* is indicative of two things: By using words such as “alleged,” firstly, the printing press showed its policy not to commit to the existence of any wrongdoings by the British in India. Secondly, it is evident that people outside of Gandhi’s circle knew the implications of having a (formerly) wealthy and upper-class white woman working for the cause of Indian independence. White women were supposed to be unattainable and unapproachable by men of color. They were not supposed to be in subservient positions to them, especially not in positions of active defiance against imperial white supremacy.

Mira Behn’s English relatives also chimed in with statements to the press during this time. In October 1931, an interview with two of Mira Behn’s cousins, who happened to be actresses, appeared in *The Bombay Chronicle* and provided some perspective into Behn’s pre-India life. Her cousin, Marie Slade, stated that

I knew her in London in her earlier days... Madeleine always had a sort-of “crush,” for one thing, then another. She was a charming girl, very good looking... She took up things violently and would drop them as suddenly... Now she lives in a cell.²⁸⁹

The cousins’ perspective reflects the typical British response to Behn. They over-exaggerated her supposed dilapidated living conditions and they extolled her charm and good looks, traditional compliments for a white upper-class woman, while they used her English name rather than her Indian name. However, they also highlighted some of her traits that may have damaged her reputation and role within the movement. The way they described how flippant she was in pursuing (and abandoning) past projects; it could appear to readers that she might drop Gandhi and his movement in a moment’s notice. Behn went on to prove that she was not flippant

²⁸⁹ “Baptized by Rolland’s Book- Miss Slade’s Decision to Follow Gandhiji- A Peep in Mira Behn’s Early Life,” *The Bombay Chronicle*, October 3, 1931, 14, *Granth Sanjeevani*. While the article does not state if Mira Behn saw these cousins during her time in London, it is noted in Gandhi’s diary that on October 24, 1931, that he (and mostly likely Behn) “lunched at the residence of Mira’s uncle.” Gandhi, “Gandhi’s Diary- Oxford,” October 24, 1931, *CWMG*, vol. 54, 333.

with her devotion to the movement, and her time in London was one of the first ways she was able to demonstrate this.²⁹⁰

Mira Behn was Gandhi's right-hand person throughout their entire sojourn in London. He insisted on keeping his prayer rituals, silence days (Mondays), and, as previously mentioned, stayed closer to the Conference during the day in Knightsbridge. Mira Behn had to accommodate all of this around the Conference schedule:

This double establishment made my job decidedly complicated. I had to heat Bapu's bath water and provide his breakfast at Kingsley Hall, then see Bapu off promptly at 8 o'clock, when the Government car arrived each morning to fetch him. After that, I swept the rooms and roof, made up a bundle of clothes for washing, fetched provisions from the neighboring market, cooked Bapu's midday meal, packed it up and hurried off to Knightsbridge by the underground railway with the bundle of clothes in one hand and the food basket in the other. The very first job on arrival at the house was to wash the clothes so that they may be dry by evening. If Bapu came back from the Conference, I would serve him the meal there, otherwise hand the basket over to Pyarelal or Devadas, who would take it along to St. James's Palace. The evening meal I used to prepare at Knightsbridge, and the last thing, often at eight or nine o'clock, I would return by underground to Bow and await Bapu's return, which was usually between eleven and twelve o'clock, and sometimes after midnight on account of the long political conferences that used to take place in the evenings.²⁹¹

On top of doing all these daily chores, she was also in charge of waking Gandhi up for his 3AM prayer and would occasionally attend meetings with Gandhi where she could barely stay awake.²⁹² She declined tea with former-viceroy Irwin and his wife because she was behind on chores and washing.²⁹³ Her childhood tutor and former nanny, Lucy and Bertha, came to visit her at Kingsley Hall but she only had time for "fleeting talks."²⁹⁴ She relentlessly dedicated

²⁹⁰ Stories about Behn appeared in the UK press throughout September, October, and November of 1931. She often told the press she did not have time for interviews but did speak with one reporter to correct the misinformation that had appeared about her. In "English Woman Became Gandhi's Disciple," she states that she has no desire to return to her "old life" and that she has a "happy and peaceful life" at Gandhi's Ashram, ("English Woman Became Gandhi's Disciple," *Belfast Telegraph* September 9, 1931, 5, *British Newspaper Archive*).

²⁹¹ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 135.

²⁹² *Ibid*, 136

²⁹³ Morton, *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi*, 165.

²⁹⁴ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 142.

herself to making sure that Gandhi was prepared for whatever challenge he might face during his time at the Conference. By focusing on the day-to-day household functions, Mira Behn allowed Gandhi to focus all of his time to the success of the Conference. Behn worked even harder so that he could focus his attention on both his Conference duties and special visits across Britain after Gandhi concluded there was no success for India to be found at the Conference; as early as September 26, 1931 visits to Lancashire can be documented.²⁹⁵

While the British Government tried its best to ensure that Gandhi did not stage public meetings, he was still able to address the public on the occasional weekend as the Conference only met Monday through Friday. In mid-October, he spoke to the Quakers in Birmingham about the lack of progress of the Conference stating that “my true work in England lies outside the Conference... in my few public speeches, I have not hesitated to throw out a hint that no work was being done in the Conference.”²⁹⁶ In Nottingham, he spoke to university students about his position as the sole delegate for the India National Congress and what the Congress’ ultimate goals were for India.²⁹⁷ In Lancashire, he spoke to the weavers, a group of workers hit especially hard by his Swadeshi movement, who “fell in love with him as workers always did” as he spoke about why Indians were boycotting British cloth.²⁹⁸ In her autobiography, Behn quotes part of Gandhi’s speech to weavers of Lancashire:

As a nation, we are pledged to boycott all foreign cloth, but in case of an honorable settlement between England and India, i.e., in case of permanent peace, I should not hesitate to give preference to Lancashire cloth to all other foreign cloths, to the extent that we may need to supplement our own cloth and on agreed terms. But how much relief that can give, I do not know... I am pained at the unemployment here. But here is no starvation or semistarvation. In India, we have both... I wish well to you, but do not think

²⁹⁵ “News in Brief,” *Times*, 26 Sept., 1931, 10, *The Times Digital Archive*, available at: <http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS169157946/TTDA?u=tamp4489&sid=TTDA&xid=d9bc8977>, accessed July, 22, 2020.

²⁹⁶ Mahatma Gandhi, “Speech at Birmingham Meeting, October 18, 1931, Selly Oak, Birmingham,” in *Gandhi: The Last Eighteen Years*, eds Olmsted, Heller, and Olmsted, 53.

²⁹⁷ “Mr. Gandhi Visits Nottingham,” *The Nottingham Journal*, October 19, 1931, 7, *British Newspaper Archive*.

²⁹⁸ Morton, *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi*, 164.

of prospering on the tombs of the poor millions of India. I do not want for India an isolated life at all, but I do not want to depend on any country for my food and clothing.²⁹⁹

In her autobiography, Behn describes how the audiences in Lancashire and several mills could be just as enamored with Gandhi as audiences in India when “a number of women brought their babies and pushed them into Bapu’s arms,” like he was a savior.³⁰⁰ However, Gandhi was not always focused on serious discussions involving the movement. In late October, Gandhi and Behn attended a dairy show at the Royal Agricultural Hall in Islington, where Gandhi got to meet the goats that provided his daily supply of milk and was presented with cheeses made from goat’s milk.³⁰¹ Ultimately, Gandhi spoke all over, including Cambridge and Oxford Universities, and Behn was with Gandhi for all of these trips, during each of them catching a quick nap en route to wherever the next speech was to be given.³⁰²

The Second Round Table Conference ended officially in early December 1931. In mid-to-late November, some newspapers were “openly announcing the final failure of the Conference,” with headlines referring to the Conference as an “Atmosphere of Tragedy and Panic.”³⁰³ On November 30 Gandhi delivered his final speech to the Conference implying how anything accomplished at the Conference was shallow and “will be after all and at best a paper

²⁹⁹ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 140.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 140-1.

³⁰¹ “Mr. Gandhi At The Dairy Show,” *Times*, 24 Oct., 1931, 7, *The Times Digital Archive*, available at: <http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS119481688/TTDA?u=tamp44898&xid=6e02be47>, accessed July 22, 2020.

³⁰² Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 137-9. Two English detectives accompanied Gandhi wherever he went until he left for Italy. Behn describes them as “burly fellows with charming manners and dressed in smart plain clothes which undoubtedly contained revolvers in the pockets, (*ibid.*). While the Government was not able to stop Gandhi from meeting with people, these detectives ensured that they had eyes and ears wherever he went.

³⁰³ Pratt, “The Indian Round Table Conference,” 165; “Round Table Conference: Atmosphere of Tragic and Panic,” *The Lancashire Daily Post* November 25, 1931, *British Newspaper Archive*, 5.

solution.”³⁰⁴ Yet he made one last effort to compromise with British and the Indian Princes by calling for India to

get what she is entitled and what she can really take, but whatever she gets, and whenever she gets it, let the Frontier Province get complete autonomy today...I shall then have a proper footing amongst the Frontier tribes and convince them to my assistance when those over the border cast an evil eye on India.³⁰⁵

The Conference ended with no change in government status for British India and the Frontier Provinces left without their autonomy. Multiple scholars, including D.A. Low, speculate that Gandhi would have agreed to dominion status over Purna Swaraj (complete independence) because he believed that dominion status would have eventually led to India’s complete independence. Gandhi came to Britain prepared to negotiate, to completely end the boycotts and Civil Disobedience, yet Britain proved that it was not willing to concede at all. Upon leaving Britain for short trips to Switzerland and Italy before returning to India Gandhi stated “my last words to England must be: Farewell and Beware! I came a seeker of peace. I return fearful of war.”³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ Mahatma Gandhi, “Speech at Round Table Conference, 1931, November 30, 1931,” *Gandhi Sevagram Ashram*, available at: <https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/speech-at-the-round-table-conference-1931.php>, accessed July 7, 2020.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.; The Frontier Province mainly consisted of modern-day Pakistan. For more on the Frontier Province see James W. Spade, “Pakistan’s North-West Frontier,” *Middle East Journal* 8, no. 1 (Winter, 1954): 27-40, and Elisabeth Mariko Leake, “British India versus the British Empire: The Indian Army and an Impasse in Imperial Defense, circa 1919– 39,” *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (January 2014): 301-29, and Raghvendra Singh, *India’s Lost Frontier: The Story of the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan*, (New Delhi: Rupa, 2019).

³⁰⁶ Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill*, 374.

Mira Behn, Gandhi, and their Meetings with Romain Rolland and Mussolini: Villeneuve, Switzerland and Rome, Italy: December 1931

Mira follows- the noble features and august bearings of Demeter.

- Romain Rolland about the arrival of Mira Behn and company³⁰⁷

After the “failure” of the Second Round Table Conference in the fall of 1931, Behn and Gandhi met with the French intellectual, Romain Rolland between December 5 and December 11 at Rolland’s villa in Villeneuve, Switzerland. Rolland and Behn had first met in 1923, when Behn sought out Rolland because of his knowledge of Beethoven, and he had been Behn’s first ‘celebrity’ interest.³⁰⁸ Rolland, a Nobel Prize-winning author, had penned a short biography of Gandhi that was published in that very same year of 1923, and when Rolland gave a copy of the biography to Behn, both seemed to have found “a new spiritual and political cause” in the form of Gandhi.³⁰⁹ Behn and Rolland remained close for many years: often referring to each other as “friend,” and respectively, “father” in their correspondence.³¹⁰ It was because of their initial interaction in 1923 that Behn was inspired to leave her life in England behind and follow Gandhi.

Rolland and Gandhi maintained a correspondence that went on for years, but it was their mutual connection with Behn that brought the three of them together in December 1931 for a meeting that was important because the information that Rolland provides in his diary about

³⁰⁷ Rolland, *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence*, 165. A note about translation: Gandhi’s letters were written in English and Rolland’s French with Mira Behn writing in either French or English. Behn herself translated Rolland’s letters to Gandhi so much of what appears in this text was already in English.

³⁰⁸ Ruth Harris, “Rolland, Gandhi, and Madeleine Slade: Spiritual Politics, France and the Wider World,” *French History* 10, no. 4, (2013): 579-599. Behn had a job as a concert organizer after World War One and had fallen in love with her pianist, a married man with children. (see *ibid.*, 579, 582). Behn sought out Rolland to reach out to the author who had her captivated by his rendering of Beethoven’s life.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 583.

³¹⁰ In 1928, Behn stopped addressing Rolland as “father” and switched to “brother.” While she continued to regard Rolland as “father-like” figure, she, and others, affectionally referred to Gandhi as “Bapu,” meaning “father.” This switch from “father” to “brother” also implies the increasingly authoritative role that Gandhi played in Behn’s life. This further supports my argument that the feelings felt between Behn and Gandhi were those between parent and child and not romantic, since she seemingly replaces Rolland with Gandhi as the father-figure in her life.

Behn allows for a different perspective than other contemporaries such as Gandhi and the press of the era. I argue that the meeting between the three individuals was important because it allowed for misinformation that was being spread across France and Europe because of Rolland's writings and political involvements to be corrected. This meeting was also important in the fact that the connection with Rolland led to Behn and Gandhi meeting with Benito Mussolini in Rome. Meanwhile, the trip allowed for Mira Behn to relax and reflect about her first visit to England and Europe since leaving in 1925. Behn's role as a "literal and figurative" translator was vital in facilitating the communication between all of the individuals involved.³¹¹

Rolland highly anticipated meeting Gandhi in person, and he was not the only person in his area of residence to express excitement. In his diary, he notes how he and his sister had to "defend ourselves against a shower of letters, telephone calls, and requests of sorts provided by Gandhi's announced arrival."³¹² Rolland had high hopes for the visit with the Mahatma. He believed that Gandhi was "the greatest soul of the twentieth century."³¹³ Rolland was a pacifist and believed that nationalism was equivalent to barbarism, thinking that Gandhi would be receptive to an East-West alliance to "counter against the excesses of both communism and fascism" and that Gandhi could "aid in the fight against Western authoritarianism."³¹⁴ Rolland was not the only Westerner to project onto Gandhi their hopes and dreams, only to find that Gandhi was not the answer to what Rolland believed was the West's imperialism and bellicose problem. Behn helped Rolland realize that Gandhi was not the savior that Rolland was looking for and helped Rolland to better understand what it was to be around Gandhi.

³¹¹ Harris, "Rolland, Gandhi, and Madeleine Slade," 581.

³¹² Rolland, *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence*, 163.

³¹³ Mark Lindley, "Mirabehn, Gandhi, and Beethoven," in *Sarvodaya Talisman* 1, (2000), 1-2, 1, available at: https://www.academia.edu/1182808/Mirabehn_Gandhi_and_Beethoven?auto=download, accessed October 11, 2019.

³¹⁴ Harris, "Rolland, Gandhi, and Madeleine Slade," 581-2.

No other Western woman was as close to Gandhi as Mira Behn; she lived on Gandhi's ashrams for years, translated works for him, did his laundry, prepared his meals, and "performed the long bathing and massage rituals, so dear to him."³¹⁵ In her autobiography, Behn recalls spending most of the week "in a haze of inner sadness which I could not at the time explain to myself...(which) left me unable to recapitulate with any accuracy."³¹⁶ This trip with Gandhi was her first time back in England and Europe since leaving six years prior. Behn lost her sense of self in England due to the exhaustion and discipline that she forced on herself to help Gandhi prepare for the Conference and his various public meetings. She notes in her autobiography that "In order to maintain that discipline, I had, without realizing it, shut myself up in a self-imposed inner prison."³¹⁷ This could be said of her entire existence since leaving for India. In the six years since leaving for the subcontinent, she completely engulfed herself into her relationship with Gandhi and learned how to be of use to his movement overall. In her autobiography, she reflects on this as a "strange feeling which had been affecting me unconsciously in England also- a feeling of coming back to the scenes of my former free and independent life, but now under strict discipline."³¹⁸ One can surmise that having some free time to reflect on this monumental metamorphosis would leave one mixed feelings.³¹⁹ Yet, while Behn could not recall much about the week when penning her autobiography, she did have a copy of a multi-page letter that Rolland sent to an American friend that describes the events of the visit. Rolland, a very active writer, kept a diary in which he wrote detailed entries of this visit.

³¹⁵ Ibid, 590.

³¹⁶ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 120.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 146-7.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 119.

³¹⁹ I do not want to speak too much of Behn's mental health during this week with Rolland because she could not communicate her state of mind. In 2021, we are much more knowledgeable about mental health, and perhaps a scholar or scientist with more expertise with the state of mental health in historical actors could investigate this further. I am hesitant to speak on Behn's behalf and can only speculate given the material I have.

During their visit, Behn conversed with Rolland as she hung out Gandhi's laundry to dry. He noted in his diary how Behn spoke of her relationship with Gandhi as well as Gandhi's influence and attitude at the Ashram:

The dearer they are to him, the more he asks of them. He keeps an inflexible control over them, going beyond their words and their actions to their very thoughts. In fact, he is most pitiless of all with their bad thoughts, and he does not need to have them confessed to him; he reads in their minds and tears them from the depths of their souls before they have time to say anything. Everyone fears him, but they cherish him too...³²⁰

Behn embodied the "heavy psychological costs of being (all) at once a disciple, a daughter, and co-worker" of one of the most prominent figures in the world at that time.³²¹ It is during this time that there became more to Behn's relationship with Gandhi than pure selfless devotion and idolization that manifested themselves during her first years at the ashram. During this trip to England and Switzerland Behn began to express these conflicting emotions. However, she never once hinted at leaving Gandhi or returning to her old life. In his diary, Rolland recalls how "the admirable thing is that she has never for a day, or even an hour, felt any anxiety, boredom, or nostalgia."³²² Rolland was able to view the intimate relationship between Gandhi and Behn firsthand during their stay. Rolland talked to Gandhi about the moral and social state of continental Europe and the terrors of fascism.³²³ Rolland saw in Gandhi a "pragmatic leader to inspire European pacifism;" however, Gandhi did not wish to fulfill this role; Rolland was a man of action and planning, whereas Gandhi's practices were more pragmatic for the movement, Gandhi simply was not urgent enough in his actions for Rolland.³²⁴

³²⁰ Rolland, *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence*, 199.

³²¹ Harris, "Rolland, Gandhi, and Madeleine Slade," 597.

³²² Rolland, *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence*, 201.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 168, 172. Rolland and Gandhi communicated primarily verbally during this visit with his sister, Madeleine Rolland (not to be confused with Behn's birth name, Madeleine), and Mira Behn translating.

³²⁴ Harris, "Rolland, Gandhi, and Madeleine Slade," 592.

While this in some ways was a mere visit between three individuals from vastly different worlds, Rolland's hope for Gandhi is representative of how incorrect Western perspectives of Gandhi could be. Much of the Western world viewed him as a possible savior to all the world's problems or even a mystic with untold supernatural powers. Rolland recalls in his diary one Italian lady who wanted to know if Gandhi would write back and tell her the ten winning numbers for the next Lotto.³²⁵ In reality, Gandhi was just a man with his own political and social agenda and way of doing things. Rolland was just one of many who wished to make more of Gandhi than he really was. Behn was key to de-mystifying the man and ideology of Gandhi.

In a letter to Rolland from Gandhi prior to this meeting in December 1931, Gandhi wrote that Behn would be the "bridge between (the) East and West."³²⁶ Gandhi was not the messiah, the second coming, or the Maitreya some Westerners wanted him to be in the peculiar tradition among Western intellectuals who saw South-Asia as the source of all wisdom and spirituality and the key to the creation of a perfectly harmonious spiritual global civilization. Gandhi was not another Jiddu Krishnamurti, Theosophy's fallen savior, but a man who sought a more equitable deal for his people, a political leader, as Behn tried to show.³²⁷ While not much came from this meeting in December 1931, it was indicative of much more ideological confusion across the Western world. Behn went on to prove that she was, indeed, that very bridge between two worlds, as Gandhi had suggested.

From Switzerland, Gandhi, Mira Behn, and few companions traveled to Italy and met with fascist leader, Benito Mussolini.

³²⁵ Rolland, *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence*, 163.

³²⁶ Harris, "Rolland, Gandhi, and Madeleine Slade," 587.

³²⁷ For more Krishnamurti and Theosophy, see his biography on *J. Krishnamurti*, available at: <https://jkrishnamurti.org/biography>, accessed July 15, 2020. See the introduction of this project and Arthur H. Nethercot, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant* for more on Theosophy in Britain and India.

Gandhi, Mira Behn, and Mussolini, December 1931

To watch the faces of the two leaders as they talked was a unique study in contrasts.

-Mira Behn to Rolland about the discussion between Gandhi and Mussolini³²⁸

During their visit, Rolland warned Gandhi that what would be awaiting him in Fascist Italy was “underhand attempts to annex him to their cause... for there is not a single brutal dictatorship in the world today that does not seek to mask its true character hypocritically under the aegis of some pure and true idealists.”³²⁹ Rolland had no need to worry: Gandhi did not leave Italy a newly recruited Fascist.

Gandhi expressed interest in meeting both Benito Mussolini and Pope Pius XI. According to Niloufer Bhagwat,

Gandhi’s moral and political influence in the world reached such heights that leaders and heads of state of even fascist movements in Europe desired to meet him... [Gandhi, himself, was] politically curious about fascist political movements spreading across Europe.³³⁰

During their short stay in Italy, Gandhi and company stayed with a friend of Rolland’s, General Moris.³³¹ They visited the Vatican but were unable to meet the Pope (to Gandhi’s

³²⁸ Mira Behn, *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence*, 240.

³²⁹ Rolland, *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence*, 172.

³³⁰ Niloufer Bhagwat, “Mahatma Gandhi: His Political Relevance and Global Impact,” *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues*, 18, no.1, (Spring (January-March) 2014): 50-63, 56-7. While Gandhi himself was no communist, one can draw parallels between his ideals and those of imprisoned Italian communist leader, Antonio Gramsci. Both believed in the negative effects of materialism and capitalism and to Gramsci, fascism “modernizes the economy repressively by liquidating the free organizations of the working class and forcibly conscripting them into the ‘corporate’ economy and state,” (see, David Forgacs, “Introduction to Passive Revolution, Caesarism, Fascism,” in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988), available at: muse.jhu.edu/book/34790, accessed August 4, 2021). Gandhi expressed similar views in terms of machines replacing the spinning wheel and spinner. Gramsci’s and Hungarian Marxist, Georg Lukacs’ idea of a cultural hegemony within capitalism combining with economic control of the means of production, is exactly what was occurring in British-controlled India during this era with the British having stripped India of its cloth industry and forcing English-mill cloth on the population.

³³¹ I could not find much on General Moris outside of his mention in Rolland’s correspondence and Behn’s autobiography- and each just refer to him as “General Moris.” He is referred to as “General Maurizio Mario Moris, a pioneer of Italian military aviation and old friend of Rolland’s” in Deirdre Pirro, “Mahatma Gandhi’s Italian visit: A meeting of Mohandas and Mussolini,” *The Florentine*, issue 253, February 6, 2019, available at: <https://www.theflorentine.net/2019/02/06/mahatma-gandhi-italian-visit-mussolini/>, accessed July 15, 2020. In K. Natwar Singh, “How Mussolini used Tagore and Gandhi,” Moris is referred to as “General Moris Monte,” however “Monto Mario” was his villa, (K. Natwar Singh, “How Mussolini used Tagore and Gandhi,” *The Sunday Guardian Live*, February 23, 2019, available at: <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/opinion/mussolini-used-tagore-gandhi>,

disappointment).³³² While Behn could not remember much from the week with Rolland, she does recall the meeting with Mussolini in Rome in her autobiography.

The meeting occurred on December 12, 1931, at 6pm and lasted a mere ten minutes.³³³ Mussolini rose as soon as Gandhi entered the room, met him in the middle of the room, and addressed Gandhi and Mira Behn directly. At the time, Behn did not realize the significance of this gesture, but she was later informed that Mussolini would “often not even raise his eyes when callers entered the room.”³³⁴ Mussolini was interested in learning about India but was more enthusiastic when ending the meeting insisting that Gandhi see “everything” while in Rome—particularly the maternity and children’s welfare centers, and to be shown a “display of the Balilla- little boys trained to military exercises and drill.”³³⁵ While Mussolini did not spend an inordinate amount of time with Gandhi, this gesture demonstrates some truth to Rolland’s warning. I posit that Mussolini wanted Gandhi to see a version of Fascist Italy scrubbed clean and to report exactly what he saw to any representatives of the press that may ask. However, as

accessed July 15, 2020). Singh’s article states the meeting between Mussolini and Gandhi lasted 20 minutes, however, other sources agree on ten minutes.

³³² In his diary, Gandhi notes how he was provided with a state car to use for travel in Milan on route to Rome and how “large crowds gathered on the way.” Gandhi, “Excerpts from London Diary, Rome, Friday, December 11,” *Gandhi: The Last Eighteen Years*, 70. According to Mario Prayer, The British Embassy in Italy most likely interfered with Gandhi’s attempt to meet the Pope because of the implications of a meeting between Gandhi and the Pope that might arise: “In this way, Gandhi might have claimed the Pope’s sanction to nationalist campaigns, and induce Indian Christians to actively participate in them” (Mario Prayer, “The Vatican Church and Mahatma Gandhi’s India, 1920-1948,” *Social Scientist* 37, no. 1/2 (2009): 39-63, 44).

³³³ Gandhi, “Excerpts from London Diary, Rome, Saturday, December 12,” *Gandhi: The Last Eighteen Years*, 70; Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 151.

³³⁴ Behn, *The Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 151.

³³⁵ Ibid.

previously stated, Gandhi remained unconvinced about Italy's progress and untainted by any fascist leanings.³³⁶

Soon after, Gandhi, Mira Behn, and company left Italy to return to India.

Conclusion

When Gandhi returned to India in late December 1931, the relationship between India and Britain was more strained than when Gandhi had left for the Conference almost half a year earlier. During his travels back, Gandhi had decided to renew the Civil Disobedience Campaign in response to the lack of progress during British-Indian negotiations. However, the situation in India had deteriorated in Gandhi's absence. There had been terrorist attacks in Bengal, while civil disobedience had recurred in the Frontier Provinces, and a no-rent campaign was escalating in the United Provinces.³³⁷ In Britain, Churchill, supported by the rising Conservatives, had refused to see Gandhi while he was there and was "delighted to see progress blocked by the division between Hindus and Muslims, of which he made so much."³³⁸ This tension was further inflamed by the announcement of harsher Emergency Power Ordinances in December 1931 which further restricted the rights of Indians to speak out against the injustices committed against

³³⁶ Gandhi and Rolland disagreed on how well Mussolini treated the general populace. Gandhi once wrote to Rolland that "it also seems to me the bulk of Italians liked Mussolini's iron rule," and Rolland responded saying that Gandhi did not spend enough time in Italy and only saw "those who support the regime," (Gandhi and Rolland, *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence*, 242, 246). Gandhi was misrepresented in the Italian press, but he had gone to Italy knowing that his words may be misconstrued or misrepresented to fit the Italian press' (Mussolini's) needs, much like his words and actions were in the British press. (see Mahadev Desai (Gandhi's secretary), *Romain Rolland and Gandhi correspondence*, 225). As time went on, especially during World War Two, Gandhi realized Mussolini's and fascism's real impact on Italy and "recognized that the material advance under fascism was of no avail since the whole system denied freedom and was based on force. These dictators (Mussolini and Hitler), he felt were showing to the rest of the world how efficiently could violence be worked when it was not encumbered by hypocrisy or weakness masquerading as a humanitarianism: they were showing the world how hideous, terrible, and terrifying violence looked in its nakedness" (see Rashmi-Sudha Puri, "Gandhi and the Second World War," *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 1 (1977): 30-53, 34).

³³⁷ Low, *Britain and Indian Nationalism*, 178.

³³⁸ Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*, 91.

them. Yet, while relations between India and Britain worsened after the Conference, it had not been a complete waste of time for the movement, in particular for Mira Behn.

During this international adventure, Behn was able to reflect on how much she had changed and grown over the six years since leaving her home. She demonstrated how she was the “bridge” that Gandhi wanted her to be for the movement. At the onset of the Conference, Mira Behn was just coming into her own with the movement. As demonstrated in Chapter One, she gained some experience traveling across India promoting the movement, but in London in 1931, she was able to hone different skills that could ultimately aid the movement. She continued to demonstrate to Gandhi, and to those around him who were high-ranking figures in the Indian independence movement, that she was willing and capable of doing anything that may be of service to the movement from washing clothes to preparing meals. She demonstrated to the British people through her open deference to Gandhi during the Conference that the British culture, race, or class status was not superior to that of the Indian people, despite how she may have been represented in the press. She was able to act as an interpreter and combat misinformation about Gandhi, herself, and the movement. She was able to witness how Gandhi communicated not only with the upper echelon of British society and government but also with the general populace. She subsequently used these communication tactics and styles later when she toured internationally without Gandhi to promote the movement for India’s independence later in 1934.

Upon her return to India in December 1931, Behn took a leadership role in the Civil Disobedience Campaign by creating a *Weekly Report* that was distributed internationally informing readers of what was happening in India with regards to movement. She returned to

India a committed and valuable member of the independence movement who had proven her worth to Gandhi and others and was ready to face whatever challenge came next.

CHAPTER THREE: A LEADER EMERGES: MIRA BEHN AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Introduction

Mira Behn proved that she was an asset to Gandhi and the Indian independence movement through her khadi solo tours and her work with the Second Round Table Conference. Yet, Mira Behn did not have a lot of practice with the key form of protest of the movement: civil disobedience. This was in part because Gandhi did not personally participate in any large civil disobedience campaigns in the latter part of the 1920s when Behn joined him. As previously discussed in Chapter One, Gandhi's earlier civil disobedience campaigns were not very successful which caused him to turn his attention to khadi work.³³⁹ However, the British became more and more coercive towards the end of the 1920s, and it became clear to Gandhi and the rest of the Indian National Congress that it was time to revive the nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns.

Gandhi did not, however, allow Mira Behn to directly participate in these campaigns (Gandhi has a policy for his Western followers not allowing them to directly participate in civil disobedience campaigns). Gandhi initially only allowed her to continue her khadi tours and work in the ashram. Nonetheless, in response to Gandhi's several imprisonments during this era, Behn found herself called to do more for the movement. She took it upon herself to publish several internationally-distributed publications that brought renewed global attention to the civil disobedience campaigns, the violent British oppression, and the movement as a whole. Through her work with Gandhi and her own "Western" background, Behn was able to cultivate

³³⁹ Civil Disobedience and the Constructive Program which khadi was a part of were vital to Indian independence.

relationships with sympathizers for the movement across the world, particularly in America, Switzerland, France, and England.³⁴⁰ I argue that her publications and work during these early 1930s civil disobedience campaigns demonstrate that Behn was vital in ensuring that information about the movement reached an international audience and that she grew during this era to from being a participant in the Indian independence movement to a leader of the movement.

The Salt March: The New Beginnings of the Civil Disobedience Campaign³⁴¹

Here was an army such as had never been seen, devoid of all physical arms, only eighty strong, and marching off in joyous confidence to overthrow the greatest empire of the world.

-Mira Behn in *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*³⁴²

In the late 1920s, the Indian National Congress sought a compromise with the British Government, that of dominion status, as already enjoyed by other parts of the empire. A 1926 declaration by the Cabinet minister Arthur Balfour claimed that any “dominion” within the British Empire would be considered an “equal” and “autonomous” part of the Empire “in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.”³⁴³

Countries holding dominion status were Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. In response, Jawaharlal Nehru and other Indian National Congress members declared that the

³⁴⁰ This chapter utilizes as a key source the *Richard Bartlett Gregg Papers*, particularly the correspondence of Gregg and his copies of Behn's *Weekly Reports*. Gregg was an American philosopher and non-violence theorist who spent time with Behn and Gandhi at Sabarmati Ashram in the late 1920s. This chapter very much focuses on the American side of Behn's international relationships. But Behn had friends and allies in ex-patriot Frenchman, Romain Rolland, as well as the network that she helped cultivate during her early life in England and during her time there at the Second Round Table Conference. The *Richard Bartlett Gregg Papers* are housed at Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

³⁴¹ While not related to Gandhi or his movement, an interesting fact is that one of the earliest non-violent forms of resisting British domination was a temporary switch from drinking English dark ale to German light beer, (Wilson, *India Conquered*, 358-9).

³⁴² Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Digital Edition, 92.

³⁴³ *Imperial Conference, 1926*, 3, available at:

https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/cth11_doc_1926.pdf, accessed January 21, 2021.

British Government grant India dominion status by the end of 1929.³⁴⁴ When dominion status was not granted, on December 31, 1929,

Nehru hoisted the Tri-Color flag, signifying Indian independence. Gandhi proclaimed that people all over the country should fly the flag on January 26, 1930, and on that day take a pledge of independence... The Congress Working Committee authorized Gandhi to begin civil disobedience when he thought the time was appropriate.³⁴⁵

A few days later it was decided by Congress that January 26 of every year would be celebrated as Independence Day. On the first Independence Day in 1930, “some Union Jacks were burned; some new Indian flags were flown,” but its importance lay in the fact that it was the “first symbolic step towards civil disobedience.”³⁴⁶ The actual first act of this new campaign was the Salt March.

Also called the “Dandi March,” the Salt March was a 241-mile march by Gandhi and 79 of his Sabarmati Ashram men, beginning in Ahmedabad on March 12, 1930, and ending on April 5, 1930 in Dandi; it became “Gandhi’s largest mass mobilization, involving the participation of hundreds of thousands of women and men all over India.”³⁴⁷ The concept behind the Salt March was that Gandhi, when he reached Dandi in April, went down to the sea, collected seawater, and made his own salt. The decision to choose salt as a self-manufactured product, like khadi, was a very conscious choice for Gandhi. Salt as a civil disobedience tool was ripe with potential benefits for the independence movement. The 1882 Salt Act taxed locally-manufactured salt and

³⁴⁴ “Dominion Status,” *Indian National Congress*, available at: <https://neo.inc.in/brief-history-of-congress/1925-1935>, accessed January 21, 2021.

³⁴⁵ Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Last Eighteen Years*, eds Olmsted, Heller, and Olmsted, 27.

³⁴⁶ Arthur Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill: The Epic Rivalry that Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age*, (Banton Dell: New York, 2008), 332; Md. Khairul Anam, “The Salt Satyagraha movement, 1930-31: A Case Study on the Nature of its Impact on Murshidabad (W.B.),” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 68 (2007), 806-24, 806.

³⁴⁷ Suchitra Balasubrahmanyam, “Imagining the Indian Nation: The Design of Gandhi’s Dandi March and Nehru’s Republic Day Parade,” in *Designing Worlds: National Design Histories in an Age of Globalization*, eds Fallan Kjetil and Lees-Maffei Grace, 108-24, (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016). This particular source states that the March ended on April 6, but other sources say that the March ended on April 5.

forced the local Indian population to purchase British-made salt, which “made up 8.2% of the government’s revenues,” and by 1930, half the price paid by the consumer represented the tax.³⁴⁸

Salt was a way to unify the people of India under one cause. Everyone used salt and paid the salt tax: rich, poor, Muslim, Hindu.³⁴⁹ Private salt winning/sifting was a way to get massive participation in the campaign. While only the men from Sabarmati marched with Gandhi from the beginning to the end of the march, thousands of people, joined up with him for a while from the various villages they passed. Gandhi required each man on the Salt March to pray, spin, and keep a daily diary.³⁵⁰ In Nadiad, Gandhi attracted 20,000 people and in Broach, 15,000.³⁵¹

Women were drawn in because salt was used in their everyday lives in the kitchens; teenagers and children got involved by forewarning picketers about incoming police.³⁵² Newspapers and media outlets from India and abroad came out to ask questions and take pictures. A scholar of Lord Irwin’s viceroyalty, S. Gopal, describes the March as

The sight of this old man marching along the dusty road, without arms and without allies, to do battle with the British Empire stirred the hearts of men not only in India, but throughout the world.³⁵³

However, it was not just the press who were interested in the March. The British Government took notice as well. When Gandhi began the civil disobedience campaign, the British responded with seven new ordinances which included:

Executive authorities were given greater power to control the press, to pickets and boycotts, and to punish agitators who tried to persuade the peasants not to pay their land revenues; (and) martial law was proclaimed in Sholapur.³⁵⁴

³⁴⁸ Walter Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown: The British Betrayal of India*, (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2016), 36; S. Gopal, *The Viceroyalty of Lord Irwin, 1926-1931*, (London: Oxford UP, 1957), 56.

³⁴⁹ Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill*, 333.

³⁵⁰ Ahmed, *Mohandas Gandhi: Experiments in Civil Disobedience*, 101.

³⁵¹ Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill*, 336.

³⁵² Rekha Pande, "The History of Feminism and Doing Gender in India," *Estudos Feministas* 26, no. 3 (2018): 1-17, 6.

³⁵³ Gopal, *The Viceroyalty of Lord Irwin*, 60.

³⁵⁴ William Roy Smith, *Nationalism and Reform in India*, (New York/London: Kennikat Press, 1938), 263.

Wherever Gandhi was, the police could be found as well. Gandhi anticipated arrest throughout his Salt March; yet, he was never arrested during his progress from Ahmedabad to Dandi. He was, however, arrested mere weeks after reaching Dandi, in May. For, the disobedience campaign had not ended with Gandhi's arrival at the coast the previous month. It triggered a nation-wide civil disobedience campaign that expanded to include the picketing of liquor shops, the boycott of foreign cloth, and persuading Indian officials to resign from their posts in the colonial administration.³⁵⁵ Police violence soared in India as men, women, and children took to the streets in processions protesting British dominance. Scholar D.A. Low describes a May 1930 procession in his text *Britain and Indian Nationalism* where 200 congress volunteers carried "national flags and singing the usual national songs...walked in pairs and kept carefully to the left side of the road."³⁵⁶ When participants refused to end the procession upon police order,

Mounted police thereupon moved forward down both sides of the road to separate the processionists from the watching crowd- and were not altogether sparing in the use of their batons. They then attempted to remove the processionists- but failed. For the leaders now ordered them to sit or lie down so that the horses of the police would shy away from them... Evidently some of the processionists now resisted the attempt of the police to snatch their flags and carry them off... Twenty minutes of brutal, and in the end quite indiscriminate, police flogging then ensued... There were Congress reports that eight to ten people had been killed and that 219 cases of injury were registered that night. (British reports were significantly different and documented a less violent outcome).³⁵⁷

There were several repercussions to the violent suppression of these demonstrations. One was the temporary halt of civil disobedience between March and December 1931 due to the agreement between Gandhi and Viceroy Lord Irwin in preparation for the Second Round Table

³⁵⁵ Jawahar Lal Verma, "Salt Satyagraha (1930) in Kaimur (Bihar)," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 73 (2012), 619-23, 621; R.J. Moore, *The Crisis of Indian Unity, 1917-1940*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 171.

³⁵⁶ D.A. Low, *Britain and Indian Nationalism: The Imprint of Ambiguity, 1929-1942*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 102.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 103-4.

Conference.³⁵⁸ A second repercussion was the outlawing of the Indian National Congress and its committees, where the Congress and anyone affiliated now had their correspondence pilfered through and censored.³⁵⁹ Another was the increased participation of women in civil disobedience activities.

Women and Civil Disobedience

As previously stated, Gandhi brought 79 men from Sabarmati along with him for the Dandi March. Initially, for Gandhi, women were mostly to dedicate themselves “reconstruct the nation from within the household and to resolve violent disputes through her own essentially nonviolent, family-oriented nature.”³⁶⁰ However, Gandhi quickly discovered that women could be involved in civil disobedience in a multitude of ways. According to scholars Madhu Kishwar and Debali Mookerjea-Leonard, “Gandhi viewed women not as passive recipients of humanitarian initiatives, but as active agents with a capacity for self-determination.”³⁶¹ In a way, the Salt March, and the corresponding civil disobedience of the early 1930s, allowed, much like with the production of khadi, for women to do their own D.I.Y nonviolent campaigns to correspond with their comfort levels.³⁶² According to Rekha Pande,

The manufacture of salt, in defiance to British laws prohibiting such manufacture had a lot of symbolic value for the women. Here was a very private issue linked to the daily lives of people in the kitchen, brought to the forefront of the public realm and a large number of women from villages also joined Gandhiji at Dandi.³⁶³

³⁵⁸ For more on the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, see Chapter Two.

³⁵⁹ Ahmed, *Mohandas Gandhi*, 84; When Gandhi left Sabarmati Ashram to embark on the Salt March he pledged not to return until India was free. He never ended up returning to Sabarmati, and he and Mira Behn resided in Wardha from the mid-1930s onward, (Dr. R.V. Rao, *Sevagram: Gandhiji's Ashram and other Institutions in Wardha*, (Sevagram Ashram Publications, 1969), 2).

³⁶⁰ Rebecca M. Klenk, *Educating Activists: Development and Gender in the Making of Modern Gandhians*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 2.

³⁶¹ Debali Mookerjea-Leonard, "To Be Pure or Not to Be: Gandhi, Women, and the Partition of India." *Feminist Review*, no. 94 (2010): 38-54, 40; Madhu Kishwar, "Gandhi on Women." *Economic and Political Weekly* 20, no. 40 (1985): 1691-702, 1691.

³⁶² For more on khadi, see Chapter One.

³⁶³ Pande, "History of Feminism," 6.

Suruchi Thapar-Bjorkert states that women were able to participate in the civil disobedience campaigns of the early 1930s because during this time society allowed for a “domestication of the public sphere.”³⁶⁴ Indian women, especially those of the middle-classes, typically were kept segregated from men except their husband or father, but this did not mean that the public civil disobedience campaign could not find its way into the private sphere.

Some women solely participated in civil disobedience from their homes. They could listen in on the discussions among male family members and discuss the ideas with other women, sing patriotic songs to their children or other women, or prepare meals for local protestors.³⁶⁵

The women in Congress leader Jawaharlal Nehru’s family set a precedent for other women when they began to participate in civil disobedience and further allowed for a blending of the private and public spheres; this idea spread further with Gandhi’s support of women and their involvement in the campaign, even if only if they had the approval of their family and their household duties, such as childcare, covered by someone else.³⁶⁶

Women from all walks of life involved themselves in civil disobedience. As Mira Behn described in her autobiography, women came out of seclusion to join the movement, “from rich ladies of Bombay making salt out of seawater to poor peasant women scratching salt off the ground near their villages”³⁶⁷ Some women did not just want to help from their homes. There were women at Sabarmati Ashram, Mira Behn included, who wished to join Gandhi on his

³⁶⁴ Suruchi Thapar-Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), 22.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 174, 177, 180, 205.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 66, 77-8; In fact, some women were not particularly interested in civil disobedience, but participated at the urging of their family (much like the women who lived in Gandhi’s ashrams simply did so because their husbands did). Nehru’s mother hated the publicity that civil disobedience from such a prominent family brought; many women did not truly care for civil disobedience but would participate in not wearing foreign cloth just to support their fellow woman, (*ibid.*, 82, 113).

³⁶⁷ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, Adobe Digital Edition, 93.

March and Gandhi had to “console” them by promising that “sanitation work and spinning were equally as important as picketing.”³⁶⁸ Yet, women did not stay in the background of the civil disobedience campaign for long.

Women who felt comfortable enough to do so (and had the approval of their family), stepped out into the streets and participated in anti-government processions with other women: upwards of 5000 to 6000 women participated in the processions during this era.³⁶⁹ Shortly after the demonstrations began, the police subsequently began to arrest most involved in them. As Low’s procession description of the 1930 demonstration shows above, women began leading them after the men were arrested. It was initially believed that police would behave less aggressively towards the women, but they too suffered from police brutality, and eventually faced imprisonment.³⁷⁰ While the movement for Indian independence did not have a major impact on women’s rights as a whole in India during this era, women stepped in and took over when the men were arrested which led to them developing a “critical consciousness about their role and rights in Independent India.”³⁷¹

As a prominent woman in the movement during this period, Mira Behn expanded her work for independence from solely khadi manufacturing and tours to writing for numerous publications and utilizing the movement’s international network of friends and allies of the movement to get word out about the Indian independence movement’s civil disobedience, and the brutal political response.

³⁶⁸ Mark Thomson, *Gandhi and his Ashrams*, (Mumbai: Popolar Prakashan Pvt. Ltd, 1993), 142, available at: https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/Gandhi_and_his_Ashrams.pdf, accessed January 28, 2021.

³⁶⁹ Bjorket, *Women in the Indian National movement*, 58.

³⁷⁰ For more on colonial prisons and female prisoners, see Chapter Four.

³⁷¹ Pande, "History of Feminism," 7; Bjorket also expresses a similar argument in her text. Bjorket, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, 25.

Mira Behn and Civil Disobedience

One of the first things that occurred in British newspapers after Gandhi's departure for Dandi in March was the announcement that Madeleine Slade, the daughter of Admiral Slade, "will be in charge of Gandhi's ashram" in his absence, which is a completely incorrect statement, but not a surprising one.³⁷² In his absence, Gandhi left the women, as a group, in charge of running the ashram and not just Mira Behn on her own. However, it was very common for the British press to misrepresent Mira Behn's role in the movement and alongside Gandhi as an almost equal partner. This suited the narrative the papers were selling to their audiences, whether it be to undermine her impact to minimize the success of the movement or to exaggerate her role because she was a British aristocrat and would "naturally" be viewed as a co-leader. Stating that she was left in charge of Sabarmati would help propagate the narrative of British cultural superiority. Given this alleged superiority, of course Gandhi would have no choice but to leave Mira Behn in charge, since it was "the white woman's burden to lead," in an awkward version of Kipling's earlier adage. This statement was so widely diffused by the British that Gandhi felt the need to publish a rebuttal in his weekly internationally syndicated publication, *Young India*, entitled "Mirabai Not Manager."³⁷³ In this article, he clarified that Mira Behn had been left in charge of the sanitation department of the ashram and that "No member of the Ashram has striven more strenuously than Mirabai to observe the rules of the Ashram and to realize its ideals...but, she is not the head of the Ashram."³⁷⁴ While she was not left in charge of Sabarmati during the Salt March or during Gandhi's subsequent imprisonments, she found her own way to contribute to the movement outside of ashram work by writing articles for *Young India*. Through

³⁷² "Who's Who: Miss Madeleine Slade," appeared on March 14, 1930 in both *The Nottingham Journal*, 4, *British Newspaper Archive*, and *the Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 4, *British Newspaper Archive*.

³⁷³ Mahatma Gandhi, "Mirabai Not Manager," *Young India*, March 27, 1930, CWMG, vol. 48, 489.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

her work for *Young India*, she brought attention to the issue of police brutality. In “Exemplary Behavior of the Police,” in the June 12, 1930 issue of *Young India*, she provided graphic descriptions of police brutality against protestors:

Here was a young man with his shoulders and buttocks so beaten that he could not be on his back, yet his arms and sides were so damaged as well, that he did not how to turn for rest. There was another gasping for breath with his chest badly battered; and nearby was a tall, strong Musalman lying utterly helpless...The Satyagrahis were ready to accept unresistingly the legal punishment of arrest and imprisonment, but the authorities thought it preferable to employ other methods.³⁷⁵

Those “other methods” included lathi blows to the head, chest, and stomach, tearing off loin-cloths and thrusting of sticks or lathis into in private parts, and pressing and squeezing testicles until a man became unconscious.³⁷⁶

However, she felt that solely publishing in *Young India* was not enough and created her own publications *News in India* and *Weekly Reports* to get information about the Indian independence movement out into the world. She utilized her international network to help spread the information from her publications. One key friend was Richard Bartlett Gregg.

Mira Behn and Richard Bartlett Gregg

Between 1925 and 1929, the American social philosopher and nonviolence theorist, Richard Bartlett Gregg stayed at Sabarmati Ashram and worked with Mira Behn.³⁷⁷ The two continued corresponding throughout the 1930s once he had returned to America. In her letters to Gregg, Mira Behn described the events occurring in India related to Gandhi and the movement and, beginning in late 1930, she began sending Gregg copies of her publications. In Gregg’s correspondence to Behn as well as Jawaharlal Nehru, one learns more about American opinion

³⁷⁵ Mira Behn, “The Exemplary Behavior of the Police,” *Young India*, June 12, 1930, Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 58-9.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁷⁷ Richard Bartlett Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence*, ed. James Tully, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2018), Xi-xii; Kevin Stuart Lee, “Abstract,” *Richard Bartlett Gregg Papers Finding Aid*, available at: http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/ead/detail.html?id=EAD_upenn_rbml_PUSpMsColl954, accessed January 28, 2021.

of the Indian independence movement. In a letter to Nehru, Gregg noted the admiration of Britain that many Americans had for him and how Gregg tried to educate others about Gandhi and the independence movement:

The struggle has excited me so much that I could not do anything all the past year but try to understand Indian events from afar and try to help Americans to understand and appreciate the real situation. It is not easy, for so many here are filled with admiration of Britain and are so easily flattered by Britain propagandists... Most of our rich people, educated people, and government officials are much flattered by any chance to associate with British sirs, lords, or royalty.³⁷⁸

However, in a letter to Behn, he shared a more optimistic viewpoint:

It seems to me that there are two important effects of continued nonviolent resistance- the gradual breakdown of British morale and the slowly increasing unity of India...I think American opinion is slowly growing more and more skeptical of British ability to win in India.³⁷⁹

Gregg's viewpoints on American opinion were key because it allowed for Mira Behn to gauge the reception of hers and other nationalist publications in America. It also helped inform her subsequent decision to tour America in 1934.³⁸⁰

In letters to Gregg in 1930, Behn discussed her current involvement in the movement and the various plights suffered from the civil disobedience campaigners, also known as *Satyagrahis*: "I (Behn) have been made Vice President of the FCBC (Foreign Cloth Boycott Committee)," and "Among the latest tortures (to civil disobedience campaigners) have been after beating and

³⁷⁸ Richard Bartlett Gregg, "July 20, 1931," *Richard Bartlett Gregg Papers*.

³⁷⁹ Richard Bartlett Gregg, "February 3, 1931," *Richard Bartlett Gregg papers*. The letter itself is addressed to "My Dear Sister" rather than Mira Behn, but I believe that this letter is written to Behn because the contents, style, and format of the letter are similar to other correspondence between Gregg and Behn. Also, Gregg and Behn typically referred to each other as "brother" and "sister," respectively. That was the custom at Gandhi's ashram. Gregg's name was Govindbhai/Brother Govind.

³⁸⁰ For more on Behn's tour of America, see Chapter Five. There were several associations and people that informed Americans about the conditions of the indigenous population in India. One of these was the India League of America. The League wanted "complete independence of India," and a "closer cultural relationship between India and America as a means of promoting better understanding between East and west," (India League of America, "Information about the India League of America" *Peace Collection*, South Asian Digital Archive at Swarthmore College, available at: <https://www.saada.org/item/20120712-729>, accessed June 14, 2021).

ducking in water, to rub mud into satyagrahi's eyes, noses, and mouths until they have all fainted, to pump air and water in satyagrahi's ear breaking the drum."³⁸¹ Her letters to Gregg also indicated the growing interference and censorship by the British government; in one December 1930 letter, Behn noted that "it seemed that all my letters for abroad were getting tampered with" and "now that I have begun editing a paper, practically all my letters are likely to be interfered with."³⁸² This paper was Behn's first attempt at producing her own publication, *News of India*.

News of India and the Suspension of Civil Disobedience

The more one tries to collect correct news, the more one realizes the terrific force of the repression now at work.

-Mira Behn to Richard Bartlett Gregg, November 1930³⁸³

On December 30, 1930, *The Bombay Chronicle* published an article announcing the upcoming release of Mira Behn's new weekly new publication, *News of India*.

We are glad to learn that a new English weekly entitled the "News of India" will shortly appear in Ahmedabad under the editorship of Mira Ben (Miss Slade). It is said it will contain selected brief news of special national interest from all provinces, a few notes, and occasional articles, weekly news of Mahatmaji's health and an English translation of his weekly discourses addressed to the members of Sabarmati Ashram... [The] paper will be priced at one anna and will be issued on each Wednesday.³⁸⁴

The first issue of *News of India* was published December 24, 1930. Through this publication, Mira Behn could inform readers about the day-to-day aspects of civil disobedience. Since the days of the Dandi March, civil disobedience had grown to include boycotts, protests, and refusal to pay taxes. These actions by the Satyagrahis came with repercussions. One repercussion was the seizure of items of value when not paying their taxes.³⁸⁵ There were also

³⁸¹ Mira Behn, "June 13, 1930," *Richard Bartlett Gregg papers*; Mira Behn, "Bihar Report, August 6, 1930," *Richard Bartlett Gregg papers*.

³⁸² Mira Behn, "December 25, 1930," *Richard Bartlett Gregg papers*, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

³⁸³ Mira Behn, "November 29, 1930," *Richard Bartlett Gregg papers*, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

³⁸⁴ "News of India," *The Bombay Chronicle*, December 20, 1930, 8, *Granth Sanjeevani*.

³⁸⁵ Mira Behn ed., *News of India*, December 24, 1930. *Richard Bartlett Gregg papers*.

instances of houses mysteriously catching fire. Five houses were burned during the night between November 7 and 8, 1930. It was reported that

They were the houses of Patidars (members of an agrarian caste) who have not paid their land taxes and who are at present camping in the Baroda Territory...Police made no attempt to put out fire...No-body can exactly say who started the fires.³⁸⁶

Mira Behn edited two more issues of *News of India*. There is not much information on why publication stopped. However, in a letter to Gregg about the final issue, Mira Behn stated “I am glad to be relieved of this job, as I can now go back to khadi wholeheartedly.”³⁸⁷ In early 1931, Behn believed that her attention should be devoted to khadi production. News production about civil disobedience in India became a non-issue shortly afterward when between March 1931 and December 1931, the campaign was halted due to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and Gandhi’s participation in the Second Round Table Conference in London. However, this cessation of civil disobedience proved temporary once Gandhi and the Congress believed that nothing of merit was accomplished at the Conference and Behn had a change of heart in terms of her involvement in news publications. A focus on khadi production alone was no longer enough for her and when civil disobedience resumed in January 1932, Mira Behn felt the urge to publish again about the goings-on in India.

Weekly Reports, the Bombay Riot Reports, and the Resumption of Civil Disobedience

I felt something must be done about systematic collection of news from all over the country and its distribution abroad, as there was no chance of the full truth coming out through the Indian press, which was heavily censored.

- Mira Behn in *The Spirit’s Pilgrimage*³⁸⁸

Shortly after his return from London and the announcement of the revived civil disobedience campaign in early January 1932, Gandhi was arrested and sent to Yeravda Jail,

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Mira Behn, “January 9, 1931,” *Richard Bartlett Gregg Papers*.

³⁸⁸ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, Adobe Digital Edition, 126.

where he joined Nehru and other Congress members and leaders who had already been arrested when the Congress and its committees had been declared illegal.³⁸⁹ Upon Gandhi's arrest, Mira Behn relocated to Bombay to begin production of her newest weekly publication, the *Weekly Reports*. Behn recruited people from all walks of life to aid her in this publication and found crafty ways to get around the British censorship.

No sooner did I start work in Bombay, and people got to know what I was trying to do, than help began coming in from all quarters. Some people came to me in their usual garb, and others, who expected arrest, dressed in various styles. Rich and poor, all helped behind the scenes. I was given a typist, a typewriter, and cyclostyle. Such Congress workers as were still out of jail organized [a] very successful collection of authentic news by sending messengers to obtain firsthand information from various parts of the country, and news poured in. Some of it was firsthand, some secondhand, and some rumor. Out of all this I sorted, sifted, and finally selected only that which I felt to be thoroughly reliable, prepared a Weekly Report which I sent to friends in England, France, and America. In order to escape the censor, I used to send the typist with the envelopes to the main post office just at the air mail closing hour. There he would hurriedly pay the late-letter fee and get the envelopes popped into the bag at the moment it was being closed.³⁹⁰

Behn led this large and diverse group of people into producing a lengthy and informative weekly publication.³⁹¹ The *Weekly Reports* contained tens of pages of information each week, typically divided by region, and each *Report* sent to Richard Bartlett Gregg typically had a note attached to the front of it directly addressing him. The *Reports* contained information about disobedience campaigns, Congress news, police brutality, arrests, and convictions.

While Gandhi downplayed Behn's *Reports* in a letter to E.E. Doyle, the Inspector General of Prisons, as "confined purely to conducting the constructive khadi movement and reporting to friends in the West the present political happenings," many would not define Behn's

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 125, 126; Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 152-3.

³⁹⁰ Mira Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 155.

³⁹¹ Prior to her involvement with Gandhi, Behn had organized several concerts in England, so she had some experience with business organization. See the Introduction for more information about Behn's early life prior to joining Gandhi.

work as “confined” in this manner.³⁹² Across India, Britain, and even the rest of the world, Behn was becoming renowned for her role within the Indian independence movement not least because of the *Weekly Reports*.

In early 1932, *The Bombay Chronicle* sponsored a contest where contestants had to match the correct political symbol to the correct Indian leader, in which Behn was one of the “leaders” that had a symbol matched to her.³⁹³ Not only was Behn considered a leader, but an *Indian* leader. However, not all attention to her is positive attention. The British government quickly picked up on Behn’s “leader” status as well. They did not allow Behn to visit Gandhi in prison because she was “actively engaged in the furtherance of the civil disobedience movement.”³⁹⁴ About a month after publication of the *Weekly Reports* began, Behn suspected her own imprisonment was imminent. In the February 7, 1932, *Weekly Report* she noted that “In case of my own arrest I am endeavoring to make arrangements for the continuation of a regular supply of news.”³⁹⁵ She successfully made those arrangements. When she suspected that C.I.D spies were interfering with air mail, she arranged for the *Reports* to be shipped abroad via ocean mail.³⁹⁶ When she was arrested in mid-February, the *Reports* continued to be published and shipped without problem throughout August 1932 despite Behn’s imprisonment between mid-February and May 1932.³⁹⁷ Her influence in India and the movement was further demonstrated by Indians for it was reported in *The Bombay Chronicle* that

³⁹² Mahatma Gandhi, “Letter to E.E. Doyle, May 18, 1932,” *CWMG*, vol. 55, 389. Gandhi perhaps downplayed Behn’s role in an attempt to avoid her being arrested for her connection to the movement. This was fruitless, however, by the time this letter was sent, Behn had already been arrested and imprisoned once for her involvement.

³⁹³ “Political Symbol Competition,” *The Bombay Chronicle*, January 1, 1932, 10, *Granth Sanjeevani*.

³⁹⁴ Mahatma Gandhi, “Letter to E.E. Doyle, June 9, 1932,” *CWMG*, vol. 55, 489.

³⁹⁵ Mira Behn, *Weekly Report*, February 7, 1932, *Richard Bartlett Gregg papers*. Date is derived from personal note from Behn at front of *Report*.

³⁹⁶ Mira Behn, *Weekly Report*, February 11, 1932, *Richard Bartlett Gregg papers*. Date is derived from personal note from Behn at front of *Report*.

³⁹⁷ Mira Behn was imprisoned for three months between mid-February and May of 1932 and again arrested and imprisoned for 15 months starting in August 1932. For more about her time in prison, see Chapter Four.

On hearing the news of the arrest and conviction of Mira Behn (Miss Slade) a large number of shops in the main business localities were closed down and the merchants observed hartal (not working in protest) for the day.³⁹⁸

Upon her release from prison in May 1932, Behn took it upon herself to release a second publication, *The Bombay Riot Reports*, to address the ongoing violent riots occurring in Bombay during this time. While Gandhi's goal was that all resistance against the British should be nonviolent, much like his initial civil disobedience campaigns of the 1920s, he once again found himself in an India where not everyone believed that nonviolent resistance was the best path to independence. However, Behn quickly found that producing two reports was difficult and absorbed the *Riot Reports* into the *Weekly Reports*.

Behn also found that her *Reports*, while filled to the brim with information, were a lot for readers to take in, and in May 1932, made a conscious decision to note that the particular report was not going to have such an emphasis on arrests and convictions. She noted that

This week's reports contains very scanty news about arrests and convictions. That is not because arrests and convictions have fallen off. They continue pretty much as usual. But I have thought it better to cut down the news under that head; the same old story repeated week after weary week is apt to be tiring and may come to be looked-upon as common-place.³⁹⁹

She realized that if people were exposed to reading about such atrocities against other human beings on a regular basis that it may not seem as shocking or bad as it was being allowed to continue. People might become emotionally numb to the atrocities occurring.

The mail of those considered to be part of the Civil Disobedience Campaign also continued to be intercepted and tampered with. When a telegram from Mira Behn to Labour MP Tom Williams was intercepted it became international news, appearing in newspapers all over the United Kingdom and remained a topic of interest in these papers for months. The Indian

³⁹⁸ "Merchants Observe Hartal," *The Bombay Chronicle*, February 19, 1932, *Granth Sanjeevani*, 3.

³⁹⁹ Mira Behn, *Weekly Report*, May 15, 1932, *Richard Bartlett Gregg Papers*.

Government claimed that the material in the telegram was “objectional” and violated section 5 (1) b of the Indian Telegram Act, “which authorizes the detention of messages on the occurrence of any public emergency or in the interest of public safety.”⁴⁰⁰ Apparently, the British Government believed that whatever Mira Behn was writing about had an adverse effect on public safety. The irony of the entire situation is that the MP still received the message of the telegram because he received a copy of it via air mail and he openly stated to the press that there was nothing “objectionable” about the messages within the telegram.⁴⁰¹ One can assume that because a British MP was openly and repeatedly stating that the messages were not objectional that there was really nothing too horrid in the telegram and that the British Government was needlessly interjecting in Indian affairs. Because of the widespread attention that this interception got, people all over the United Kingdom got to read about the hypocrisies occurring under the British rule in India.

Throughout the early 1930s, the repression against Satyagrahis and those who supported them grew to the point that merely wearing khadi was perceived as an infraction against public laws. In a May 1932 *Weekly Report*, Behn commented that

Every person, especially if he is clad in home-spun, is followed by police from the moment he enters a small-town or village and in most cases arrested and deported before he goes very far or has had the time to see anything.⁴⁰²

In the summer of 1932, Mira Behn suffered from another malaria bout (something that she suffered from throughout her time in India).⁴⁰³ She had gone to Benares earlier in the

⁴⁰⁰ “House of Commons,” *Times*, 1 Mar. 1932, 9, *The Times Digital Archive*, available at: <http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS15201377/TDA&xid+333a3665>, accessed 22 July 2020.

⁴⁰¹ “India Telegram to British M.P. Stopped,” *Bristol Mirror*, February 11, 1932, 1, *British Newspaper Archive*. Similar announcements appeared in *The Times*, *The Sunderland Echo*, *Edinburgh Evening News*, *The Londonderry Sentinel*, *Trinity Mirror*, *The Western Morning News and Mercury*, *The Courier and Advertiser*, and the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* throughout February and March 1932.

⁴⁰² Mira Behn, *Weekly Report*, May 15, 1932, *Richard Bartlett Gregg Papers*.

⁴⁰³ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 164.

summer and returned to Bombay in the middle of August 1932. Immediately upon her arrival, she was served her second “Quit Bombay,” which she ignored and was subsequently arrested once more. Unfortunately, the *Weekly Reports* did not survive her second arrest.

While the *Weekly Reports* ended, civil disobedience continued throughout the early 1930s. The 1933 annual meeting of the Indian National Congress was raided by police where “delegate after delegate, as he stood up to move resolutions, was violently attacked by sergeants wielding lathis with all their might.”⁴⁰⁴ Protestors continued to wear khadi, boycott British goods, and march in the streets. The campaign seemingly died out by the middle of the 1930s after large amounts of protestors had been beaten and arrested.

Conclusion

The Civil Disobedience Campaign during the early 1930s “made clear how much damage Indian resistance could do to the financial position of the Raj.”⁴⁰⁵ Britain, already suffering the consequences of the 1929 global depression, felt that they could not handle any more financial losses, and this led some in the British government to want to include some of India’s business leaders and middle classes in developing a policy for the Raj to “survive.”⁴⁰⁶

With Indians boycotting British goods and cloth as well as producing their own salt, the need for reliance on the British became less apparent. With this Indian resistance came violent repression, oppression, and censorship from the British that garnered international attention.

During this period, Indian women began to emerge as actors in the independence movement on a larger scale. In 1933, American ally and friend of Gandhi, C.F. Andrews, noted that, “The women of India are taking a far more active part in the national movement than they

⁴⁰⁴ International Committee for India, “What Happened at Calcutta,” *Richard Bartlett Gregg Papers*.

⁴⁰⁵ Wilson, *India Conquered*, 437.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.* For more on policy changes in the Raj see Chapter 6 and the *Government of India Act, 1935*.

did ten or twelve years ago.”⁴⁰⁷ This was because civil disobedience could now be practiced in the confines of women’s social position. Khadi and salt production let them perform civil disobedience from their traditional private sphere. The British allowed their racist, classist, and sexist biases to cloud their judgement in assessing the impact women could have within the movement resulting in women communicating vital information to each other and other activists as well as using the ability to smuggle contraband literature and distribute nationalist propaganda in a less detectable way than their male counterparts.⁴⁰⁸ The boycotts and processions allowed for the women who chose to do so, to venture outside of their traditional space with ramifications that lasted long after independence in 1947.

Mira Behn had made a name for herself among the British by simply defying gender and class tradition by joining Gandhi in 1925. She cultivated her reputation across India with her khadi tours and re-emerged in London in 1931 networking and assisting Gandhi during the Second Round Table Conference. Her time in London garnered much global publicity and helped solidify Behn’s international fame as an assistant to Gandhi. During the civil disobedience campaigns of the early 1930s, however, Behn found herself working apart from Gandhi as he was away on the Dandi March and subsequently in prison. During this time, much like her solo khadi tours, Behn proved that she was much more than Gandhi’s personal assistant. She proved that she had the leadership skills to organize large and diverse groups of people to ensure that news about civil disobedience, police brutality, and the Indian independence movement as a whole, reached an international audience. She was able to ensure the continued production of her *Weekly Reports* while imprisoned. She cultivated friendships and alliances aside from with Gandhi that were to prove fruitful later in the struggle for Indian independence,

⁴⁰⁷ C.F. Andrews, “India Today,” December 1933, *Richard Bartlett Gregg Papers*.

⁴⁰⁸ Bjorket, *Women in the Indian National movement*, 199.

as will be further demonstrated in later chapters. However, Behn was not able to focus solely on news production and civil disobedience during the early 1930s. This is because she spent months going in and out of prison between 1932 and 1934. The next chapter will demonstrate what Behn was able to accomplish from prison.

CHAPTER FOUR: “A PRISONER HAS NO CHOICE:” MIRA BEHN, FEMALE POLITICAL PRISONERS, AND THE MOVEMENT FROM PRISON⁴⁰⁹

“You have chosen to enter the furnace. You must remain in it. My society is no easy job as you have seen all these years. Drink then the poison to the last dregs.”

-Gandhi to Mira Behn when both were imprisoned, 1932.⁴¹⁰

Introduction

Mira Behn’s *Weekly Reports* brought international attention to the Indian independence movement. Unfortunately, it also drew the attention of the British government. In her autobiography, Behn recalled that

Sir Samuel Hoare [Conservative British Cabinet member] made an angry reference in the House of Commons. He did not mention my name, but it was clear that he was referring to my reports, and within a few days I was served with a notice to quit Bombay.⁴¹¹

On or about February 15, 1932, Sir Patrick Kelly, commissioner of the police in Bombay, signed an order dictating that Mira Behn leave Bombay because of her persistent involvement in the Civil Disobedience Campaign:⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁹ Gandhi, “April 22, 1931,” in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhруд and Weber, 305. While there is an abundance of correspondence between Gandhi and Mira Behn during this time (mostly Gandhi to Mira Behn) a lot of it is Gandhi providing guidance to what types of books Behn should be reading, or about Gandhi’s continuously fluctuating weight, and his different dietary experiments and the resulting bowel movements. He advises her on a salt-less diet and different methods of including and removing milk from the diet. This kind of discussion is common throughout the duration of their relationship in their correspondence. Many factors should be considered in using this correspondence. For example, Gandhi was known to write in pencil and re-use letters, so much of what remains are Mira Behn’s copies, and we don’t have many copies of her letters to him. The government also intercepted the correspondence between the two of them whenever at least one was imprisoned, and there is at least one letter in which the government knowingly removed or crossed out information in a letter. Perhaps it intercepted a few which never reached their destination, which may have been destroyed.

⁴¹⁰ Gandhi, “September 20, 1932,” in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhруд and Weber, 322.

⁴¹¹ Behn, *The Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 156. Hoare held a variety of political positions throughout the timespan of the Indian independence movement. In May 1931, he became the Secretary of State for India just in time for the Second Round Table Conference.

⁴¹² Wireless to the *New York Times*, “Order Miss Slade to Leave Bombay,” February 17, 1932, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times*. 8, available at: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/99708785/20E894A07BD742EFPQ/9?accountid=14745>, accessed April 4, 2020. For more on the Civil Disobedience Campaign see Chapter 3. Some sources say February 16 while others state February 15. The order in the Richard Bartlett Gregg Papers states February 15.

Whereas I am satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that you have been acting are about to act in a manner prejudicial to the public safety or peace or in furtherance of a movement unlawful and prejudicial to the public safety or peace, I Sir Patrick Kelly, Commissioner of Police, Bombay, do hereby direct and order that you shall abstain from any act in furtherance of the Civil Disobedience movement and that you shall remove yourself from Bombay before midnight on Wednesday the 17th inst., and not return to Bombay without the permission of the Commissioner of Police.⁴¹³

She was subsequently arrested when she refused to leave Bombay and sentenced to three months in prison on February 18th, becoming “the first European apprehended” who was involved with the Civil Disobedience Campaign.⁴¹⁴ Behn went on to spend more than a year in and out of different prisons because of her involvement in the movement; she was jailed fifteen months in Arthur Road Prison and nine months in Sabarmati Prison (Both in Bombay). During her time in prison, Behn continued spinning for the creation of khadi, corresponding with Gandhi, and vigorously read Indian religious texts. Behn was far from the only person to be arrested in connection with the independence movement, but her experience was a unique one compared to other female prisoners, particularly non-political prisoners. As an upper-class British woman, even as a follower of Gandhi, she was afforded privileges that other prisoners were not. Through this chapter I argue that Behn’s experiences and publications act as a conduit to expose the plight of the female prisoner. She was also able to continue the work of the Indian independence movement from behind prison walls, even if only in small ways. Another aim is to build upon the work of earlier scholars, such as Kumari Jayawardena and David Arnold, and demonstrate how the colonial prison and the female political prisoners within them became a symbol of “defiance against the British.”⁴¹⁵

⁴¹³ Sir Patrick Kelly, “Order. (Under Section 4 (1) of Ordinance No. 11 of 1932),” *Richard Bartlett Gregg Papers*.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.; Special Cable to *The New York Times*, “Sentence Miss Slade to 3 Months In Jail,” Feb 19, 1932, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times*, 9, available at: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/99734832/20E894A07BD742EFPO/14?accountid=14745>, accessed April 4, 2020.

⁴¹⁵ David Arnold, “The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge, and Penology in 19th Century India,” in *Essays in Honor of Ranjit Guha*, eds. David Arnold and David Hardiman, (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1994), 148-187, 152.

The Colonial Prison

According to Frank Dikötter, “in colonial contexts, prisons were part and parcel of the ‘civilising mission’ of the colonizers.”⁴¹⁶ This proved true in the creation and implementation of colonial prisons and procedures put in place in India after the eleven-month long 1857-1858 Rebellion, during which Indians set fire to British soldiers barracks, and Mughal-Indian power was temporarily restored in some provinces where the British East India Company had exerted power.⁴¹⁷ One way the British maintained control in India was by spreading propaganda (in the UK, in India, and elsewhere) that promulgated the idea that India was an uncivilized and uncultured country in need of foreign, particularly British, control. By using the prison to lock up the colonized, the British, from their perspective, “helped draw a line of demarcation between a colonial rule which saw itself as uniquely rational and human, and the ‘barbarism’ of an earlier age or ‘native society.’”⁴¹⁸ The colonial prison was additionally a “critical site for the acquisition of colonial knowledge.”⁴¹⁹ Colonial authorities and medical doctors used prisoners to inform themselves on how to treat India’s issues outside of the prison. For example, the government used research on Indian prison diets to establish dietary scales for famine victims.⁴²⁰ In 1944, Lieutenant Colonel F.A. Barker composed a report, *The Modern Prison System of India-1944: the Progress of Prison Reform in India during the Twenty Years following the Publication of the*

⁴¹⁶ Frank Dikötter, “Introduction,” in *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, eds. Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 1-13, 3.

⁴¹⁷ These rules and procedures created and implemented by British Colonial authorities provided police with the powers to go into people’s homes and private spaces to look for any “dissidence,” (Arvind Verna, “Governance and Coercion in India,” in *Crime and Justice in India* ed. N. Prabha Unnithan, (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2013) 5-27, 9; Jon Wilson, *India Conquered*, 226-7). There were other rebellions prior to 1857, however, as Wilson discusses, the 1857-1858 uprising is considered a turning point because it is the first time that a series of attacks occurs linked to each other, whereas earlier mutinies tended to be individual acts, (see *ibid.*, 227-8).

⁴¹⁸ Arnold, “The Colonial Prison,” 159. Arnold’s ideas of prison theory are heavily influenced by Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

⁴¹⁹ Arnold, “The Colonial Prison,” 158.

⁴²⁰ Kevin Grant. *Last Weapons: Hunger Strikes and Fasts in the British Empire, 1890-1948*, (Oakland: U. of California P, 2019), 30.

*Report of the 1919-1920 Indian Jails Committee.*⁴²¹ The report's purpose was to demonstrate how the prisons had changed in the years since the last report and simultaneously reflected the long-term effects of the implementation of the India Penal Code. The India Penal Code of 1860 was the primary source of rules, regulations, and procedures with regard to India's prisoners and prisons, implemented soon after the 1857-1858 rebellion. It was thought that the rebellion demonstrated that Indians were capable of joining forces and systematically attack the British. The Code contains 511 sections of which 319 describe infractions which carry prison sentences ranging from 6 months to "life."⁴²² The Code also helped to inspire the number, size, and shape of colonial prisons from the mid-nineteenth century onward: Their design included a central watchtower, radiating cellblocks and high perimeter walls.⁴²³

Barker's *Report* reflects how the massive influx of middle-class political prisoners as a result of the rising political tension in India, beginning in the 1920s, impacted the prison system. Going to prison, also known as "gaol-going," was "one of the main vehicles of anti-colonial defiance."⁴²⁴ It was popular among Gandhi's followers because of the non-violent aspect, for people let themselves be apprehended without resisting because willingness to accept punishment as a necessary corollary for Satyagraha is the hallmark of the (actively resisting) civil disobedient person who is breaking a law.⁴²⁵ Thousands of followers ended up in these colonial prisons. Overcrowding had- always been an issue in the colonial prison system but with

⁴²¹ Frederic Allan Barker, *The Modern Prison System of India, A Report to the Department, the Progress of Prison Reform in India During the Twenty Years Following the Publication of the Report of the 1919-1920 Indian Jails Committee*, (London: Macmillan, 1944).

⁴²² Rani Dhavan Shankardass, "Introduction: The Problems and Paradoxes of Punishment," in *Punishment and Prison: Indian and International Perspectives*, ed. Rani Dhavan Shankardass, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000), 13-48, 9.

⁴²³ Arnold, "The Colonial Prison," 164.

⁴²⁴ David Arnold, "India: the Contested Prison," in *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, eds. Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2007), 147-184, 175.

⁴²⁵ Thanks to Bidisha Mallick for helping me draw the connections between Satyagraha and arrests.

the influx of great numbers of political prisoners, it only got worse. The overcrowding was also compounded by the issues of “demands for the grant of special treatment and privileges” for the primarily middle-class political prisoners.⁴²⁶

Prison in India was a reflection of the world outside in which prisoners were classified based on their caste, socio-economic status, religion, age, and race. Europeans in India who committed crimes were seldom sent to prison and instead subjected to other, less denigrating, systems such as orphanages, workhouses, “lunatic” asylums, and repatriation.⁴²⁷ However, as discussed by scholar Waltraud Ernst, “the lines between disease, crime, insanity, and poverty could rarely be drawn,” and where a European prisoner could end up was random: it might be jail, asylum, or, even, a hospital.⁴²⁸ When Europeans were imprisoned in India they received special treatments: They were provided traditional British diets instead of Indian food, they were never placed under the jurisdiction of an Indian judicial authority, while separate prisons and prison wards were created for Europeans.⁴²⁹ Part of the reason that these European prison and prison sections were organized was to maintain the alleged superiority of the “respectable British community” in the Raj and other colonial institutions, by removing the less-desirable British off the streets and out of the public view.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁶ Lord Hailey, “Forward,” in *The Modern Prison System of India*, by F.A. Barker, vii-x, viii.

⁴²⁷ Arnold, “The Colonial Prison,” 170. Separate “lunatic” asylums were created for Indians and Europeans. The European Asylums were often used as cash-cows for the English and treatment in the facility was based on class much like the prison-system they were avoiding. However, it appears that treatment in these asylums was better than prison. For more on lunatic asylums see Waltraud Ernst, “The Rise of the European Lunatic Asylum in Colonial India (1750-1858),” *Bulletin of the Indian Institute of History of Medicine, Hyderabad* 17, no.2 (1987): 94-107, 94-95, available at: http://www.ccras.nic.in/sites/default/files/viewpdf/jimh/BIIHM_1987/94%20to%20107.pdf, accessed July 14, 2020. See further, Anouska Bhattacharyya, “Indian Insanes: Lunacy in the 'Native' Asylums of Colonial India, 1858-1912,” Unpublished PhD diss., (Harvard University, 2013), available at: https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/11181217/Bhattacharyya_gsas.harvard_0084L_11204.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y, accessed July 14, 2020.

⁴²⁸ Waltraud Ernst, *Mad Tales from the Raj: Colonial Psychiatry in South Asia, 1800-58*, (London: Anthem Press, 2010), 42.

⁴²⁹ Arnold, “India: the Contested Prison,” 170.

⁴³⁰ Ernst, *Mad Tales from the Raj*, 15.

For Indians, classification in colonial prisons was very seldom based on the actual crime committed. Prisoners born of a higher caste and class were afforded privileges which lower-class or lower-caste prisoners were not. Prisons were not equipped to deal with the officials procedures and privileges that were brought in with the influx of the largely middle-class prisoners, which included: being kept away from lower-caste prisoners; being able to supplement diet at one's own expense; wearing one's own clothing; having a bed; being allowed to read and correspond with others; visitor access; and exclusion from menial details and labor.⁴³¹ If accommodating the political prisoners was not enough, Barker's *Report* called for additional separation of lower-caste prisoners to attempt to keep younger lower-class offenders away from older or "more hardened" offenders, continued home-nursing and baby welfare lessons for female prisoners, and continued and additional basic education and "scouting" opportunities for all prisoners.⁴³² Scholars of the colonial prisoner system and actual accounts from prisoners demonstrate that while Barker's *Report* and earlier reports called for reforms, the actual realities of the prison could be far different, especially for females in prison.

Female Prisoners

Women could be a powerful force for the Indian independence movement because of the cultural and social attitudes towards the treatment of women and women's capabilities.⁴³³

Outside of prison, women were "deliberately" placed in certain areas of the Civil Disobedience

⁴³¹ Ujjmal Kumar Singh, "Political Prisoners and the Prison System: Colonial Purposes and Praxiological Problems," in *Punishment and Prison*, 370-83, 380. Singh is just one of the scholars to discuss how the influx of middle-class prisoners completely changed the "atmosphere" of prison, (ibid., 373).

⁴³² Barker, *The Modern Prison System of India*, 21, 32. The scouting that Barker is referring to a program very similar to the Boy and Girl Scouts program in the US. Robert Baden Powell, founder of the Scout movement, was a loyal denizen of the British Empire.

⁴³³ Women could also be active in other movements such as women's rights. However, "social evils," like inequality in divorce and education were "supplanted by nationalist issues," according to Kumari Jayawardena, (Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism*, 99-100). I suggest that many Indian feminists' involvement in the nationalist movement was partially inspired by the hope that once independence was achieved that the focus could shift to women's issues.

Campaign due to the fact that those in charge knew that the police would be less likely to violently handle them; there was even a government mandate in Madras to avoid using lathis when dealing with large gatherings of women.⁴³⁴ Lord Irwin, the viceroy of India, even told the *Hindustan Times* that “The detention of ladies in jail is indefensible.. they are certainly less dangerous to the public peace.”⁴³⁵ In terms of attitudes towards women, Lord Irwin was like most other colonial officials and the British public at large, but he was wrong, for women were quite dangerous to “the public peace” in terms of a sometimes fervent anti-colonialism.⁴³⁶

In 1932, 3196 women were convicted in connection with the Civil Disobedience Campaign.⁴³⁷ Women served time in jail for a multitude of reasons linked to the Indian independence movement: “leading processions, holding meetings... delivering of provocative speeches against colonial rule, picking, staging boycotts,” etc.⁴³⁸ Women’s involvement caused a huge increase in the amount of female political prisoners. Within the prisons, female political prisoners used fasting as an additional political protest adding to their “gaol-going.” Fasting was a way to exacerbate and expose the failures of British administration.⁴³⁹ This was because the actions of political prisoners from within the prison were often made public through Gandhi’s and other nationalist publications. If a political prisoner were to die of starvation in prison, they

⁴³⁴ Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, *Women in the Indian National movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42*, (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2006), 146-7.

⁴³⁵ Björkert, “Lord Irwin *Hindustan Times* Interview,” *Women in the Indian National movement*, 147.

⁴³⁶ Gandhi’s views about women were quite different than Lord Irwin’s. According to Jayawardena, Gandhi believed that women were equal to men; however, “equality was located within a religious sense of the word and within the patriarchal system, projecting a women’s role as complimentary to that of men and embodying virtues of sacrifice and suffering,” which means that Gandhi believed that men and women were equal, but that it was good to include women were good in the movement because they were by nature non-violent and “had great ability to endure suffering” because of their biological sex, (Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 95, 97.)

⁴³⁷ Björkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, 71-2. Gandhi was known to fast for days or weeks. The female prisoners would use fasting as a manipulation tactic.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 148. Britain had a history of arresting women as political prisoners. In Britain, prior to World War One, “the suffragettes were hauled into jails and ill-treated,” (Björkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, 147).

⁴³⁹ Grant, *Last Weapons*, 11.

would become a martyr for the movement, a symbol of British injustice and colonial oppression. Prison medical authorities were quite fearful of allowing fasters to fall into what became known as the “danger zone,” because they could be charged with manslaughter.⁴⁴⁰ Political prisoners used this to their advantage and sometimes feigned a collapse to exacerbate a doctor’s fears.⁴⁴¹ By keeping the doctors and prison authorities in a constant state of anxiety, these hunger-strikers removed some of the imperialist control over them.

While no two female prisoners went through the same experience, Suruchi Thapar-Björkert is able to succinctly and expertly portray the general experience of women in prison in *Women in the Indian National movement*:

Women carved out social spaces in prison, which resembled their own lives within the domestic sphere. Each barrack can be seen as a household, unfolding dynamics which were similar to the domestic space. Women were segregated from the outside world as well as from other men, as it was within the domestic sphere. Respectability was maintained though it opened wide issues of caste and class. This emerged as a site of humiliation and as a site of resistance. Identities were constantly shaped and redefined, and women built networks and a collective opposition to colonial rule. Older women within the prison were recognized as pillars of support for unmarried women.⁴⁴²

Prior to the influx of political prisoners, women made up a small percentage of prisoners. In 1891, roughly two decades before political prisoners really began to enter the prison population, women only accounted for 5% of prisoners.⁴⁴³ With the sudden influx of women, changes had to be made as to how the prisons were operated due to the culture of India. As Björkert states, women were primarily confined to a life within the private sphere and could not

⁴⁴⁰ Grant, *Last Weapons*, 32, Courting arrest was not a tactic used by women across the Empire. In South Africa in the 1960s, arrests could be made on the grounds on suspicion alone, without a warrant or a charge and in Egypt, there was a political writer who “not even informed by the police that she was being led to prison,” (Björkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, 153). However, one similarity to female political prisoners in India is that female political prisoners in Britain and Egypt were also separated by political prisoners and “criminal” prisoners,” (ibid., 156).

⁴⁴¹ Grant, *Last Weapons*, 35.

⁴⁴² Björkert, *Women in the Indian National movement*, 25.

⁴⁴³ Arnold, “The Colonial Prison,” 166.

individually interact with men outside of their immediate home and family. Before the protests of the early 1930s, then, it was not viewed as necessary to have a separate women's portion of the police force and male police officers were aware that "any form of perceived 'molestation' of 'respectable' women engaged in nationalist activities would make the crowds explode in violence."⁴⁴⁴ This made women a vital part of the independence movement, something which will be further explored below.

Upon entering prison, women were given a classification of either "A," "B," or "C." Political prisoners typically were classified as either "A" or "B" and afforded special privileges such as the ones mentioned above, whereas traditional convicts were classified as "C" and had a more "traditional" prison experience. Aparna Barnu published the experience of C-Class prisoner in *Chand* magazine where the prisons were described as

dark, dingy places with damp air, musty smell and bats hanging from the ceilings. The food for ordinary prisoners was inedible. Policemen sometimes poked fun or jeered at women prisoners. There were no bathrooms in the cells and women prisoners much to their embarrassment went to toilets accompanied by male "guards." It must be remembered that these young girls spent their best years of their youth in prison.⁴⁴⁵

This is not the kind of treatment that Barker called for in his *Report*. Yet, humiliation in the form of male-female interaction and upper-caste versus lower-caste interaction was quite common as a form of punishment and undermined morale. For example, women from the "untouchable" caste were asked to inspect incoming prisoners from the middle-classes, something which was considered "sacrilegious" by those in the higher castes.⁴⁴⁶ According to Satadru Sen, there were those who felt that "instead of reforming and rehabilitating (female)

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 143, 148.

⁴⁴⁵ Björkert, "Basu Aparna, *Chand* excerpt," in *Women in the Indian National Movement*, 142.

⁴⁴⁶ Björkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, 160.

criminals, British-India prisons contributed to their further demoralisation.”⁴⁴⁷ This was because the British almost completely ignored traditional Indian beliefs and customs. This kind of treatment of women was also counter-productive to the cultural superiority the British propagandizing in India. Björkert argues that the “British could no longer talk unabashedly about their civilized behavior once Indian women protestors were physically assaulted and manhandled by the guardians of law and order.”⁴⁴⁸

It was almost impossible to maintain class distinctions or political-prisoner separation due to the limited amount of space that was allotted for women’s confinement, and this was cause for concern in many women’s penitentiaries. The Superintendent of Chapra Jail was quoted as stating,

It is impossible to keep the non-cooperators out of communication with other prisoners and unless this is done, I feel concern that non-cooperators will infect the other prisoners who were usually quiet and well-behaved, with mischievous ideas, and trouble will ensue.⁴⁴⁹

Not only were prisons unable to maintain separation of prisoners, but there was also no proof of the reformatory function Barket had advocated, such as offering education or child welfare in prison. In reality, in cases, quite the opposite occurred.

In 1946, A-Class political prisoner Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit published a diary that she kept during her time in prison between August 1942 and June 1943. Pandit begins her diary with a detailed exposition of her arrest. She states how the area surrounding her home was “full of plain-clothes men” and questions (most likely mockingly) “why is it necessary for so many

⁴⁴⁷ Satadru Sen, “The Female Jails of Colonial India,” *The India Economic and Social History Review* 39, no.2, (Dec 2002): 417-438, 417, available at: Doi 10.1177/001946460203900405, accessed April 9, 2020. British culture, especially British female culture was seen by Indians as too familiar and risqué because of the habitual social interaction with non-familial males.

⁴⁴⁸ Björkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement*, 165.

⁴⁴⁹ Singh, “Political Prisoners and the Prison System,” in *Punishment and Prison*, 370.

armed men to come arrest one unarmed woman?”⁴⁵⁰ I suggest that because Pandit was a political prisoner that the British deliberately wanted to make her arrest into a public spectacle to deter other political prisoners, as well as have numerous witnesses to make sure that Pandit was not harmed during her arrest.

The British had to walk a fine line between punishing political prisoners and turning them into martyrs. While her status afforded her luxuries such as a fellow-prisoner to help her cook and clean, Pandit was exposed to all levels of the prison experience because of the lack of space within her jail.⁴⁵¹ While many political prisoners were happy to go to jail for the movement, they seemed naïve as to what exactly the prison experience would be like, judging by the experiences of Mira Behn and Pandit describe. Upon her second day in prison, for example, Pandit writes in her diary that she was “prepared to be civil to the world, but when by 8:30 (am) there was no coal and no tea, I found myself losing my temper.”⁴⁵² In another example, she avers that one thought of great “horror” for her is that she will be “left without anything to read.”⁴⁵³ As the diary continues, she appears to be more accepting of her new reality.

The prison itself is described by Pandit as a place where beds are made into islands because of rainwater leaking to the floor, the “ceiling falls in chunks every day,” and the barracks being covered in ants, bats, and frogs; the bat population was so dense that a bat fell on the chest of Pandit’s roommate.⁴⁵⁴ She describes an environment where mothers had to bring their children to prison with them and the children were often “running wild and completely

⁴⁵⁰ Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, *Prison Days*, (Calcutta: The Signet Press, 1946), 2. While Pandit’s experience is a decade later than Behn’s first venture to prison, her experience appears to mirror that of other women’s experiences during the entire colonial period and provided useful insight of the treatment and experience of an A-Class prisoner.

⁴⁵¹ Pandit, *Prison Days*, 11.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 30-1.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 13, 24.

neglected,” and found children as young as seven chewing tobacco.⁴⁵⁵ It should also be noted that in the eyes of the law, defendants were only considered “children” until age 12 (and even that was raised from age 8 from earlier colonial days).⁴⁵⁶ This implies that many lower-caste prisoners could be children.

The food was also prepared in the men’s wards of the prison and sent to the women’s ward in large buckets where “several portions are removed during transit.”⁴⁵⁷ One could argue that the food was barely edible once it arrived. Pandit depicts one dish as looking like “dirty porridge and tasting worse,” and prison tea as something that “has to be seen to be believed.”⁴⁵⁸ As an A-Class prisoner, Pandit was allowed to supplement her prison diet with outside food as long as she purchased it herself. This, in theory, was a privilege; but in reality, what fruit was brought to Pandit on numerous occasions was smashed bananas, even if one could argue that smashed fruit was better and more nutritious than no fruit at all.⁴⁵⁹ In his text on fasting and penal food, Kevin Grant states that the “‘penal diet’ offered virtually no fat, and arguably inadequate protein and carbs.”⁴⁶⁰ Food was not the only great divider of class and caste in prison. The British colonial officers knew that giving poor food to the highly refined upper caste (and usually vegetarian) Hindu men and women was one simple way to intimidate them.

Class or caste difference was evident in all components of the colonial prison, even in terms of sentencing. Pandit describes a C-Class prisoner who was on her eleventh conviction and was serving seven years for stealing a sheet.⁴⁶¹ One can see how “class justice” was so prevalent in the prison system by this example, or by the knowledge that lower-caste prisoners were given

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 28-9.

⁴⁵⁶ Barker, *The Modern Prison System of India*, 43.

⁴⁵⁷ Pandit, *Prison Days*, 48, 50.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 9, 13.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁶⁰ Grant, *Last Weapons*, 30. The “Penal Diet” was what was fed not only to prisoners but to famine victims.

⁴⁶¹ Pandit, *Prison Days* 22.

extremely harsh sentences, when middle-class prisoners were typically given mere months-long sentences for their offenses. The legal and prison authorities were well aware of the distinctive sensibilities of the distinct castes (which they may have adhered to in part because they themselves were overwhelmingly Hindus).

Fellow prisoners might be friend or foe depending on whether or not they were a spy for the prison matron. Psychological torment was also prevalent through a mandate that “prisoners should be counted in the usual ways every 15 minutes throughout the night which means there will be a harsh medley of sound depriving us of sleep.”⁴⁶² While naïve upon arrival, Pandit was cognizant of her privilege and status throughout her imprisonment; she referred to non-political prisoners as “convicts,” and described the treatment that she received in prison as “lenient.”⁴⁶³ Pandit’s diary allows for an intimate look into the experience of female prisoners, especially female political prisoners.

As previously stated, female political prisoners became a vital part of the Indian independence movement. Mira Behn and other female prisoners were able to keep the movement going despite being inside those four walls.

British Response to Mira Behn in Prison

News of Behn’s arrest and sentencing appeared in one form or another in many British newspapers including *The Nottingham Journal*, *Aberdeen Press*, *Western Mail and South Wales News*, *The Citizen*, *The Londonderry Sentinel*, *The Scotsman*, and *The Liverpool Echo*. As happened most of the time when Behn’s name appeared in the British press, the press insisted

⁴⁶² Ibid., 55, 63.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., I, 11.

on using “Miss Slade” when referencing her.⁴⁶⁴ Many times, the articles made references to her father’s position and status, and her leaving behind of her upper-class life and repeatedly referring to her as Gandhi’s “disciple.”⁴⁶⁵ However, the “importance” of the news of her arrests varied by publication. In some, news of her arrest, sentencing, or release made front-page news; in other publications, the news was relegated to pages, 4 or even 10.⁴⁶⁶ Her second arrest and sentencing in August 1932 warranted the same attention by the newspapers. However, her release from prison in August 1933 only garnered the attention of a few newspapers, including the *Birmingham Gazette*.⁴⁶⁷ By focusing attention on her arrests and sentences rather than releases from prison demonstrates a bias in the British press that focuses on Behn’s failure of character as an upper-class British woman. The British press used Behn to emphasize how undesirable behaviors could land even an upper-class British woman in prison. Yet, despite being in prison, and having her imprisonment published globally, Mira Behn was able to continue the movement.

⁴⁶⁴ Examples of articles that insist on referring her to “Miss Slade,” are “Miss Slade Sent to Prison,” *The Liverpool Echo*, February 18, 1932, 10, *British Newspaper Archive* and “Miss Slade Sent to Gaol,” *The Midland Daily Telegraph* August 23, 1932, 4, *British Newspaper Archive*.

⁴⁶⁵ Examples of the British press referring to her as Gandhi’s “disciple,” include “Miss Slade Sent to Prison: Gandhi’s Disciple Refusal to Leave Bombay,” *Gloucestershire Echo*, February 18, 1932, 1, *British Newspaper Archive* and “Miss Slade Arrested: Gandhi’s British Disciple: Daughter of Admiral,” *Dundee Evening Telegraph and Post*, August 17, 1932, 1, *British Newspaper Archive*.

⁴⁶⁶ Examples include “Miss Slade Sent to Prison,” *The Liverpool Echo*, February 18, 1932, 10, *British Newspaper Archive* and “Miss Slade Sentenced,” *The Midland Daily Telegraph*, February 16, 1932, 6, *British Newspaper Archive*.

⁴⁶⁷ “Miss Slade Released,” *Birmingham Gazette*, May 19, 1932, 1, *British Newspaper Archive*; “Miss Slade Freed,” *The Leeds Mercury*, May 19, 1932, 1, *British Newspaper Archive*.

Mira Behn and the Movement Behind Bars

I was taken to the court for the mock trial- our practice was not to defend ourselves- and sentenced to three months simple imprisonment, A-Class.

– Mira Behn⁴⁶⁸

In a letter dated February 17, 1932 to Romaine Rolland, Behn wrote that “It seems the honour is to be mine at last! A notice has been served on me and I expect my arrest tomorrow morning.”⁴⁶⁹ As previously mentioned, “gaol-going” was a respected tradition in the movement and Behn was proud to be among those going to jail for the cause. Upon receiving the notice, Behn laughed and stated that “she hoped the police would not disturb her sleep, but would wait until morning to arrest her.”⁴⁷⁰ This was a request that police did adhere to; she was arrested February 18 at eight in the morning.

Behn’s trial was held the same day as her arrest at noon. She pled guilty, accepted her sentence with a smile and stated, “I am happy to be going to the only place where a self-respecting Indian man can wish to go- prison or death.”⁴⁷¹

Behn arrived at Arthur Road Women’s Prison in February 1932 to serve the first of several prison sentences over the course of almost two years. Because of her socio-economic status, her affiliation with Gandhi, and her race, she was classified as a Class-A prisoner and served her sentence availing herself certain comforts. Much like Pandit’s, Behn’s experiences allow us to learn about the ordeals of both political and non-political female prisoners. Like many other prisons during this era, Behn’s prisons were overcrowded and riddled with animals. In an article published about her time in prison, Behn describes the female section of the Arthur

⁴⁶⁸ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 156.

⁴⁶⁹ Mira Behn, *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence*, 258.

⁴⁷⁰ British United Press, “Miss Slade Laughs: Gandhi’s Disciple and the Police Order,” *The Nottingham Journal*, February 18, 1932, 5, *British Newspaper Archive*.

⁴⁷¹ “Miss Slade Sent to Prison: Three Months for Defying Police Order,” *The Western Daily Press and Bristol Mirror*, February 19, 1932, 1, *British Newspaper Archive*.

Road Prison as “a one-sided building consisting of three small barracks opening to one verandah, [of which t]he barracks are supposed to be large enough to accommodate fourteen people each, but it is a crush at more than eight.”⁴⁷² Both Pandit and Behn describe their encounters with poisonous snakes that prison authorities refused to handle; a cobra in Sabarmati prison got within two feet of Behn before she was able to escape the room.⁴⁷³ In her autobiography, Behn recalls the resident monkey in Sabarmati Jail that attacked prisoners upon provocation.⁴⁷⁴ Upon her arrival at the prison, Behn recalls in her autobiography that

the jail authorities were flustered. They did not know what to do with me. Owing to the very large number of women political prisoners, the ordinary women’s jail had long since overflowed, and the debtors’ jail had been converted into a jail for female politicals... Here there were no accommodations for A-Class prisoners. Also, they were not anxious for me to join the B- and C-Class prisoners who were crowded together in one big barrack, thereby enabling them to get all the latest news.⁴⁷⁵

One of the ways that Behn and other female political prisoners could keep the momentum for the movement going in jail was through the spreading of news and educating fellow prisoners. In fact, going to jail “helped to build discipline among the nationalist ranks and, through the creation of prison ‘schools’ helped educate young activists in nationalist ideas and incorporate them into wider political networks.”⁴⁷⁶ I suggest that because she was so close to Gandhi, Behn was considered particularly dangerous. The fact that Behn was barred from going into the big barrack and interacting with the other prisoners, even other political prisoners, attests to that idea.⁴⁷⁷ This “barring” proved fruitless as Behn found herself able to interact with other prisoners anyway.

⁴⁷² Mira Behn, “Arthur Road Prison (Bombay), *Harijan* 10.10.1933,” in Gupta, ed., *Mira Behn*, 81.

⁴⁷³ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 174.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴⁷⁶ Arnold, “India: the Contested Prison,” in *Cultures of Confinement*, 179.

⁴⁷⁷ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 157.

She describes the other female political prisoners as “some of the leading ladies of Bombay...used to good standards of living.”⁴⁷⁸ Although these female political prisoners were some of the most highly educated ladies in Bombay, many of them were classified as C-Class prisoners, and only Behn, Ba (Gandhi’s wife), and Sarojini Devi were classified by the Bombay authorities as A-Class.⁴⁷⁹ Whereas the C-Class prisoners were subjected to sub-par living conditions and menial details and labor, Behn, and other A and B-Class prisoners had a much different experience.

In a letter to Behn from Gandhi after she first arrives at Arthur Road, he wrote how he was “glad” she was happy there and that she now had “this precious and unsought leisure.”⁴⁸⁰ For Behn, prison was a time for reflection and relaxation from the harsh demands of the movement. During her imprisonment, she was housed in a barrack that had been converted from a barrack for Europeans and special prisoners to one for political prisoners in which she served her time occasionally alone, but was often housed with one or more political prisoners.⁴⁸¹ As an A-Class prisoner, she was afforded a bed, a dressing table with a brush and comb, a washstand, bathtub, curtains, and access to a kitchen.⁴⁸² She was able to spend her time practicing her Hindi and reading the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. She became fascinated with one of the strangest aspects of the prison: its omnipresent ants. In her autobiography, she extols how “I, at my end (of the sentence) was having a very interesting time with ants, whose extraordinary intelligence

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 157-158.

⁴⁸⁰ Gandhi, “February 25, 1932,” in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 300-1. Another white, European, female political prisoner, Margaret Cousins, spent a year in the women’s prison in Vellore. In Vellore, she was put together in a cell with other female political prisoners, and she spent her time there teaching inmates, reading, and writing, (Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, 153). It is obvious from these examples that race and class played a role in how women were treated in prison and that Behn did not have the “typical” experience of an imprisoned woman in India.

⁴⁸¹ Behn, “Arthur Road Prison,” 81.

⁴⁸² Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 161. She notes in her autobiography how she gave up her A-Class amenities once fellow A-Class prisoner Sarojini Devi was released.

and industry I had plenty of time to study.”⁴⁸³ Her privilege allowed her, towards the end of her imprisonment, to be transferred from Arthur Road to Sabarmati Prison after she complained to Gandhi in a letter of the stench. He wrote to her that “no prisoner has a right to demand transfer,” but “you should be transferred to a better place... You have a very sensitive nose and therefore are more readily acted upon by foul smells.”⁴⁸⁴ Gandhi viewed the prisons and the treatment of prisoners during this time as much more lenient when compared to the times that he was arrested earlier in life during his time in Africa. He writes to Behn how “ordinary prison life nowadays has lost all of its terrors,” and appears slightly perturbed at her complaints by stating that “Such is prison. It is a good discipline in patience.”⁴⁸⁵ At first, though, Behn did not see it that way and was not completely aware of her privileged treatment in prison.

While she was happy to go to jail for the cause, as so many of Gandhi’s followers were, she appears naïve, much like Pandit, about the actual terms of the prison regimen when she first entered the prison system. In her correspondence with Gandhi, she expresses frustration with the fact that the government was not respecting their privacy when it became obvious that they were reading the correspondence she exchanged.⁴⁸⁶ Because she and Gandhi were political prisoners, the colonial government was also obsessed with making sure that they did not die or become severely ill in prison. Behn was not one to fast in prison, but she still had to record any and all maladies with prison medical authorities. In a letter to Behn Gandhi writes that

We are bound to report our condition. For the authorities hold our bodies in the expectation that we shall report all about their condition to them. If we do not, we commit, at least a technical, if not a full breach, of prison discipline.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 171.

⁴⁸⁴ Gandhi, “April 9, 1932,” in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 345; Gandhi, “April, 9, 1932,” in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 343. When she was moved from Arthur Road Prison to Sabarmati Prison she was placed in a barrack with Gandhi’s wife, referred to in the correspondence and Behn’s autobiography as “Ba.”

⁴⁸⁵ Gandhi, “August 23, 1932,” in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 319; Gandhi, “June 30, 1932,” in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 314.

⁴⁸⁶ Gandhi, “June 30, 1932,” in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 314.

⁴⁸⁷ Gandhi, “February 17, 1933,” in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 347.

In other letters, she complains about her loneliness while her upper-class biases surface when she describes the other inmates as “criminals.” Gandhi reprimands her by stating that “The word ‘criminal’ should be taboo from our dictionary[...o]r we are all criminals.”⁴⁸⁸ It appears that prison brought out class biases Behn harbored which had not been apparent while working with lower-class/caste individuals on her grassroots tours.⁴⁸⁹ Yet, once Behn got over her initial scruples, she and another political prisoner, the socialist leader, Kamala Devi, who served her time in jail as a B-Class prisoner, involved themselves in trying to better the treatment and conditions of the C-Class prisoners.⁴⁹⁰

Behn noticed that the C-Class prisoners lived in abhorrent conditions both in the prison and outside of it. She noted in her autobiography that there was an upsurge of lower-class women arrested for thievery and prostitution during inclement seasons or harsh times.⁴⁹¹ Thanks to the aforementioned Indian Penal Code of 1860, it was not hard for a woman to be arrested for crimes related to prostitution and sexuality because the Code “introduced an expansive set of laws that regulated the bodies of women and controlled their sexual and reproductive

⁴⁸⁸ Gandhi, “October 19, 1932,” in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 327.

⁴⁸⁹ For more on her grassroots tour of India see Chapter One.

⁴⁹⁰ Kamala Devi provided some companionship for Behn during this time of her imprisonment. In a letter to Behn on April 22, 1932, Gandhi writes that he was glad that Devi could join Behn in morning prayers and singing songs in the evening, Gandhi, “April 22, 1932,” in *Beloved Bapu*, Suhrud and Weber, 304. Devi was no stranger to prison and had actually been transferred to Behn’s prison from another prison. In her prior prison, Devi had been classified as a C-Class prisoner for her role as an itinerant political protestor and her refusal to give up the location of her friends and fellow political protestors. She was labeled as a B-Class prisoner in Arthur Road Prison, which afforded her more privileges, but also required that she work a prison job. While in Arthur Road Prison, Devi developed an “acute case of jaundice” and further demonstrated that prisons were not equipped for women, but were especially unequipped to handle women in long-term cases. For more on Kamala Devi (or Kamaladevi as she is also known) see Jamila Brijbhushan, *Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya: Portrait of a Rebel*, (New Delhi: Abhinav Publishing, 1976). Devi traveled throughout Europe, China, and Japan in the 1930s to promote the Independence movement. She also demonstrated that participating the independence movement could be a family affair; her sister-in-law was Sarojini Naidu, the first Indian female president of the Indian National Congress, who worked with Gandhi from 1920 onward (Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 100,101).

⁴⁹¹ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 159. “Prostitution” in Colonial India did not always mean what the modern-day reader would now define as prostitution. Depending on the area and caste, “prostitute” could mean any woman sexually active outside of a monogamous, upper-class, Hindu marriage (for more about this topic see Durba Mitra, *Indian Sex Life: Sexuality and the Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2020).

behavior.”⁴⁹² Behn was not the only person to notice this correlation. Dr. G.S. Sutherland, a participant in the Indian Jail Conference of 1877, noticed a correlation between the price of wheat and the number of prisoners in Awadh Jail; Sutherland estimated that high prices increased the prison’s population between 15 to 30 percent.⁴⁹³ Sutherland’s findings and the general belief that the poorer classes would use the prison as a “hotel” was part of the justification that the British used for keeping the conditions of the prisons as they were.⁴⁹⁴ Whether or not C-Class prisoners were escaping harsher conditions in the outside world, their conditions in prison could only have been marginally better.

In 1933, Behn published an article for Gandhi’s weekly publication, *Harijan* (previously called *Young India*), in which she described the time she spent imprisoned in Arthur Road Prison. Through this publication, she was able to educate the global audience of *Harijan* about the struggles and indignities that female prisoners suffered in colonial prisons. She writes how the work that they are given has no educational merit and that there are no educational resources or religious instruction available to them.⁴⁹⁵ She describes the prison as a “hot-bed for the spreading of syphilis and other venereal diseases.”⁴⁹⁶ Behn recalls when a woman diagnosed with syphilis gave birth on the prison floor.

One day a young woman suddenly gave birth to seven-month twins before there was time to remove her. It was a scene of the utmost sordidness and misery. There on the bare stones with the assistance of one of two fellow convicts and the jail doctor, the wretched woman brought forth two puny female babies which both died within half an hour. When I spoke to the doctor he said that the woman was so saturated with syphilis that no baby to which she gave birth could ever live. As soon as the scene was over, a stretcher was brought and the mother with the two dead babies was taken to a motor car and then driven to the J.J. Hospital. The births took place in the barrack where 10 to 15 women and one or two babies were kept locked up for 14 ½ hours out of the 24. But no

⁴⁹² Mitra, *Indian Sex Life*, 68.

⁴⁹³ Arnold, “The Colonial Prison,” 168.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁴⁹⁵ Behn, “Arthur Road Prison,” 82.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

disinfectant was supplied for washing away the filth on the floor! It was to be done with plain cold water. I had a bottle of phenile which I gave to the woman for thoroughly disinfecting the barrack.⁴⁹⁷

The graphic imagery of women being forced to clean up diseased after-birth rather challenges the civilized and cultural superiority that the British claimed to have over the Indian people.

In an attempt to reform the horrid conditions from inside the prison, Behn and Kamala Devi brought them up to the prison superintendent numerous times. The initial reaction from the superintendent was to tell Behn and Devi to ignore such problems, but when they refused, Behn and Devi were removed from the debtors' prison and placed in the regular women's prison where they could be better isolated.⁴⁹⁸ This was the end of Behn's attempts to reform the prison during her imprisonment- instead, she placed more focus on her own personal growth and the movement for independence.

Mira Behn gave up her right to visitors and interviews with the press in order to continue her correspondence with Gandhi. This limited her ability to connect with the ongoing Indian independence movement in the world outside of prison because it limited the amount of information she received to just the news that came from edited newspapers, government pilfered correspondence, and newly arrested political prisoners. It also inhibited the amount of information going out of the prison. Yet, while this decision may have limited her contributions to the movement, it did not completely end them.

Due to the transient nature of political prisoners' jail sentences (they served shorter terms than other prisoners) there was a constant stream of news from the outside world. While Behn spent over a year imprisoned between 1932 and 1934, her sentences would extend each for

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 159. Devi was eventually transferred to another prison.

roughly 3 months, until her last longer sentence of 12 months. This not only allowed for Behn to go back to the ashrams and the villages in between to resume her work for the movement on the outside, but also allowed for other political prisoners who were rotating in and out of prison to bring her updated news, despite the prisons' attempts to keep Behn from other political prisoners.

Because of the rotational nature of Gandhi's and Behn's imprisonments, they could also focus on ashram organization and administration from prison. As we saw, the ashrams were communities created by Gandhi where one could fully immerse oneself in Gandhi's lifestyle of satya (truth) through "ahimsa" (non-violence), vegetarianism, and celibacy. Behn had completely dedicated herself to the lifestyle of the ashram upon coming to India, going as far as to shave her head to remove vain attachments. Her dedication was a point of pride for her. She wrote to Gandhi during a discussion on ashrams,

Did I ever tell you how, during the year of training which I gave myself before coming to you, I kept the Rules of the Ashram continually by me... [and e]veryday I read them and thought over them, and every night I put them under my pillow.⁴⁹⁹

During her grassroots tours and presswork, Behn was able to stay at a few of Gandhi's ashrams. Her autobiography and correspondence expressed frustrations about the actual operation of the ashrams. She witnessed intoxication and excessive fraternization among the leadership of the ashrams and felt that they were not properly living according to Gandhi's vision. Behn utilized her time in prison to address these issues with Gandhi through correspondence and brought up ideas for solutions to them. She wrote to Gandhi that

A vital operation has got to be performed on the Ashram if it is to survive. All these years you have been patiently trying to cure it by medicines, and have hesitated to take the knife. But the disease goes deeper and deeper and medicines cannot touch it now.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁹ Behn, Sabarmati Central Prison, Ahmedabad, "April 2, 1933," in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 356.

⁵⁰⁰ Behn, Sabarmati Central Prison, Ahmedabad, "April 2, 1933," in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 355. It is evident through their correspondence that Behn was more worried about the actions occurring within the ashrams than Gandhi. She followed the "rules" to a "T," and was frustrated that others did not hold themselves up to the same standards.

She suggested that to bring the ashrams back to their intended purpose and operation, that their size be reduced.⁵⁰¹ Within a few days, Gandhi responded to her conveying to her that he did not place the same kind of importance on ashram reorganization and regulation that she did. He wrote to her that, “You are hard on poor babies!!!! (in reference to two ashram residents who fell in love with each other and married) and that “we cannot afford to be self-righteous.”⁵⁰² Nonetheless, while he stated that “no violent changes will be made,” he did give her permission to “make any drastic suggestions” she wished.⁵⁰³ Behn realized that her opinions on the ashrams were putting an unnecessary strain between her and Gandhi and caused her great anxiety while they were imprisoned and attempted to rectify the situation by stating,

You know Bapu how miserable I am whenever I have to argue with you!! It is hard enough when I am near you, but when we are locked up far away in different prisons it is a thousand times harder! I am always haunted with the thought, is it a flaw in my faith?- And that thought makes me sick beyond all things... My trouble is simply my impression that many in the Ashram do not feel for the vows all that you hope they do. Hence I had been trying to think of a means of giving an outlet for those who appear to be in a false position.⁵⁰⁴

She completely capitulated in her next letter saying she will no longer worry about the Ashram and refers to herself as a “fool.”⁵⁰⁵ While these conversations on Ashram administration and organization seem minor, the differing thoughts and ideas between Gandhi and Mira Behn during the correspondence at this time foreshadows some of the later tensions that occur in their

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Gandhi, “April 4, 1933” in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 354.

⁵⁰³ Gandhi, “April 6, 1933” in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 357-8.

⁵⁰⁴ Behn, “April 22, 1933, Sabarmati Central Prison, Ahmedabad,” in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 369.

⁵⁰⁵ Behn, “Saturday, April 29, 1933, Sabarmati Central Prison, Ahmedabad,” in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 372. It is apparent from the two letters that Behn would rather be in Gandhi’s good graces than openly argue with him even if she disagreed with him on something she deemed important. One can speculate that he had bigger things to worry about than what he may have viewed as minor corruptions in the ashram, even if it was something that Behn seem to focus on. As with her relationships with Beethoven, Romain Rolland (explored in earlier chapters) and Gandhi, Behn had a tendency to narrowly fixate on people and things, and this fixation on the ashram could just be the latest obsession because it was something that she could discuss and have a degree control over in prison.

relationship. So while Behn did not radically reform the ashrams, these conversations did have later repercussions. Yet, she was able to contribute to the movement in another way from prison, through the continued creation of khadi.

One of the biggest components of the Indian independence movement was the concept of “swaraj,” which we have met several times before. Its meaning was that of self-rule or self-reliance, through ending the dependence of the Indian population had on British goods.⁵⁰⁶ Since his early days as a leader of Congress around 1920, Gandhi had called for an end to wearing British-styled clothing and the use of British cloth. This meant that the people of India needed to make their own cloth and clothing. We saw how Behn went on grassroots tours across India to teach the Indian people had to card and spin khadi to make their own cloth clothing. While she could not tour the country from her prison barracks, she could continue to make khadi. In various letters to Gandhi, she writes of spending copious amounts of time spinning and carding describing how “[t]he little wheel goes round and round- about 1,500 yards or a little more a day.”⁵⁰⁷ There was not much written on what is done with the fabric but the correspondence between Behn and Gandhi indicates that they were able to communicate with the various ashrams and they could send fabric through the mail. Behn states in one letter to Gandhi that “I am spending much time carding and spinning- the work carried one’s prayers away on wings- and the yarn is of course for the Harijans.”⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁶ Swaraj means self-rule/ self-governance as well as national independence but, as noted to me by Bidisha Mallik, Gandhi gave it an expanded meaning in social, political, economic, and moral-spiritual terms. It is not to be understood only narrowly as political self-governance or economic self-reliance. It is, in fact, Swadeshi that means economic self-reliance and is also one of the Gandhian virtues.

⁵⁰⁷ Behn, “May 17, 1933, Sabarmati Central Prison, B.B. & C.I. Rly,” in *Beloved Babu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 384.

⁵⁰⁸ Behn, “May 12, 1933, Sabarmati Central Prison, Ahmedabad,” in *Beloved Babu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 381. One of Gandhi’s causes outside of the Indian independence movement was to bring about the abolition of the caste system, and particularly, of its “untouchables” caste. He believed that by naming his popular magazine after the untouchables with the more palpable name “Harijan” this would not only bring further attention to their plight but also afford them a degree of respect.

While Behn's individual contributions to the movement may appear negligible from prison, during her confinement, through her publications and correspondence, she became a conduit for a bigger picture of how the colonial prison and the prisoners within it were a major component to the Indian independence movement.

Conclusion

From the British perspective, the prison "was just another system of control and discipline" like the army, police, factories, and schools.⁵⁰⁹ Through prison, the British could control how Indian prisoners ate, slept, behaved, and practiced caste separation and religion. Non-political prisoners, in particular, were subject to overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and menial labor with little to no opportunities to partake in proper education and religious practice. Despite the conditions, the prison was also a place for the Indian independence movement to flourish, especially with the arrival of political prisoners and their nonviolent prison protests in the 1920s. Fasting was a popular tactic among political prisoners because it was a non-violent protest and gave prisoners a chance to become a martyr for the movement should they die. Fasting gave prisoners some semblance of control against the British because the last thing the British needed was a bunch of dead martyrs, especially those from higher castes and important families in India.

The influx of female political prisoners changed the shape and administration of colonial prisons. Prisons were not built to house women in general because of their traditionally low numbers in prison. Prisons and prison wards had to be built to accommodate the sudden rise of prisoners. This often led to overcrowding and ignoring of prison practices such as class/caste

⁵⁰⁹ Arnold, "The Colonial Prison," 159.

separation that allowed for political prisoners to educate non-political prisoners about the movement.

The influx of female prisoners also challenged traditional British norms and cultures that the colonial rulers were attempting to promulgate throughout India. British culture believed that women belonged in the domestic sphere and that they were weak and inferior to men. From the British perspective, this was especially true for Indian women, who were not only perceived as inferior because of gender, but because of their race. Björkert argues that “By entering the jails, women proved their courage, determination, and strong commitment to put an end to British rule.”⁵¹⁰ These female political prisoners demonstrated that women were a vital part of the Indian independence movement and had the capabilities to stand against the British authorities.

In her autobiography Behn admits that the movement was not as active due to the imprisonment of all the leading congressmen and thousands of its rank-and-file; the government had even begun to confiscate the property of those related to participants of the movement- not just the participants themselves.⁵¹¹ While the movement was not as active, Behn was still able to contribute to movement from prison by spreading news, through her correspondence with Gandhi, and her continued creation of khadi. Her imprisonment with other female political prisoners such as Kamala Devi allowed the racial biases of the British to be further exposed since Devi, an Indian woman was sentenced more harshly and given a lower classification as a convict than Behn, even though they were serving time in prison for the same crimes. Her choice to continue to correspond with Gandhi instead of having visitors and conducting interviews with the press exhibits that Behn sometimes allowed her affections for Gandhi to overshadow the

⁵¹⁰ Björkert, *Women in the Indian National movement*, 165.

⁵¹¹ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 175.

wider needs of the movement. However, this “attachment” was not completely one-sided. In a letter to a friend, Gandhi noted that

I have felt Mirabehn’s self-sacrifice to be beyond praise, and, therefore, wish to see her perfect. The moment I see any imperfection in her, my ignorant attachment makes me impatient, and I rebuke her sharply. The result is a flood of tears.⁵¹²

I argue that her most important contribution while in prison was utilizing her experience and platform to share the horrid treatment of female prisoners at the hand of British authorities through her 1933 *Harijan* publication. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in his autobiography that

Most of the girls and women who were sentenced had a very bad time in prison, even worse than the men had. I heard of many painful instances, but the most extraordinary account that I saw was one prepared by Miraben (Madeleine Slade) giving her experiences, together with those of other civil disobedience prisoners, in Bombay Jail.⁵¹³

Her experience further exposed the racial and class hierarchies of colonized India; in addition, the publication further challenged the ideas of British superiority that the British promulgated not only in India and England, but to the entire world.

Behn realized that she could not meaningfully combat British misinformation and oppression from behind prison walls. Even if she could intermittently publish in *Harijan* and *Weekly Reports*, these publications only reached the international audiences that subscribed to them. The British government was working hard to promote the ideas of cultural superiority citing the barbarism of the Indian people, all the while imprisoning and oppressing Indians in subhuman conditions. Behn needed a bigger platform to promote the Indian independence movement and challenge British misinformation. By utilizing some of her international contacts and with permission from Gandhi, Mira Behn soon traveled to Britain and the United States on a

⁵¹² Gandhi, “Letter to Premabehn Katak,” February 25, 1932, *CWMG*, vol. 55, 78-9.

⁵¹³ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru*, (Cornwall: Cornwall Press, 1942), 220.

multi-month speaking tour to combat misinformation about herself, Gandhi, and the movement which resulted in an international network of allies of the Indian independence movement.

CHAPTER FIVE: FLYING SOLO: MIRA BEHN IN BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES

Introduction

Because of her numerous recent incarcerations, Behn traveled to Great Britain and America in the belief that her press work in India could not garner the international attention that an in-person tour might. I argue that Behn's international solo tours were vital to the growing success and fame of the movement because she was able to reach out to a widening audience of people previously not fully aware, or misinformed about, the independence struggle in India. She was also able to use this tour to combat misinformation that had spread about herself.

Much of the Western public could not believe what they learned about Behn, that she had willingly left her privileged life, for it challenged so many gender, class, and social norms. Prior to her tour, the Western press incorrectly printed facts about Behn, stating that her parents disowned her for her choice to follow Gandhi without their blessing.⁵¹⁴ The truth appeared so unbelievable to some journalists and publishers, that they published false information that supported the British, or Western, superiority ideals, rather than accept the idea that a British woman had placed herself in a subservient position to an Indian man of her own volition.⁵¹⁵

This chapter focuses on Behn's work in both Britain and America. There is more information about her time in America; but, it was her multi-month solo tour in Great Britain that laid the foundation for her to solidify herself as a prominent and vital representative of the

⁵¹⁴ S.T. Williamson, "Footnotes on a Week's Headliners; Their Differences. Mayor Walker's Pinch-Hitter. She Was an Admiral's Daughter." *New York Times*, March 15, 1931, par. 1, available at: <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1931/03/15/100994514.pdf>, accessed November 2, 2018.

⁵¹⁵ I originally made this statement in "There is No 'I' in Mahatma."

movement in America.⁵¹⁶ While she was vital to the movement as Gandhi's assistant abroad in 1931, her individual work in Great Britain and America took her out of Gandhi's shadow and allowed for her to do more significant work for the movement that left an indelible imprint on the manner in which the Indian independence movement was seen by the Western public.⁵¹⁷

Indian Independence in the British and American Perspective

So now the Indian Empire is to be considered only so far as it illustrates the general law of expansion which prevails in the modern part of English History. It will be considered not in itself, but only in its relation to our own State. It will be considered historically, that is, in the causes which produced it, but also politically, that is, in regard to its value or stability.⁵¹⁸

- J.R. Seeley to a group of undergraduates at Cambridge, 1882

In the fall of 1881 and the spring of 1882, J.R. Seeley delivered two lectures to undergraduate students at Cambridge University. Within these lectures, Seeley discussed his idea of Britain's role in history as an imperial power. While he vehemently believed that Britain's purpose was to "modernize India," he also believed that that prominent historians of his era were ignoring the role of imperialism in British history.⁵¹⁹ Through these two lectures, Seeley founded the subfield of imperial history.⁵²⁰ He additionally demonstrated that the mindset of the educated British who studied history did not concern itself with the ideas of the empire. Still in Mira Behn's time, this mindset permeated throughout Britain, where domestic issues took priority, and even when looking abroad, European affairs played a far more prominent role in the public discourse than anything that had to do with the colonies.

⁵¹⁶ This was noted particularly by Gandhi and Reverend John Haynes Holmes, the man responsible for bringing Behn to America.

⁵¹⁷ Gandhi also believed that this tour would be good for Behn in asserting some of her former independence. In a letter to Vallabhbhai Patel, he states that there is nothing more to Mira Behn leaving than her desire to go and help: "She suddenly felt that she herself should go and do something. I consented and she left. Her personality had become suppressed under me. I hope she will regain her former independence of character" (Gandhi, "Letter to Vallabhbhai Patel," On/Before June 25, 1934, *CWMG*, vol. 64, 90-1).

⁵¹⁸ J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, edited and with introduction by John Gross, (Chicago: U. of Chicago P. 1971), [Originally published in 1883 and 1884, a mere 18 months after the lectures were given], 143.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, xi, 8.

⁵²⁰ David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 17.

In 1707, England had united with Wales and Scotland to form United Kingdom with Protestantism at the “core” of British identity.⁵²¹ Linda Colley persuasively argues that until conscription in World War One, “intense localism” was the norm in more rural and remote parts of Britain.⁵²² It was those rural and remote parts of Britain that Mira Behn targeted on her tour of Britain in 1934 because she wanted to reach out to the working classes, rather than the middle and upper-classes. The localized mindset of these “faraway” areas had little interest in Britain’s empire.

Most of the people not directly associated with government or the empire itself had little to no idea about the Indian plight. What they did know was usually equated -with the empire being financially beneficial to Britain while looking down upon those of a different race, or basically, any outsider.⁵²³ According to Michael Fisher, in the mid-to-late 1800s, “many Britons interpreted Social Darwinist theory of evolution as giving a scientific validity to these evolving concepts of race as inherited and immutable in individuals.”⁵²⁴ Although empire was far from the minds of the educated middle-class British person, there was a racial bias against non-whites because of the prevalent social theories and practices popular among the middle class, which trickled down to the working classes and fed into its general hostility against others. One such means reinforcing racism was through newspapers, which were increasingly perused by workers in the later nineteenth and early twentieth Centuries. The British press published and spread

⁵²¹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2008), 369.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 372.

⁵²³ Michael H. Fisher, “Asians in Britain: negotiations of identity through self-representation,” in *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire 1660-1840*, ed. Kathleen Wilson, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 91-112, 99.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 112; Keep in mind that Victorian-era “cultural heroes,” a term used by Edward Said in his 1979 text, *Orientalism*, and other writers such as Rudyard Kipling and Herbert Spencer all espoused European racial and cultural superiority in their popular texts, adding to the conscious and subconscious racial and cultural biases of the general populace.

malicious material about Gandhi and the movement. When asked by John Haynes Holmes about the “slanderous attacks” on him by the London press in the 1930s, Gandhi responded with

They do not trouble me, but they pain me terribly. Think of how full and freely I have talked to the reporters. I have told them everything. And yet they print these slanders and vicious lies. It hurts me to think that such things can be done.⁵²⁵

There was not much that could be done to counter the attacks by the press on Gandhi’s character. According to historian David Armitage, during this time, the idea of “the British Empire,” was not at the forefront of the average person’s mind.⁵²⁶ While the British had been in India for over two centuries, average British people, unless they subscribed to Gandhi’s publication, *Young India/Harijan*, had little knowledge of the plights faced by the Indians. By appearing in person, then, Behn reached audiences that were otherwise impossible to reach from India, or through the diffusion of Indian publication alone. This idea seems even more true in evaluating her trip to America.⁵²⁷

The United States, after all, was the world’s first “post-colonial” country. Oddly, though, the US had shown little to no interest in independence movements in the European colonial system, even if it could have seen in them an echo of its own past. After its own off flirtation with colonialism at the end of the Spanish-American War (and in the case of Hawaii), signs of a growing interest in movements for national self-determination can be seen in Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points and his negotiations in Paris in 1919.⁵²⁸ But Wilson, a southerner, was afflicted

⁵²⁵ John Haynes Holmes, “Mahatma Gandhi: I Meet Gandhi,” *Community Pulpit*, Series 1931-1932, Sermon No. 2. October 11, 1931, 1-9, 5. *Harvard Square Library*, available at:

<http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/biographies/mahatma-gandhi-i-meet-gandhi>, accessed October 1, 2019.

⁵²⁶ Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 16.

⁵²⁷ I originally made this statement in “There is No ‘I’ in Mahatma,” *The Proceedings*.

⁵²⁸ For more on this see Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World*, (New York: Random House, 2002). The India National Congress did have representation at the Paris Conference. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was the INC representative at the Congress who wrote a letter to Woodrow Wilson to ensure that the Peace Conference would apply Wilson’s principle of right and justice to India: “Tilak did receive a reply, written by Wilson’s private secretary, assuring him that India’s case ‘will be taken up in due time by the proper authorities.’” It was not discussed (Maria Framke, “India’s Freedom and the League of Nations: Public Debates, 1919-1933,” in

by the virulent racism that was common in Jim-Crow America. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and advocates arguing for the civil rights of African Americans gained ground after 1918, but an awareness of the hypocrisy of celebrating the anti-colonial struggle that had been the US foundational movement and the denial of true equality of African Americans or the championing of independence movements outside the West was largely absent.⁵²⁹ Author Katherine Mayo stated,

Why, after so many years of British rule, is India still so poor,” the Indian agitator tirelessly repeats. If he could but take his eyes from the far horizon and direct them to things under his feet, he would find an answer on every side, crying aloud for honest thought and labor.⁵³⁰

In 1922, Mayo authored the “most popular American book on India ever written.”⁵³¹ The book itself intended to inform the general public about India and British-rule in India. It was a typical (and popular) reflection of the US mindset regarding the European and American colonies. Mayo believed that the only thing that Americans knew about India was that “Mr. Gandhi lives there; also tigers.”⁵³² The author herself wrote it from a pro-British perspective and promulgated exaggerated and false information about India and the people within it. Her work has been described as portraying the “most sensational aspects of Hindu/Indian society: child

Asia After Versailles: Asian Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Interwar Order, 1919-1933, eds. Urs Mathias Zachmann, (Edinburgh: U. of Edinburgh P., 2017), 124-143, 128).

⁵²⁹ I want to give acknowledgment to my advisor, Kees Boterbloem, for helping me make these connections by drafting the above paragraph; Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois were keenly interested in Gandhi’s movement since the 1920s; In the early 2000s, when international talks about climate change begin to emerge, India was leery of any proposals that came from the United States, the UK, or any other developed nation because India believed that these countries were simply trying to keep the developing nations in a subdued state, while enhancing their own developed positions. India has a legacy of “bad blood” between itself and the United States because of idealistic differences, which include the Jim-Crow-era racially biased laws (see Ray Binayak, *Climate Change: IPCC, Water Crisis, and Policy Riddles with Reference to India and Her Surroundings*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011).

⁵³⁰ Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*, New York: Harper, Brace, and Company, Inc., 1922, 223, available at: <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.458884>, accessed October 16, 2019.

⁵³¹ Kenton J. Clymer, *Quest for Freedom: The United States and Indian Independence*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1995), 6.

⁵³² Mayo, *Mother India*, 11.

marriage; sexual eccentricities, and (the) plight of the untouchables.”⁵³³ She not only negatively attacks Indian society as a whole, but also negatively displays Gandhi as a man whose “costume, being merely a loincloth, exposes his hairy body,” having ideas that are merely “more or less hazy notions more or less unconsciously absorbed from professional propagandists out of one camp or another.”⁵³⁴ Mayo’s depiction of Gandhi and India reinforced the misinformation that left people ignorant of the true situation in India, and helped support the idea that the British belonged in India as rulers, as India’s indigenous population was unable to rule itself. To debunk such misinformation, Mira Behn toured the Western world.

In 1968, Ashley Guy Hope, wrote a book, while it did not directly challenge Mayo’s view of India, investigated America’s attitude towards Indian independence in the twentieth century. Hope approaches his text acknowledging both the political and social elements of American interest in pre-1947 Indian affairs. He states that “the only ‘official statement’ on Indian aspirations in the early twentieth century was by Theodore Roosevelt in an address which discouraged the advocates of home-rule.”⁵³⁵ Additionally, he noted that subsequently President Franklin Roosevelt supported home-rule.⁵³⁶ He furthered mentioned the involvement of some of the American leaders within the movement for Indian independence such as Community Church of New York leader, Reverend John Haynes Holmes and Reverend J.T. Sutherland, and the 1919 creation of the “India Home Rule League of America,”(IHRL); yet, he makes no mention of Behn’s visit, and thus its possible significance, to America, even though it was arranged by John

⁵³³ Kenton, *Quest for India*, 5.

⁵³⁴ Mayo, *Mother India*, 5, 221.

⁵³⁵ Ashley Guy Hope, *America and the Swaraj; the US Role in Indian Independence*, (Washington DC: Public Affairs Press, 1968), 6.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

Haynes Holmes himself.⁵³⁷ Behn's tour of America is also ignored in Kenton J. Clymer's text, *Quest for Freedom*.⁵³⁸ Clymer's text discusses the works and actions of movement leaders in America such as Holmes and Roger Baldwin, but Clymer believes that only true political involvement counts as interest in the movement and argues that the US had no real involvement in the Indian independence movement until World War Two.

One of the most informational texts I found about America's involvement with the Indian independence movement is a 1974 article by Alan Raucher.⁵³⁹ It explores key characters, such as John Haynes Holmes, who supported the movement in America prior to Behn's visit and helps to inform readers about how little most Americans knew about the movement. Those who seemed to know the most were educated liberals and anti-imperialists. Raucher argues that "the movement was an indicator of the growing awareness by American liberal intellectuals of the world beyond their national boundaries and Western Civilization."⁵⁴⁰ Mira Behn is not discussed in Raucher's text, even if her tour of America in 1934 helped to continue to educate Americans about a world outside of the aforementioned "national boundaries and Western Civilization" and brought the discussion to an audience beyond educated liberals.⁵⁴¹

This chapter seeks to refute the notion that the US showed little to no interest in the Indian independence movement until after World War Two and demonstrates how Behn's involvement in America not only helped the movement but through her work, and the work of

⁵³⁷ The India Home Rule League of America was founded by Lala Lajpat Rai around early 1918. "Description," *South Asian American Digital Archive*, available at: <https://www.saada.org/item/20110912-359>, accessed July 6, 2021.

⁵³⁸ Kenton J. Clymer, *Quest for Freedom: The United States and India's Independence*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1995).

⁵³⁹ Alan Raucher, "American Anti-Imperialists and the Pro-India movement, 1900-1932," *Pacific Historical Review* 43, no. 1 (Feb. 1974): 83-110.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁵⁴¹ One can keep in mind that the late 1920s and 1930s (pre-World War One) was the time of the Great Depression in America, so many Americans were naturally not concerned with foreign affairs because of their own worries about the domestic economy.

those present in America with whom she sympathized and liaised, the American involvement in the Indian independence movement occurred much sooner and laid the foundation for the post-World War Two involvement and support for Indian independence in 1947.

Through Behn's solo tour, she met with people of various classes and races that she was unable to reach by solely working from India or traveling as Gandhi's assistant. This became another outlet for information about Gandhi and his movement to reach an international audience.

British Tour: June-September 1934

Though now without the supporting presence of Gandhi, she met them unflinchingly; she answered questions without compromise.

-Eleanor Morton, author of *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi*⁵⁴²

In 1934, after her numerous incarcerations, Mira Behn left India on a speaking tour, to enlighten the people in Western countries directly about Gandhi and the movement for Indian independence. As previously mentioned, most in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales were unaware of the events occurring in India, the empire being the furthest thing from their minds.⁵⁴³ Behn saw it as her duty to educate those who wholly ignored British oppression in the colonies. In a letter to Horace Alexander, a long-time British Quaker associate of Gandhi, Behn describes how she wished to go through "the length and breadth of England, trying to reach the heart of the working classes."⁵⁴⁴ Much like her grassroots work in India, Behn knew that the way to change peoples' hearts and minds was not through speaking with or influencing the privileged few, but to educate the masses. In the same letter, she states, "the statesmen... can come later, my call is

⁵⁴² Morton, *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi*, 181.

⁵⁴³ Armitage, *Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, 16.

⁵⁴⁴ Mira Behn to Horace Alexander Gundry, "Letter 2, 1934," Box 1, Folder 11, *Horace Gundry Alexander Papers* (DG 140), Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

the humble, understanding, sold folk.⁵⁴⁵ This was in keeping with Gandhi's ideas and his championing of the poor, the disenfranchised, and the downtrodden in India.

On June 26, 1934, Behn left for England by ship with a mission of working quietly and persistently for a truer understanding between India and England," [and make] them...understand that Gandhi is the best friend the English people have. I have never known anyone else who was not English who understands and appreciates the English character as he does.⁵⁴⁶

Rather than emphasize the divide between Britain and India, Behn sought to highlight how India and Britain could come together in support of the idea of India's independence.

Upon arriving in London, Behn was surprised to find that her "friends" in London were "disturbed" by her sudden arrival as they were "evidently apprehensive" of what she might say or do.⁵⁴⁷ Many Londoners involved in the pro-independence movement knew Behn but appeared to think of her as just the handmaiden of Gandhi, as the woman responsible for his cooking and cleaning.

Behn met with working-class people all over England and Scotland. She describes the crowds as "overflowing" in her autobiography and states that "whenever I came into direct contact with the working-classes, I felt an immediate content and sympathy with the audience."⁵⁴⁸ By meeting with these large groups of people, Behn was able not only to educate

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁶ "Miss M. Slade for England," *Western Morning News and Daily Gazette*, June 19, 1934, 7, *British Newspaper Archive*; "Miraben's Mission to Britain," *The Bombay Chronicle*, July 23, 1934, 8, *Granth Sanjeevani*. Surprisingly, the same Samuel Hoare that lambasted her in Parliament did consent for her tour of Britain (see Jayawardena, *White Woman's Other Burden*, 202).

⁵⁴⁷ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 183. These "friends" that Behn mentions are mostly likely upper-class British people connected to the movement for independence stationed in London who adhered to specific methods through which they wanted to help India gain independence. There were those in positions of power sympathetic to the Indian independence movement, who felt that Gandhi and his methods were too extreme. The "friends" she talked about were Agatha Harrison and Muriel Lester who, according to Bidisha Mallik, had doubts about her ability to speak to such audiences and feared that she could swamp the boat of Gandhi's movement.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid. 183-4.

people about the movement, but observe just how much the general populace wanted to know about Gandhi and the movement.

Her first lecture outside of her initial meetings in London was Saturday July 7, 1934 at the Y.W.C.A. College of Selly Oak, Birmingham. A journalist from the *Birmingham Gazette* was sent to cover the event and interview Behn. Behn stated that

I simply want to be among the people and try to teach them what Mr. Gandhi means- the work he is doing... I am afraid that from what I have read in the papers and heard it seems that they don't understand.⁵⁴⁹

This talk at the Y.W.C.A. also covered topics like poverty, food shortage, weather, and Indian attire. Behn asserted that she would refrain from sending cables and postcards because they were expensive: Sending a postcard was equal to the cost of someone's food for a whole day in India.⁵⁵⁰ She also commented on the reporter's choice of clothing, a tweed coat and flannel trousers, declaring "No wonder you're hot, all stuffed up like that. Why, in India, no one would think of dressing like that."⁵⁵¹ With these statements and comments, Behn not only educated the people present about Gandhi, the movement, and India, but also delivered thinly veiled critiques of British culture and style, challenging the British white supremacy narrative so often uncritically assumed by imperial authorities.

Behn did talks like this all over Britain: From Cheltenham, Nelson, Leeds, Dundee Nottingham, or Bedfordshire. She spoke at colleges, churches, anti-war societies, and YMCAs. Wherever she went, news of her visit preceded her in the local press. Coverage ranged from tiny blurbs at the bottom of pages to multi-column articles with pictures of Behn wearing her khadi.

⁵⁴⁹ "Sending a Postcard-Price Of A Day's Food- Mira Bai Tells How Careful Gandhi Is," *Birmingham Gazette* July 9, 1934, 3, *British Newspaper Archive*. This is one of the few newspapers that actually uses a form of Mira Behn's preferred name in a headline, rather than the usual "Miss Slade."

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

While she had been prominently featured in the press during the Round Table Conference of 1931, during this tour more coverage was given to her own imprisonment and work with the movement, rather than her role as Gandhi's assistant.⁵⁵² The British press still often returned to the theme of abandoning her wealth and class to follow Gandhi, but they did move beyond harping on this topic to include information about her work with the Round Table Conference, and in the Civil Disobedience Campaign, as well as her imprisonment.⁵⁵³

While some newspapers purely stuck to rather trivial facts, such as about with whom Behn stayed during her visit and even offered salacious tidbits about Behn sleeping on the floor, others reported matter-of-factly about what she explicitly spoke about. One writer in the *Nottingham Journal*, while claiming to be "impressed by Behn," directly disputed Behn's statements:

Miss Slade's attack on British rule in India- all the more bitter because it was delivered in such a patient voice- is not calculated to help the cause for which she pleads. England for four hundred years was ruled by the Romans and even to-day we have cause to be grateful for what they did for our country. They gave us the cream of Roman culture, Roman civilisation, [and] Roman laws. This is Britain's gift to India... The Salt Tax, which she condemned as iniquitous, must be understood as the chief means by which the people can be made to pay the necessary expenses of government. These expenses under "self-government" would certainly not be less, probably more.⁵⁵⁴

This was exactly the type of imperialist propaganda that Behn was attempting to combat. The same author went on to state that "the message Miss Slade *must* take back to India is that even Liberal opinion in Great Britain is that India is not yet ready for complete self-

⁵⁵² This is not to say that Gandhi was completely left out of the narrative, which would be impossible, since Behn was on tour to promote Gandhi's movement and correct misinformation about him. She was still presented as "Gandhi's Disciple" in some headlines, but the articles tended to focus more on her.

⁵⁵³ Examples of the more in-depth profiles of Behn can be found in "A Striking Figure Comes to Lancashire," *Lancashire Evening Post*, August 22, 1934, 6, *British Newspaper Archive*; "Gandhi's Woman Disciple in Leeds," *The Leeds Mercury*, August 29, 1934, 5, *British Newspaper Archive*; and "Ghandi's [sic] Disciple Coming to Warwick," *Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser & Leamington Gazette*, September 22, 1934, 5, *British Newspaper Archive*.

⁵⁵⁴ "Gandhi's Disciple," *The Nottingham Journal*, August 31, 1934, 9, *British Newspaper Archive*.

government.”⁵⁵⁵ These were common beliefs among the British middle-class. Based on the concept that India needed to be civilized by superior Western culture, taught at public schools and endlessly repeated in the newspapers, magazines, and books, consensus among the educated public was that India should be saved by the British from ruin, and that it would be a long while before its population could be trusted to govern itself. These kinds of arrogant beliefs are why it is important that Behn insisted on using the name given to her by Gandhi rather than her anglicized birthname, that she wore khadi, and discussed how poverty and starvation had been caused by the taxes and the British government implemented.

One somewhat awkward topic came up frequently because many British were curious about it, which was Gandhi’s decision to retire from his leadership role within the India National Congress.

Gandhi had served as president in the late 1920s, and represented Congress as its sole delegate at the Round Table Conference in 1931, but since afterwards had passed the baton primarily to Jawaharlal Nehru in particular. Mira Behn’s official statement to the people of Britain was that

Gandhi is retiring from leadership of the Congress to be more free, serving the people not officially as one connected with the organization.⁵⁵⁶

While this was technically true, Gandhi had other motives as well. In an August 1934 letter to Mira Behn, Gandhi wrote, “The corruption in the Congress is preying on me as it has never done before.”⁵⁵⁷ It was no secret that the ideals of Gandhi and the Congress parted ways as

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ Morton, *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi*, 183. Behn also stated that Gandhi would continue to work with smaller committees within Congress (Reuter, “Gandhi’s Woman Disciple: A Five-Day Visit to England,” *Belfast News-Letter*, October 25, 1934, 14, *British Newspaper Archive*).

⁵⁵⁷ Gandhi, “August 7, 1934,” *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 401. Donald Rothermund also argued that Gandhi “made Congress into an organization which he could influence by remote control without being drawn into its internal conflicts,” which allowed Gandhi to pick and choose how to utilize Congress as he saw fit, (Donald Rothermund, “Gandhi as a Politician,” *India Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (1970): 362-7, 367).

the 1930s went on. In his personal diary, Romain Rolland noted in July 1934 that the “British tactics are to isolate Gandhi from the Indian Congress and to deal only with the latter.”⁵⁵⁸ I posit that this division is another reason Behn focused on communicating with the working classes rather than the imperial authorities who sought to undermine the movement’s unity.

Nonetheless, upon returning to London, Behn had a “bracing” meeting with the Independent Labour Party’s leaders.⁵⁵⁹ And she was able to accomplish something that Gandhi was not during their time at the Round Table Conference in 1931, having a meeting with Winston Churchill.⁵⁶⁰ While Behn had been privy to political on-goings within the Conference, her role in it had been more of an assistant. Her meeting with the Labour Party and with Churchill added a new layer to Behn’s identity as a political figure in the movement for Indian independence.

While Behn did not have much time for anything besides delivering speeches and holding meetings during this visit, she did spend a couple of nights with her sister Rhona towards the end of her time in Britain. However, true to the Hindu practice of *tapasya* (self-discipline), she did not allow herself to attend any concerts while in London, undoubtedly a bit of a trial for a music lover such as she was throughout her life.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁸ Romain Rolland, “Extract from Romain Rolland’s Diary July 1934,” *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence*, 310.

⁵⁵⁹ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 185.

⁵⁶⁰ She also met with other political leaders of that era including David Lloyd-George, Sir Samuel Hoare, and Lord Halifax (formerly Lord Irwin, prior Viceroy of India), (see Morton, *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi*, 314).

⁵⁶¹ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 186. “Tapasya” or “Tapas” literally means “heat” and is used in yoga in terms of holding difficult poses for extended amounts of time to generate said heat (*Yogapedia* available at: <https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/6638/tapasya>, accessed July 12, 2021; Bidisha Mallik aptly explained it to me as “Tapasya in the Gandhian sense of nonviolence implies a mode of conduct with important sociopolitical implications. It is not just suffering for one’s own self, but a willingness for self-sacrifice, of directing attention away from one’s own self, a means to penetrate the heart of the opponent to whom one is appealing, so it is a means of change and transformation for one own self, for the opponent, and for the overall situation.”

At the end of the tour, Gandhi wrote to Behn that he was unwell and she should remain in England for another month.⁵⁶² Rather than stay and complete another speaking tour, she devised another idea. In a September 1934 letter to Indian industrialist and “freedom fighter,” Jammalal Bajaj, Behn wrote of her times in Britain and about an upcoming plan:

My experiences here have been very remarkable. I had, as you know, expected to find some interest and sympathy amongst the people here, but have met more than I could have ever dared to hope for, and I believe if we gave the working classes of this country a proper chance of knowing the truth we could change public opinion. At present, there is no systematic effort to reach the masses, and they know practically nothing regarding the whole question of India and Bapu. But I do believe something worthwhile can be done- I am working out a scheme with friends here and putting it before Bapu.⁵⁶³

Part of that “scheme” was to travel even farther from India and continue to combat Western falsehoods about herself, Gandhi, and the movement abroad. She decided that it might be constructive to travel to America and attempt to educate Americans on who Gandhi truly was and what Indian independence was all about. With Gandhi’s blessing, she traveled to America.⁵⁶⁴

American Tour: October 1934: Northeastern United States

Due to media attention and international notoriety, some in the US were not wholly ignorant of Gandhi and the upper-class English woman who followed him faithfully. The American press “reported heavily” on various events concerning the Indian independence movement: The 1930 Salt March, The Round Table Conference, Gandhi’s fasts, and the numerous arrests of the Indian National Congress leaders in 1934.⁵⁶⁵ America had several foundations supporting India’s plight. Two of them were the India League of America (ILA) and the All World Gandhi Fellowship (AWGF). Membership in the ILA gave those who donated

⁵⁶² Mira Behn to Horace Alexander Gundry, “Letter 1, 1934,” Box 1, Folder 11, *Horace Gundry Alexander Papers* (DG 140), Swarthmore College Peace Collection; Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 186.

⁵⁶³ Mira Behn, “Mira Behn to Shri Jammalal Bajaj, September 26, 1934,” in Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 220-1.

⁵⁶⁴ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 186

⁵⁶⁵ Clymer, *Quest for Freedom*, 9.

more than a certain minimum to gain a subscription to *India Today*.⁵⁶⁶ The fact that multiple organizations existed supportive of the cause and the kinds of information that came with membership demonstrates that a good number of Americans not only knew about Gandhi and Mira Behn but were aware of the very injustices from which India was suffering.⁵⁶⁷

Behn had already made somewhat of a name for herself in America prior to her travels there. In both 1931 and 1932, the *New York Times* featured an article about Behn because of the international attention she drew in challenging class and social norms by becoming a follower of Gandhi. The article chose to ignore the non-gender-conforming ways that Behn served Gandhi and instead chose to focus on how she waited on Gandhi, prepared his meals, and even missed out on sessions at the Round Table Conference because of her need to do his laundry.⁵⁶⁸ This portrayal of Behn is another example of the gender, racial, and social Western stereotypes of that era: It displays Behn performing typical feminine roles, and had a focus on her class background and race: An upper-class white British woman faithfully following an Indian man, was a scandalous fact for an audience still steeped in racism. Behn, however, challenged this passive profile by stepping out on her own and speaking on Gandhi and the movement's behalf during her tour in 1934. When speaking to journalists in America, they kept referring to her as "Madeleine Slade" or "Miss Slade" but she told them that "Madeleine Slade died nine years ago

⁵⁶⁶ India League of America, "Membership Application" *Peace Collection*, South Asian Digital Archive at Swarthmore College: New York 1940-1949, available at: <https://www.saada.org/item/20120712-727>, accessed November 6, 2018. Basic Membership was \$1.00 annually, with \$5.00 and \$10.00 memberships garnering the subscription. The ILA would not see real prominence until after World War Two.

⁵⁶⁷ A version of this paragraph appears in "There is No 'I' in Mahatma," *The Proceedings*.

⁵⁶⁸ S.T. Williamson, "About an Ambassador, a Yankee Democrat, An Alabamian and a Gandhi Disciple," *New York Times*, February 21, 1932, Par. 4, available at: <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1932/02/21/105784431.pdf>, accessed November 5, 2018; Margarita Barnes, "MiraBai: Gandhi's English Disciple: The Daughter of an Admiral, Miss Slade Keeps Her Stern Vows of Service," *New York Times*, November 15, 1931, SM10, available at: *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times*, accessed October 21, 2019.

when I renounced the world.”⁵⁶⁹ Behn’s retort appears to be an attempt to combat the misinformation and misconstruction of the press using an incorrect name and to recognize her by her chosen name, but, many headlines still utilized “Miss Slade.” By touring America, Behn did not only correct misconceptions about Gandhi and the movement but about herself as well, challenging prejudice and conventional wisdom.

Reverend John Haynes Holmes, the Chairman of American League for India’s Freedom and President of the All World Gandhi Fellowship, believed that Mira Behn “had the courage and the supreme intelligence” to handle her responsibilities as essentially Gandhi’s right-hand-man and that she “brings to mind the consecrated women in the New Testament who followed Jesus in his ministry.”⁵⁷⁰ Holmes, a Unitarian minister in New York who helped found the NAACP, first discovered Gandhi’s philosophy in 1918.⁵⁷¹ It was Holmes who was responsible for making those believing in Indian independence in America aware of Gandhi’s philosophy, making Gandhi the face of the independence movement because of his fervent belief that he was the “greatest man in the world.”⁵⁷² It was his powerful belief in Gandhi and Behn that inspired Holmes to schedule to have Behn to do a two-week speaking tour across America immediately after her multi-month tour across Great Britain. Behn was very receptive to this idea since Gandhi was unable to do much work for the movement because of his illness.

New York

Behn arrived in America on Wednesday, October 10, 1934, after a rough and treacherous trip aboard *The Majestic*; she had not yet left the ship before being hounded by twelve reporters

⁵⁶⁹ Morton, *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi*, 183.

⁵⁷⁰ John Haynes Holmes, *Gandhi and Non-Violence*, (Delhi: Akashdeep Pub. House, 1988), 141-2, 142.

⁵⁷¹ Raucher, “American Anti-Imperialists,” 95, 101.

⁵⁷² Ibid. 101. Raucher states that for many Americans, Gandhi became the symbol for any social action or moral alternative response to war (see *ibid.*, 101-2).

who “pelted” her with questions for roughly thirty to forty minutes upon docking.⁵⁷³ In addition to the reporters, there were also ten photographers calling at her from all directions yelling “look right this way, please.”⁵⁷⁴

Almost immediately after handling the media circus aboard the ship, Behn was summoned to a “Press Tea,” where she remained surrounded by reporters prepared with lists of questions.⁵⁷⁵ While she had just come off her solo tour in Great Britain, she seemed overwhelmed and shocked by the response of her docking in America, for she had never before been approached by that many journalists at once. It appears that even though it was not Gandhi himself, Americans were interested in this upper-class English woman who came in his stead to enlighten the public about Gandhi and the movement.

With no time for rest, her first official engagement was at the Barbizon-Plaza Hotel in New York City on the night of her arrival. This event was attended by around seventy-five people. Here, Behn stated how the purpose of her tour was to educate the West and to additionally address India’s economic problems stemming from its lack of self-rule as well as the need to bring back the cloth-spinning industry to India.⁵⁷⁶ In the *New York Times* article covering the event, Behn is described as wearing a “simple white cotton hood and robe which she had spun herself.”⁵⁷⁷ This depiction of Behn contrasts the original *New York Times* portrayals because it displays her oratory skills and her independence rather than her subservient role to Gandhi. Evidently, by visiting the US in person, Behn acquired a humanity and complexity that had been denied her in the earlier pieces. This clearly shows the wisdom of her decision to visit

⁵⁷³ Mira Behn to Horace Alexander Gundry, “October 13, 1934,” Box 1, Folder 11, *Horace Gundry Alexander Papers* (DG 140), 1, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid

⁵⁷⁶ “Article 3-No Title,” *New York Times (1923-Current file)*; October 11, 1934, available at: *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times*, accessed October 1, 2019.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

the US personally. She was no longer a cardboard figure about whom facile clichés could be spread. Speaking to this crowd of seventy-five people was just a small taste of what Behn came to experience during her time in New York.

Her second public appearance occurred Sunday, October 14, 1934 at a town hall meeting of John Haynes Holmes' Community Church.⁵⁷⁸ The room was packed at capacity with 1600 people, with an additional 100 standing and 200 more outside.⁵⁷⁹ One week later, Behn spoke at Rabbi Steven Wise's Synagogue at Carnegie Hall which held, at the time, 3000 to 4000 people.⁵⁸⁰ In New York alone, the, Behn was able to reach and educate thousands of people. She must have been satisfied that her strategy of reaching out to the popular masses rather than limiting herself to communicating with a small educated or interested elite proved again effective.

The New York leg of her tour focused mostly on Abrahamic-religion-based audiences. Behn demonstrated smart oratorical strategy and political savvy by catering her speeches to her specific audiences. When speaking to the religious congregations, Behn described Gandhi as a "man of God," and is quoted in the *New York Times* stating, "his life is dedicated to the services of God and to a search for the ultimate truth."⁵⁸¹ She adjusted her speeches and talks like this throughout the different legs of her tour. By connecting Gandhi and the movement for Indian independence to the Abrahamic God, she was able to reach an audience that might not have felt much of an association to the movement in what was a largely non-Christian India. She was also

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Mira Behn to Horace Alexander Gundry, "October 13, 1934," 3, *Horace Gundry Alexander Papers*.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ "Gandhi is Pictured As Servant of God: 'I Do Not Stand for Freedom of India, but for Truth,' He Told Miss Slade," *New York Times (1923-Current file)*, October 15, 1934, 13.

able to create similarities whereas without the connection there may not have been as much empathy or sympathy.

Religious audiences might recognize affinities between the oppression faced by ancient Jews and the current oppression faced by the Indian people. She also deftly invoked a direct quotation from Gandhi in which he stated, “Let me become nothing, a cipher, for only then can I become a pure instrument in the hands of God.”⁵⁸² This sort of statement enabled Behn to connect Gandhi’s “ultimate truth,” of Indian freedom with Abrahamic ideations of religious truth, and making the Indian independence movement appear another part of “God’s plan” while making Gandhi himself a vessel of God. This would not be the only way that Behn utilized connections and networks on her tour, for she used her connection with Lillian Wald to enlist a very powerful ally for the movement.

During her stay in New York, Behn stayed at Lillian Wald’s Henry Street Settlement which gave her “a glimpse of the poverty which lies in the back parts of that great city.”⁵⁸³ Lillian Wald had become a staunch American ally of the Indian independence movement. Sometime earlier, Wald, of course, had been raised as a young woman to a life of privilege (not unlike a young Madeleine Slade), who became “one of the most influential and respected social reformers of the twentieth century,” founded the Settlement in 1893 to offer solace to the industrial poor of New York City.⁵⁸⁴ By the time of Behn’s visit in 1934, the Settlement had expanded to seven buildings on Henry Street and provided medical and social assistance, and even offered music lessons to the poor of New York.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸² Ibid.

⁵⁸³ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 187.

⁵⁸⁴ “Lillian Wald,” *Henry Street Settlement*, available at: <https://www.henrystreet.org/about/our-history/lillian-wald/>, accessed October 22, 2019.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid.

Based on her upbringing in England and her time in India, Behn was astounded by what she witnessed in New York City: the “surroundings seem appalling, but the people most charming;” the streets were “the dirtiest in the West” and pedestrians risk their lives “dodging in and out amongst this whirl-wind of motor traffic.”⁵⁸⁶ Through New York, Behn got her first taste of America, Behn would proceed to meet with political leaders and race advocates, adding a depth to her experience that even Behn could not have predicted.

College Tours and the White House

Outside of New York, Behn spoke at colleges in Washington DC, West Chester, Philadelphia, and Boston, the most prominent being Harvard University. Prior to Behn’s visit, there had only been a few Indian spokesmen who “found sympathetic audiences among American students and teachers” of colleges and universities in terms of the Indian independence movement.⁵⁸⁷ Because of such predecessors, Behn could assume that college-aged young adults might be very receptive to the message of the movement. Since those previous speakers had visited, American interest in Gandhi had grown exponentially, and Behn’s close connection to Gandhi seemed an excellent opportunity to have more American students ally with the movement.

Haverford College and Swarthmore College were two colleges at which Behn spoke. News of her speech at Haverford first appeared in *Haverford News* on October 15, 1934, in an article relegated to the last page of the newspaper in which the reporter misspelled several words and names in its headline: “Madelain Slade, Ghandi Disciple to Biscuss Him in Collection on Friday.”⁵⁸⁸ Yet, after Behn spoke, the same paper spelled her name correctly and information

⁵⁸⁶ Mira Behn to Horace Alexander Gundry, “October 13, 1934,” 2, *Horace Gundry Alexander Papers*.

⁵⁸⁷ Raucher, “American Anti-Imperialists,” 90.

⁵⁸⁸ “Madelain Slade, Ghandi Disciple to Biscuss Him in Collection on Friday,” *Haverford News*, Vol. 26, No. 4, October 15, 1934, 6, *Haverford College Libraries*.

about her talk made the front page and spanned multiple pages. At Haverford, Behn spoke to an ethics class about violence in America as well as the daily life in an ashram and concluded the talk with a question-and-answer. She was quoted as saying that

Western Civilization has been built up by robbing the East...by means of slavery, forced trading, the seizure of land, and the passing of laws that over-rode indiscriminately the established native rule.⁵⁸⁹

This change in the publication's attitude in terms of attention to detail demonstrates the powerful and positive effects that Behn had on such college campuses. At Swarthmore College, the political science department sponsored her visit.⁵⁹⁰ While news of her visit did warrant front-page news for Swarthmore, it "advertised" her as the British Admiral's daughter, in a similar vein to the early British press.⁵⁹¹ Again, after her speech, a multi-page article was published, having apparently made a deep impression on her audience. During her talk at Swarthmore she discussed the loss of the cloth industry in India, she was quoted as saying

God has given just enough for the needs of the world...and the west has deprived the east by holding up as good, a high standard of living, and thus leaving for the east starvation and poverty. We must put this right.⁵⁹²

While reaching the young adults of America was important, her most politically significant meeting occurred with arguably the most powerful woman in America at that time, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

For Lillian Wald did not just provide housing for Behn in New York, but was a close friend to the First Lady, and provided her with a very powerful political connection. In a letter to

⁵⁸⁹ "America Full of 'Callow Violence,' Madeleine Slade Tells Group Here," *Haverford News*, vol. 26, no. 5, October 22, 1934, 1 and 6, 1, *Haverford College Libraries*.

⁵⁹⁰ "Madeleine Slade, Gandhi's Disciple To Speak October 19," *Swarthmore Phoenix*, vol. 54, no.3, October 16, 1934, 1, available at: http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/SC_Phoenix/id/9503/rec/1, accessed June 15, 2021.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹² "Follower of Gandhi Described Conditions of Indian Life Today," *Swarthmore Phoenix*, vol. 54, no.3, October 16, 1934, 1 and 6, 6, available at: http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/SC_Phoenix/id/9510/rec/2, accessed June 15, 2021.

Roosevelt, Wald describes Behn as “Gandhi’s right-hand-man” and emphasizes Behn’s interest in meeting with the First Lady; Roosevelt must have been quite intrigued with the idea of meeting Behn, because she quickly responded, inviting Behn for tea at 5pm on Wednesday, October 17, 1934.⁵⁹³

Behn took her first airplane ride ever from New York to Washington DC, describing it as an experience she could “easily live without.”⁵⁹⁴ However, once her feet were firmly planted on the ground, she walked her “stockingless sandaled feet” into the White House, to meet with the First Lady.⁵⁹⁵ Behn stayed for more than half an hour with Eleanor Roosevelt because of all the questions that the First Lady had for her; she proved to be “just as Democratic as her hostess,” and when she concluded the meeting, Behn “emerged with a new friend.”⁵⁹⁶ By meeting with the First Lady, Behn was able to further increase the significance of the work she began still on board the ocean liner in New York. The meeting was a crucial moment in the effort of educating others about the movement and Gandhi and her own role in the organization at Gandhi’s side.

Behn spoke with several reporters about meeting at the White House. She utilized her time with the reporters not merely to describe her time at the White House, but to draw attention to issues affecting India, such as khadi and mechanization.

I do not like the headlong rush that the machine age has brought about. The wonderful thing is that people here are so delightful in the midst of such a mechanized life... Yes this sari that I am wearing, I spun myself while I was in prison for year... This hand bag I sewed in prison. In New York, I have with me my spinning wheel, and every spare moment I have, I spin.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹³ Lillian Wald to Eleanor Roosevelt, “October 14, 1934,” *Eleanor Roosevelt Digitized Correspondence*, Roosevelt Presidential Library; Eleanor Roosevelt to Lillian Wald, “October 16, 1934,” *Eleanor Roosevelt Digitized Correspondence*, Roosevelt Presidential Library.

⁵⁹⁴ Associated Press, “Gandhi’s Disciple White House Guest: Madeleine Slade in Sari and Sandals Calls on Wife of the President.” *New York Times (1923-Current file)*; October 19, 1934, 25.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷ “Disciple of Gandhi Guest of First Lady,” *The Palm Beach Post*, October 19, 1934, 11, available at: *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: U.S. Southeast Collection*.

Behn described her time at the White House as “the most enjoyable part of her brief tour.”⁵⁹⁸ Behn enjoyed the “simplicity and lack of ostentation” of the White House and ensured Lillian Wald upon her return to New York that “every part of India, every villager, will know...and appreciate the courtesy and honor” of Mrs. Roosevelt’s reception.⁵⁹⁹

Mira Behn’s meeting likewise made a significant impression on Eleanor Roosevelt. In a meeting with a group of bankers’ wives, Mrs. Roosevelt spoke about international relations and quoted Mira Behn stating, “we do not want something which is good for us alone but something which is good for the whole world.”⁶⁰⁰

While Behn gained a new friend in Eleanor Roosevelt, she may have also laid the foundation for greater political involvement by the US in fostering the cause of Indian independence, for Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) became one of its allies of the movement during and after World War Two. Her meeting with the First Lady further proved that Behn was not just Gandhi’s handmaiden or help-meet, but a powerful, fervent political leader of the movement in her own right, who might exert an important influence on the course of India’s history.

Race Relations

There were prominent African Americans who found a connection between their plight and that of the people of India, for there was a “logical path” between the defense of African American rights and “humanitarian sympathy for the victims of imperialism.”⁶⁰¹ One of these

⁵⁹⁸ “Miss Slade Sails, Ending Brief Visit: Says Gandhi’s Decision to Retire is Misunderstood-Praises White House Simplicity,” *New York Times* (1923-Current file); October 25, 1934, 47; *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Times*.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid; Lillian Wald to Eleanor Roosevelt, “October 27, 1934,” *Eleanor Roosevelt Digitized Correspondence*, Roosevelt Presidential Library.

⁶⁰⁰ “Bankers’ Wives Told They Have Chance to Promote Peace,” *Tampa Morning Tribune*, October 24, 1934, 5, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

⁶⁰¹ Raucher, “American Anti-Imperialists,” 85.

prominent African Americans was Howard Thurman, who rose to the rank of Dean of Rankin Chapel at one of the most prestigious HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges [and] Universities) in America, Howard University, Thurman brought Mira Behn to the university to speak to its students and faculty.

Howard Thurman had been born in segregated Florida and raised in a society where “white and black worlds (were) separated by a wall of quiet hostility and overt suspicion.”⁶⁰² Thurman knew that the Indian experience resembled that of the African-American in America and believed that by sharing Gandhi’s ideals with the African-American students of his college, they might be inspired by India’s movement for independence and (social) justice. Thus, Mira Behn provided the connection between the students and Gandhi. Thurman believed that

it was urgent that we should have a chance to meet and talk. From her, I was sure that it would be possible to get a feel of the life, the mood, and the people of India.⁶⁰³

He also ascertained that she shared the plight of the African American with Gandhi, writing in his autobiography, “It was important that she should have exposure, in a primary way, to American Negroes, in order that her experience be shared with the Mahatma.”⁶⁰⁴ Gandhi had once referred to Mira Behn as a “bridge” between East and West, and through her speech at Howard University, she became a bridge between African Americans and Gandhi that had much broader impacts than either she, or Thurman, could have imagined.

On October 17, 1934, Behn stood in front of a “large and appreciative audience” at Howard University that had “little general knowledge of the vast subcontinent of India.”⁶⁰⁵ In her speech, she strayed from her typical diatribes against Western misinformation and addressed a

⁶⁰² Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 10.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 105-6.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

new topic: race. She stated that “the spirit of Gandhi was very near because the American Negro suffered at the hands of the white man in the same terrible manner in which the people of India have suffered.”⁶⁰⁶ Behn understood that African Americans could be allies to India’s cause, because their plight and self-determination essentially mirrored that of the people of the subcontinent. She emphasized the similarities between Gandhi and Jesus, both geographically and physically, stating how “the greatest spiritual teachings of the world have all come from darker races.”⁶⁰⁷ By drawing the connections between such powerful spiritual leaders, not only did Behn seek allies because of race, but reached across racial lines, as a white woman, finding solidarity through Christian ideology and practices. She additionally addressed the issue of materialism and over-consumption stating, “he who has more than he actually needs is a thief.”⁶⁰⁸ The students hung to her every word, and many students spoke of her speech for days.⁶⁰⁹ While the subsequent influence of the students on changes within American life cannot be measured, her connection to Howard Thurman definitely proved vital to the relationship between African Americans and Gandhi.

In 1935, the national YMCA and YWCA International Committee formed a committee of African Americans who were to travel to India, Burma, and Ceylon on a “Pilgrimage of Friendship.”⁶¹⁰ Thurman joined that pilgrimage, and through his connection with Behn, the

⁶⁰⁶ “Disciple of Gandhi,” *The Hilltop*, November 1, 1934, 1, *Moorland-Spingarn Research Center*, Howard University, available at: https://dh.howard.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1047&context=hilltop_193040, accessed June 24, 2019.

⁶⁰⁷ Lynn Burnett, “African Americans Make Contact With Gandhi,” *crossculturalsolidarity.com*, 1-20, 7-8, available at: <http://crossculturalsolidarity.com/african-americans-make-contact-with-gandhi-the-1930s/>, accessed October 1, 2019.

⁶⁰⁸ “Disciple of Gandhi,” *The Hilltop*, 1.

⁶⁰⁹ Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 107.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 103. For more on the Pilgrimage of Friendship see Quinton Hosford Dixie and Peter R. Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World: Howard Thurman's Pilgrimage to India and the Origins of African American Nonviolence*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2011).

group met Gandhi and discussed the issues of race and the various protest movements within both countries. Upon leaving Howard University in 1934, Behn urged Thurman to

you must see Gandhiji while you are there (India). He will want to visit with you and will invite you to be the guests of the ashram. I'll talk with him about it upon my return and you will hear from him.⁶¹¹

Behn was true to her word and spoke highly of Thurman upon her return to India, and Gandhi arranged to meet with Thurman.

The idea of this African-American group visiting frightened the British. The official goal of the delegation in Asia was to promote African American Christianity.⁶¹² While that may have been the official aim of the delegation, the British were scared that through its promotion of African-American civil rights and rejection of racial oppression, African Americans would become powerful allies and supporters of Gandhi and “weaken white supremacy” across the globe.⁶¹³ The powers-that-be of the British Empire even tried to stop the delegation’s pilgrimage but failed. The most the imperial authorities did, however, was have the delegation followed by British spies who “made it clear that they would be removed from India the second they were suspected of contributing to the Indian freedom struggle.”⁶¹⁴ The delegation was never forcibly removed.

When meeting Thurman, Gandhi questioned him heavily about the plight of African Americans, and Thurman, in return, was able to question Gandhi about his movement of non-violence.⁶¹⁵ While this conversation may seem at first glance the exchange of ideas amongst

⁶¹¹ Burnett, “African Americans Make Contact With Gandhi,” 9.

⁶¹² Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, xiii.

⁶¹³ Burnett, 9-10.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12-3.

religious and independence leaders, this conversation between the two men would be part of a much larger picture which I will explore further below.

America and India Post-Behn

In a December 1934 letter, Gandhi wrote John Haynes Holmes that

Mirabehn did extraordinarily well both in Great Britain and America. Truth gives a power that nothing else can. And Mira wanted to express through her speech nothing but what she believed to be the whole truth.⁶¹⁶

Across Britain and the United States that is exactly what Behn did: she spread the truth about Gandhi and the movement and did her best to correct the widespread falsehoods among it that were current in the Western world. Along the way, Behn networked and made connections that helped the movement in ways she could have never predicted. Her connection to Lillian Wald led her to Eleanor Roosevelt who in turn relayed information about the movement to her husband, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who would be forced to listen on more than one occasion to India's plight.

According to historian Kenton J. Clymer, "by its own admission, the US had no policy toward India prior to the outbreak of World War Two in September 1939."⁶¹⁷ While this may be true, Mira Behn was responsible for bringing the movement to the Eleanor Roosevelt's attention almost five years prior. In 1943, Eleanor Roosevelt, concerned about the severe famine occurring in Bengal, India, would, once again, bring the state of India to the attention of the President.⁶¹⁸

The Roosevelt administration did not officially challenge Britain about colonialism or its responsibility for the Bengal famine, but the movement's connections to Roosevelt by way of the

⁶¹⁶ Mahatma Gandhi, "Letter, December 21, 1934," in *Mahatma Gandhi: Letters to Americans*, ed. E.S. Reddy, New York: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1998, 145-6, available at: <http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/americans.pdf>, accessed November 8, 2019.

⁶¹⁷ Clymer, *Quest for Freedom*, 11.

⁶¹⁸ Manish Sinha, "The Bengal Famine of 1943 and the American Insensitiveness to Food Aid," *Proceedings of the India History Congress*, 70 (2009-2010), 887-893: 890.

president's wife allowed for the India League of American and the pro-India press to draw public attention to the topic.⁶¹⁹ The initial contact between Behn, a Western woman who demonstrated that her race and class did not automatically place her above an Indian man, and such a powerful figure as Eleanor Roosevelt, allowed for the later spread of awareness of the India independence movement in America.

Race was a topic that was near-and-dear to the movement for Indian independence. Before World War Two's deathcamps, which challenged every idea of the superiority of the white man, Western Powers largely uncritically subscribed to ideals of white supremacy, not least in justifying colonial rule (as for example Churchill did, albeit more through his actions than through his words). Behn challenged those ideals by following an Indian man and supporting the movement to remove British (white European) control from India. African Americans were in the throes of racial discrimination and segregation in America and many strongly felt connected to the movement once they learned about it. The Civil Rights movement in America and the Indian independence movement had many parallels. The Civil Rights movement truly took off in the 1950s and 1960s in America, but its groundwork had been laid earlier decades. Behn's connection to Howard Thurman fed into the ideals of the Civil Rights movement that aided in its success in the 1960s.⁶²⁰

Upon the Pilgrimage of Friendship leaving India in 1935, Gandhi prophesized that it might be through the African Americans that "the unadulterated message of non-violence will be delivered to the world."⁶²¹ Gandhi would never know how true that statement was in the US.

⁶¹⁹ Robert Shaffer, "J.J. Singh and the India League of America, 1945-1959: Pressing at the Margins of the Cold War Consensus," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 68-103: 74.

⁶²⁰ There are others, such as Muriel Lester, who have a closer connection to American Civil Rights ideals and activists. This section was not meant to give Mira Behn all of the credit for inspiring Thurman, but to discuss her influence.

⁶²¹ Burnett, "African Americans Make Contact With Gandhi," 14.

Howard Thurman's delegation inspired a friend and co-worker, Benjamin Mays, who traveled himself to India in 1936 and met with Gandhi himself. Thurman and Mays took Gandhi's message to heart. Mays returned to America believing in the Gandhian ideals of non-violent resistance and Mays went on to mentor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the leader of the Civil Rights movement in the US.⁶²² Inspired by actions and words of Mahatma Gandhi, King, of course, used non-violent resistance and protest to bring about civil rights and legislation to end the legal oppression of the African-American race in his country in the 1950s and 1960s.

Conclusion

Behn ended her tour in America on October 24, 1934, when she embarked on "the Washington of the United States Lines for London, en route to India."⁶²³ She had a few qualms about America such as "the heat of American dwellings" or "the cold of American ice water," but had overall liked the American people and found the experience beneficial.⁶²⁴ In her autobiography, Behn expressed elation and appreciation for her time in America stating that everywhere she went there was interest "shown in Bapu as a person."⁶²⁵ Mahatma Gandhi never visited America, meanwhile, because he felt that his calling to solve India's problems was best answered by remaining in India. Gandhi's attention was also diverted during the 1930s. Independence was no longer Gandhi's only priority, and from 1933 onward, Gandhi toured India

⁶²² Ibid., 16. MLK knew of Mira Behn. In two letters to a former medical volunteer worker in India, Alex Aronson, MLK references Mira Behn. In one dated April 4, 1966, MLK states "I trust Mirabehn's work on Beethoven is coming along well. I shall be eternally grateful to her for her gift to me of the Gandhi booklet," while in another letter to Alan Mendelson, King states that "I shall always cherish Mirabehn's 'Digest' of Gandhi's thoughts and am humbled and honored that the digest should find its way to me at Mirabehn's request via Alex and you," (see Alex Aronson, Alan Mendelson, and Joan Michelson, *From Bergen-Belsen to Baghdad: The Letters of Alex Aronson*, (Oakville, ON: Mosaic Press, 1991), 116, 117).

⁶²³ "Miss Slade Sails, Ending Brief Visit," *New York Times* (1923-Current file); October 25, 1934, 47.

⁶²⁴ "World's Salvation Through Dark Races- Mira Ben Speaks to America...," *The Bombay Chronicle*, December 4, 1934, 7, *Granth Sanjeevani*.

⁶²⁵ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 188.

promoting the end of discrimination against the “Untouchables” caste.⁶²⁶ Behn was not only able to act as Gandhi’s representation internationally, but she was able to give the Indian independence movement her undivided attention. This kind of focus allowed her to educate the public in Britain and the United States, and possibly effect change.

Much like her grassroots tours in India, in Great Britain, Behn mainly spoke to working-class people. She felt that the upper echelon of society knew what was going on in India, and it would be only through addressing the working classes that she could truly elicit sympathy of people for the Indian independence movement. She followed a slightly different strategy in the US.

On her American tour, Behn spoke to people of differing classes, races, and religions, somewhat calibrating her message to her audience. When she spoke to congregations, she focused on the similarities between Gandhi and Jesus. When she spoke to African Americans at Howard University, she focused on racial oppression plaguing America and its parallels to struggle of the Indian race in their own country under white overlords. She used her connections with Lillian Wald to meet with, arguably, the most powerful woman in the United States and share the information of the movement which had unmeasurable effects.

Behn began her solo tours faced with the Western world’s mere curiosity about this upper-class English woman who would abandon her life of luxury to follow an Indian man. She combatted misinformation about Gandhi, the movement for Indian independence, and even herself. At the tour’s end, she left Britain and America more educated on Gandhi and the movement. She went to these places demonstrating that the British civilizing mission was a crude mind construct ill-suited for the Indian nation and, indeed, any other non-Western country.

⁶²⁶ Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, 78.

She personified the opposite of British colonial rule, that of white subordination to Indian culture. In both America and Britain, she laid the foundation for the general populace to accept the fact that British rule was not what was best for India. Most importantly, Behn proved that she could be so much more than a mere assistant in the movement for Indian independence. Gandhi wrote to a friend that Behn's "personality had suppressed under me [and] I hope that she will regain her former independence of character."⁶²⁷ Through this tour, she was able to accomplish just that. She stepped out on her own internationally and demonstrated great networking, oratory, and political skills. These skills would prove vital throughout World War Two and the final push for Indian independence.

⁶²⁷ Gandhi, Suhrud and Weber, *Beloved Bapu*, 394; For more about her loss of independence read about Behn's visit to Romain Rolland in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER SIX: FROM SINDI TO SOLITUDE: MIRA BEHN IN THE VILLAGES

Introduction

Upon returning from her international tour, Mira Behn had a newfound sense of purpose and direction about her impact within the independence movement in India. By the end of 1934, she had served the movement as an assistant to Gandhi, as a satyagraha writing and distributing nationalist propaganda, had been a prisoner, and travelled as an international spokesperson. After doing all of this, she returned to her beginnings in the movement becoming once more an educator and village worker.

Between 1935 and 1942, Mira Behn went through a myriad of personal and emotional changes. At first, she settled in a small community near Wardha and set out to improve the lives of Harijans through improved medicinal, farming, and sanitation practices. However, she found herself feeling something she had not felt since her youthful days in England: romantic love. The love was unrequited and sent Behn spiraling mentally downward which led to a fifteenth-month silence. After her fifteenth-month silence, she rediscovered herself and became a stronger ally and worker for the movement for Indian independence. Behn was no longer the woman whom journalists photographed in Gandhi's shadow and at his feet in London 1931. During this era, India as a British colony underwent a similar fundamental change.

India and British Relations in the late 1930s

The India of the latter half of the 1930s was different from the early 1930s Civil Disobedience-era. In the mid-1930s, Sir Samuel Hoare, the British cabinet member who made "angry remarks" about Mira Behn in the House of Commons in 1932, was made Secretary of

State for India. Many Congress members had been oppressed and imprisoned due to their actions in the early 1930s, but were now at liberty again, while Gandhi “retired” from Congress in 1934, and British politicians were “divided” over what the focus of the Empire should be: Some, like Winston Churchill, believed in an India-centric empire while others wanted to focus on the “Centrality of Dominions.”⁶²⁸ And, of course, there was a global war brewing that came to a head in September 1939 when the UK officially went to war with Germany.⁶²⁹ Perhaps most significantly for India, the British colonial rulers made a last-ditch effort that had repercussions lasting throughout the rest of the 1930s and 1940s, and even for independent India: The 1935 Government of India Act.

The 1935 Government of India Act was a several-hundred-page document that introduced a system of a division of power and proposed for eventual self-government for both the British Raj and the Princely States.⁶³⁰ Scholars argue about the overall “success” (or in the eyes of some, “failure”) of the Act. Sarath Pillai argues that the Act is “the most important act of the British Parliament for Colonial India,” C.L. Anand argues the Act “was one of greatest Constitutional measures ever passed by the British Parliament,” whereas Lynn Zastoupil argues the Act “proved to be a failure.”⁶³¹ Whether one considers the Government of India Act a success or failure, it had a long-lasting impact that cannot be refuted.

⁶²⁸ Mahatma Gandhi. *Letters to Sardar Patel*, trans and ed. by Valji Govindji Desai and Sudarshan Desai, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1957), 103, available at: <https://archive.org/details/letterstosardarv00gand/mode/2up>, accessed April 2, 2021; Andrew Muldoon, *Empire, Politics, and the Creation of the 1935 India Act: Last Act of the Raj*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 5. “Centrality of Dominions” meaning a focus on the British colonies with Dominion Status.

⁶²⁹ While the start of the war chronologically begins within the timeframe of this chapter’s discussion, India’s involvement does not truly ramp up until 1942 and the timeframe of chapter seven. For more on India in World War Two, see Chapter Seven.

⁶³⁰ *Government of India Act, 1935*. Accessed April 2, 2021. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5and1Edw8/26/2/enacted>

⁶³¹ Sarath Pillai, “Fragmenting the Nation: Divisible Sovereignty and Travancore's Quest for Federal Independence.” *Law and History Review* 34, no. 3 (2016): 743-82, 745; C.L. Anand, *Law and History of the Government of India: Government of India Act, 1935 and the Constitution of India*, eighth edition, (Delhi: Universal Law Publishing Ltd., 2008), 19; Lynn Zastoupil, “The Government of India Act, 1935,” in *Twentieth Century*

The Act introduced the principle of local representative government, while India as a whole remained under British rule.⁶³² While the Act attempted to provide more power to local governments through staging elections by the general populations within the Raj, the Princely States did not like how the Act “diminished” their legal status (which was one of quasi-independence).⁶³³ The main anti-colonial movements, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, did not approve of the Act either. Congress believed that the Act was just another attempt by the British to promise reform without real change. Congress was not wrong, for, through the Act, the British Government’s appointed governors and officials would retain powers that greatly restricted the powers of the various Indian territories, such as the power to veto legislature and economic issues.⁶³⁴ However, while the British remained in control after 1935, Congress benefitted from the local elections that occurred due to the passage of the 1935 Act.

In March 1937, 30 million voters went to the polls and secured the Indian National Congress victories in the majority of the provinces, that is, Madras, Bombay, United Provinces (UP), the Central Provinces, Bihar, and Orissa.⁶³⁵ Not only did these elections secure Congress an unprecedented amount of political clout, but also, according to Andrew Muldoon, disproved

Britain: An Encyclopedia, ed. by Fred M. Leventhal, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002), 230-231, 230, available at: <https://archive.org/details/twentiethcentury0000unse/mode/2up>, accessed March 11, 2021.

⁶³² V.G. Thresiamma, "Making of the Indian Constitution and debate on the issue of Tribal Development" *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 72, no. 1 (2011): 179-89, 181; Muldoon, *Empire, Politics, and the Creation of the 1935 India Act*, 1.

⁶³³ Zastoupil, “The Government of India Act, 1935,” 230.

⁶³⁴ Ramu Bagri, "Development of Indian Federalism & Role of President’s Rule in the Light of the S.R Bommai Case (1994)," *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 73, no. 3 (2012): 443-52, 443; Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), 123

⁶³⁵ Anand, *Law and History of the Government of India*, 50.

the British government's notion that Congress only represented a small percentage of India: "The votes of the peasants and urbanites, farmers and shopkeepers, said otherwise."⁶³⁶

The Act also laid the foundation for Indian independence. Aside from the elections and the "provincial autonomy" that went into effect in 1937, however, not much else announced in the Act was enacted due to the onset of World War Two in 1939.⁶³⁷ However, the Act itself, along with the British and American constitutions, laid the framework for the constitution of India after independence.⁶³⁸

The semi-autonomous India of the late 1930s, with Congress members sitting in official political positions of power, is a change from the earlier part of the decade when Congress members sat in jail. This did not mean that Congress and the British government were now allies by any stretch of the imagination. Even in 1940, Dominion Status for India was still believed to be a "goal" by the British Government rather than something "to be attained in the near future."⁶³⁹ Nonetheless, for Gandhi, Mira Behn, and the freedom struggle, this was a different India to maneuver in than one ripe in active civil disobedience. What was Mira Behn's role going to be in this India where she was no longer publicly courting arrest and after she had been speaking internationality about its plight?

Sanitation, Typhoid, and Hut Building

Upon her return from her international tour, Mira Behn proceeded to the Wardha area (Maharashtra state) in late November 1934. After spending so much of the year focusing on bringing greater attention to the independence movement internationally, she decided to return to the grassroots level to serve the cause. She settled on the ashram in Wardha, "a small market

⁶³⁶ Muldoon, *Empire, Politics, and the Creation of the 1935 India Act*, 248.

⁶³⁷ Anand, *Law and History of the Government of India*, 50; Zastoupil, "The Government of India Act, 1935," 230.

⁶³⁸ Anand, *Law and History of the Government of India*, 72.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

town at the heart of the central Indian plains,” while she pondered her next project.⁶⁴⁰ In February 1935, she was involved in a terrible car crash. British newspapers covered the event, in which the car she was traveling in crashed into a tree where “she escaped, but her three companions were taken unconscious to the hospital.”⁶⁴¹ While the crash made international headlines and was described by Gandhi as “bad,” it had no lasting impact on Behn, who made no mention of it at all in her autobiography.⁶⁴²

In April 1935, she attended the Ladies’ Section of the Hindi Conference in Indore and delivered an address stating, “let the women remember to serve the poor and the poorest of the poor, the Harijans,” and to follow the path of Gandhi.⁶⁴³ In this same speech, she also compelled women to “take care of home and family before worrying about their ‘rights.’”⁶⁴⁴ While Behn herself defied gender norms by being an unmarried, and controversial, public figure who was seemingly “attached” to a non-related man, she was not completely progressive about women’s rights for Indian women at the time. Behn was not inherently anti-women’s rights, but so focused on independence and Gandhi’s goals that women’s rights were secondary or even tertiary to those main goals. This sentiment mimics Gandhi’s rhetoric about women during the Civil Disobedience Campaign earlier in the decade. While speaking publicly and working in Wardha Ashram was helpful, in spring 1935, Mira Behn discovered her first meaningful project since returning from abroad: aiding in overcoming the massive sanitation issues in the Sindi village within Wardha.

⁶⁴⁰ Rajni Bakshi, *Bapu Kuti: Journeys in Rediscovery of Gandhi*, (Penguin Books: India, 1998), 7.

⁶⁴¹ “Crashed,” *the Western Daily Press and Bristol Mirror*, February 20, 1935, 1, *British Newspaper Archive*. The story was also covered in *The Yorkshire Post*, *The Nottingham Evening*, and the *Northern Daily Mail*.

⁶⁴² Mahatma Gandhi, “Letter to Amrit Kaur,” February 18, 1935, *CWVG*, vol. 66, 237; In the section of her autobiography that covers this era (late 1934-1935) Behn makes no mention of the accident but instead discusses sleep-walking ashram inmates and Gandhi’s soybean diet (see Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 191-2).

⁶⁴³ “Put Duties Before Rights: Miraben Urges Women to Follow Gandhiji,” *The Bombay Chronicle*, April 23, 1935, 7, *Granth Sanjeevani*.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

The Sindi Experiment

As the days went by in this extraordinary atmosphere (Wardha) I felt my nerves getting undermined, and tried to find relief by going for long solitary walks in the early morning. In order to reach the open country, I had to pass through a village called Sindi. I was disgusted with the dirty condition of its surroundings, and mentioned it to Bapu...I was to go every morning to clean the Sindi lanes with two or three volunteers...

-Mira Behn in *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*⁶⁴⁵

These daily cleanings of the pathways of Sindi, a village about a mile from Wardha, began in early 1935. Yet, Behn found that visiting daily was not enough and offered to go live among the villagers around August 1935, for which a “small one-roomed brick cottage was prepared” for her.⁶⁴⁶ However, while a hut was built for her, the villagers were wary of her motives. Although they knew who she was and how close she was with Gandhi, she could not overcome the suspicions associated with her upper-class European heritage, and she did herself no favors by remaining ignorant about local Harijan customs.

While Sindi was a village of Harijans, Behn did not realize that a hierarchy existed, similar to the very caste system that they were kept out of, among the Harijans themselves. On her first day in the village, she had accepted water from a man of the “lowest group” and was therefore not permitted to go near the wells of “caste Hindus” or “Mahars” (Mahars being higher-up in the Harijan hierarchy).⁶⁴⁷ Mira Behn’s experiences in Sindi are not only documented in her autobiography but also through a multi-part column series written by

⁶⁴⁵ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 192. For another perspective of the Sindi cleanings see Mahadev Desai, “A Sanitation Campaign,” *Harijan*, March 15, 1935, *Gandhi Heritage Portal*, available at: <https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/journals-by-gandhiji/harijan>, accessed April 7, 2021.

⁶⁴⁶ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 194.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 194. Today, Harijans are known as “Dalits.” As of 2015, Dalits represent roughly 17% of the Indian population, roughly 170 million people (see V.A. Haseena, “The History of Dalit Culture and Their Deplorable Situation in India,” *Historical Research Letter* 23, (2015): 1-4, 1 available at: <https://iiste.org/Journals/index.php/HRL/article/view/24700>, accessed April 27, 2021.

Mahadev Desai in Gandhi's publication *Harijan*; these "Weekly Letters" ran from August 10, 1935 through November 23, 1935.⁶⁴⁸

While fixing the lack of proper sanitation practices in Sindi was her number one priority, Behn came across another issue plaguing the villagers of India: unemployment. In one of his "Weekly Letters," Mahadev Desai describes a common interaction that Behn had with the villagers:

As she goes out into the village she encounters another class of patients whose illness will challenge her and challenges us everywhere in the country. "Give us employment," is the universal cry. Unfortunately, they have got curious notions in their heads about Miraben and her position. Of course she was the daughter of an Admiral and she must have a handsome bank account. "We know your father is dead, but you have a rich sister who sends you any amount of money. Now please do give us some employment..."⁶⁴⁹

While Mira Behn could not guarantee the villagers employment, she and the others associated with Gandhi did what they could to teach viable skills that improved the overall living conditions in the area. They taught latrine digging and how to compost human waste into viable manure. She also aided in overcoming a local cholera epidemic. While she was barred from drawing her own water due to the initial interaction with the "lowest group" man, it seemed that the villagers were not opposed to receiving her aid when it came to curing the outbreak of cholera in Sindi and other nearby villages. She brought medicine and obtained an "inoculating squad" from a nearby hospital, but still dealt with caste issues, as when a Brahmin, a member of the highest caste, had her drop the medicine into his hands to avoid touching him.⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁸ Mahadev Desai, "Weekly Letters," from *Harijan*, in Gupta ed., *Mira Behn*, 271-7.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 273. While they had misconstrued and preconceived notions of what Behn came to the villages to do, the villagers were not wrong about Mira Behn receiving money, as we already saw. In a letter to Premabehn Katak in May 1935, Gandhi notes that "one or two hundred pounds are received for her (annually) and are credited to the Ashram," (Mahatma Gandhi, "Letter to Premabehn Katak," May 13, 1935, *CWMG* vol. 67, 63).

⁶⁵⁰ Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, 203; Mahadev Desai, "Weekly Letters," 276.

Despite the cultural clashes and initial suspicions, after the cholera outbreak, the villagers warmed up to Behn, and she was invited to participate in the nightly congregation of locals singing religious songs and playing instruments.⁶⁵¹ While she enjoyed her eventual acceptance, she notes in her autobiography that she began to feel “restless” in Sindi that she and the others were not “getting at the problems of the real villages,” and Gandhi set her out on a mission to find a new village where he might set up another ashram and live out his dream of living among the villagers in solitude.⁶⁵² She chose Segaoon.

Segaoon’s Sanitation

Five miles east of Wardha there was an area described by Behn as having “two or three corn fields, a brook, and then right at the foot of the village, a veritable hell of dung heaps, human excrement, and litter,” where the river was used as a latrine, for bathing, washing clothes, and drinking water.⁶⁵³ This “veritable hell” Mira Behn chose for Gandhi’s next ashram and called it “Segaoon.”

In December 1935, Mira Behn settled in Segaoon, where, much like Sindi, she set out to immediately fix local sanitation issues. However, she had learned from her Sindi mistake and had a local respected man who was Gandhi’s adopted son, a very close associate of his and a philanthropist, Shri Jamanalal Bajaj, introduce her to the villagers.

Mira Behn has come here to live in your village. She is an English woman, brought up in great luxury. But because she has come to live in your village you should not start thinking that it would be the end of your problems, you will get nice jobs, and would live in comfort. Mira Behn possesses no wealth. She has renounced everything and has come to serve you... You must help her in her work. She will be able to serve you only if you give her your love and help her.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵¹ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 196.

⁶⁵² Ibid.

⁶⁵³ Mira Behn, “On the Outskirts,” *Harijan*, December 21, 1935, in Gupta ed., *Mira Behn*, 123.

⁶⁵⁴ Damador Das, “Mira Behn’s New Seva Mandir,” in Gupta, *Mira Behn*, , 261.

In addition to her introduction by a notable man, she also spent the first couple of weeks learning about the villagers and their “habits” and letting them “get used” to her presence in the area.⁶⁵⁵ In her *Harijan* article “Segaon Notes,” she describes the breakdown of the population of the area: 639 people total, with a “large majority” being Harijan, 271 Mahars, 91 Gonds, 10 Mangs, 109 Kunbis, and “misc. others.”⁶⁵⁶ There were 16 wells in the area, 11 belonging to upper castes and 5 to Mahars.⁶⁵⁷ In this same article, she noted how the Harijans drank “pretty freely,” but the upper castes did not “drink much,” and how Mang women were midwives and were permitted to enter the houses of the high castes while on duty through the kitchen.⁶⁵⁸

Armed with this knowledge about the locals and their customs, Mira Behn began to work within the village to fix the sanitation problem. Her idea was to create a “self-supporting method of sanitation,” which included “squatting areas” which would “produce” manure to be sold.⁶⁵⁹ Yet, even with her knowledge about the people and the introduction by an influential man, Behn still ran into conflicts with the local population when it came to implementing her plan. She had to confront rumors of being a government agent, confront those who suggested that her work would lead to inevitable taxes, and counter the conviction that “those who used the latrines would be required to pay a monthly fee.”⁶⁶⁰ The villagers, as could be expected, had an inherent distrust of outsiders, especially European outsiders, and Mira Behn had to constantly reassure them that she wanted “not money, but manure.”⁶⁶¹ Along with her sanitation experiment, Behn had to prepare for Gandhi who was coming to permanently settle in Segaon. There he was to

⁶⁵⁵ Mira Behn, “Segaon Notes,” *Harijan*, February 1, 1936, in Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 126.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 125-6.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 125. The note about the numbers of wells and who owned them was most likely Behn harking back to her “mistake” in the Sindi village.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 127; Mark Thomson, *Gandhi and his Ashrams*, (Mumbai: Popolar Prakashan Pvt. Ltd, 1993), 208, available at: https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/Gandhi_and_his_Ashrams.pdf, accessed April 7, 2021.

⁶⁶¹ Mira Behn, “Segaon Notes,” 127.

shift his focus from larger actions for the movement back to grassroots efforts in educating and aiding those who resided in villages.

Segaon to Sevagram: Gandhi Comes to Segaon

I believed that the key to swaraj lay with the labourers; but now I feel that it is not with them alone. Swaraj will not come so long as our poverty is not wiped out. The magic cure for achieving this is in Segaon-in the villages.

-Mahatma Gandhi, "Speech at Labourer's Meeting," Ahmedabad⁶⁶²

During the 1930s, Gandhi's health took a turn for the worse and he often suffered from bouts of high blood pressure that put him on bedrest. While Behn was already away from him frequently through her work in Sindi and Segaon, she now faced the added stress of her sense of separation being aggravated due to her being restricted to short visits, or completely being "denied entry," when he was on bedrest a mere mile away.⁶⁶³ In early 1936, a sadness overcame her which she described in her autobiography as

It was not so much the shortness of visits as the strange artificiality which had suddenly been raised between Bapu and me, which haunted me like a nightmare. And all the time that Sword of Damocles was being held over my head, the fear that if I breathed a word Bapu's blood pressure would rise.⁶⁶⁴

The stress from this caused Behn to "break down." She temporarily relocated to Maganwadi where she found solace in writing to Gandhi and their relationship normalized as both their health improved.⁶⁶⁵ He wrote to her in February 1936 of his wishes to settle permanently in Segaon stating, "I must make new friends and co-workers in Segaon [and y]ou can settle in any other neighboring village if you like, so as to be near me."⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶² Mahatma Gandhi, "Speech at Labourer's Meeting," Ahmedabad, October 31, 1936, *CWMG* vol.70, 24.

⁶⁶³ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 197-8.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 198

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 198-9.

⁶⁶⁶ Gandhi, "February 14, 1936," in *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud, and Weber, 414.

She returned to Segaoon in March 1936 and began to prepare for Gandhi's big move. Gandhi's decision to have her leave Segaoon added to the previous feelings of "strange artificiality," but, Gandhi wished to live among the villagers and seemingly retire from the public life; ultimately, Behn supported this decision and was placed in charge of finding the location and supervising the construction of Gandhi's new permanent home.⁶⁶⁷ Behn notes in her autobiography that she believed that she was the only one who supported Gandhi settling permanently in a village and that she "was openly criticized as having been the cause. Among those who surrounded Bapu there was hardly a soul who loved the countryside, and suburban Maganwadi was as far as most of them would have cared to go."⁶⁶⁸

Behn took this mission very seriously, as she did with all the tasks that Gandhi had given her over the years. Even when she suffered an attack of malaria at the "height" of the construction work with her temperature getting as high as 105 degrees, she only went away for a week to recuperate at the insistence of others and stated that she "would much rather have remained in our little camp, where I could keep at least one eye on construction work in between the attacks of fever."⁶⁶⁹

Since Gandhi wished to live at Segaoon alone, Behn had to find a place to live for herself. In July 1936, she chose to settle in Veroda, a settlement about a mile from Segaoon, where she supervised the construction of a hut for herself that impressed Gandhi greatly due to the fact that she insisted on "limiting the terms and criteria of an architecture that was practicable in a village."⁶⁷⁰ She was completely invested in immersing herself in the village lifestyle and

⁶⁶⁷ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 201-3.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 201

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁶⁷⁰ Venugopal Maddipati, *Building Impressions: Gandhi and Mira Behn's Hut: 1935-1936*, (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 2014), 2.

believed that the best way to help the villagers was to work with what was already available, instead of attempting to bring in new materials to which an average villager did not have access. That same month, Gandhi came to visit Behn and “studied” her hut, marveling that “no one from amongst us can claim to have the real rural-mindedness that she has.”⁶⁷¹ While Behn had initially set out in 1925 to assist Gandhi the man, this hut, according to Venugopal Maddipati, demonstrated how “her mind had become affected by the task of serving those who lived simply....”⁶⁷² While she still harbored feelings of devotion to Gandhi, this hut became a symbol of how much she cared about the work she was doing rather than solely Gandhi the man. However, this living in solitude did not last long for either Gandhi or Behn.

While Gandhi tried to find solace by deterring others, including politicians, to meet him at Segaoon rather than venture out himself, he found that others were more than happy to come to him.⁶⁷³ He wrote a note to Mira stating “this has become a confused household instead of a hermitage it was expected to be. Such has been my fate! I must find my hermitage from within.”⁶⁷⁴

It got to the point that Segaoon had to eventually change its name because of Gandhi’s presence. Due to a much larger area nearby named Segaoon, Gandhi’s mail went to that Segaoon rather than this smaller ashram; therefore, Segaoon became Sevagram, meaning “village of service.”⁶⁷⁵

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁷² Ibid., 21

⁶⁷³ Karine McLaine, “Gandhi’s Ashrams: Residential Experiments for Universal Well-Being in South Africa and India,” *Utopian Studies*, 30 no. 3, (2019): 462-485, 479, available at: <http://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/744695>, accessed September 4, 2020.

⁶⁷⁴ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 205.

⁶⁷⁵ R. V. Rao, *Sevagram: Gandhiji’s Ashram and other Institutions in Wardha*, Third Edition, (Sevagram Ashram Pratishthan Publication, 1969), 2. In some sources, Sevagram is spelled as “Sewagram.”

While Gandhi was dealing with his barrage of visitors and ashram inmates, Behn fell severely ill with a case of typhoid. As has become evident through this dissertation, it was not uncommon for Behn to suffer from bouts of ill health. What made this case of typhoid unique was that it drew the attention of international newspapers. An October 1936 issue of *The Scotsman* featured the blurb “ENGLISHWOMAN DISCIPLE OF GANDHI: Suffering from Typhoid,” which explained that Behn’s typhoid was so bad that Gandhi took it upon himself to nurse her back to health.⁶⁷⁶ For fourteen days, Gandhi moved Behn into his hut in Sevagram. Behn described the experience as

With perfect regularity he saw to my every need, even rising each night at one o’clock to come to me. The fever and splitting headache allowed me no sleep, and I used to lie awake too weak to move this way or that, just living or the sight of Bapu, wrapped in his big white shawl, coming along the veranda, where my bed used to be put at night. And he never once failed to come.⁶⁷⁷

This description that Behn provided is a far stretch from the woman who wanted to work through malaria just to oversee construction. As much as Behn had grown and evolved over the years since she began working with Gandhi, she still demonstrated a fixation in terms of being in his proximity. Gandhi sensed this too and did not rush her back to Veroda. Instead, he offered her the opportunity to build a small hut for herself in a corner of his one-acre plot which she immediately accepted. Unbeknownst to anyone at the time, this hut would become a place of international renown.

Since Gandhi’s arrival and permanent settlement, Sevagram was filled with visitors, well-wishers, and permanent residents. Gandhi’s blood pressure once again spiked, and the resident doctor recommended that Gandhi temporarily relocate to Behn’s Sevagram hut where he was

⁶⁷⁶ Reuter, “Englishwoman Disciple of Gandhi: Suffering from Typhoid,” *The Scotsman*, October 17, 1936, 13, *British Newspaper Archive*.

⁶⁷⁷ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 206-7.

less inundated with people. From this experience, Behn got the idea to renovate her hut into a “proper cottage” for Gandhi, which became known as “Gandhiji’s Kutia” or “Bapu Kuti.” Bapu Kuti still exists today and has become a popular tourist site and a “place of pilgrimage.”⁶⁷⁸

Yet, even with the opportunity to work on such an iconic building, Behn felt useless in Sevagram after some time. According to her, “so many people had now come to live at Segaan (Sevagram)...[,] I had nothing to do beyond the teaching of spinning to two or three village boys.”⁶⁷⁹ A woman who had traveled internationally in defense of the movement for Indian independence from Britain, during which she met and spoke with international leaders, now was just a face amongst a crowd of ashram inmates, no matter how close she was to Gandhi. She once again went in search of a sense of purpose.

Courting Controversy

Mira Behn’s health deteriorated as she was overwhelmed with “inner misery and outer aimlessness” and was sent by Gandhi to Dr. Dharmvir’s Himalayan summer resort in the summer of 1937.⁶⁸⁰ During this seasonal sojourn, she took long solo walks, rediscovered a love of sketching, and took frequent walks with Subhas Chandra Bose, a Congress member who later founded the Indian National Army, and side with Hitler and Tojo.⁶⁸¹ She returned to Sevagram in July 1937 where she remained until November 1938 when Gandhi dispatched her to Peshawar in the Northwest Frontier Province to assist Badshah Khan, the brother of the first Congress-member Prime Minister of the Province.⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁸ Bakshi, *Bapu Kuti*, 10; In fact, “Bapu Kuti” has an 4.5/5 star rating on *Trip Advisor*, available at: https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g2287546-d4088640-Reviews-Gandhiji_Ashram_Bapu_Kuti-Wardha_Wardha_District_Maharashtra.html, accessed April 9, 2021.

⁶⁷⁹ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 209.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.* For more on Bose and his break away from Gandhi and Congress, see Chapter Seven.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, 213. In May 1938, Behn received news of her sister’s death from heart failure. This news only and her reaction warranted a mere two sentence mention in her autobiography where she stated, “It was a severe shock, as she was not known to have a weak heart” (*ibid.*, 212).

Prior to going to Peshawar, Behn had made plans to help develop a movement of nonviolent resistance against Hitler in Czechoslovakia but she changed her mind when Gandhi needed someone to go to Peshawar. I suggest that she may have been planning to return to Europe because of the “aimlessness” she was perpetually feeling in India, but Gandhi’s “desperate” need for someone in Peshawar renewed her belief that she could still be of use in India. This decision to stay in India may not have seemed a big deal at the time. Gandhi had even written to a Mahadev Desai in 1938 that if Behn was ready to leave, he was “ready to let her go. Her going can do no harm at all. While she has to suppress herself with me, in the West she can work independently. There is no limit to her courage.”⁶⁸³

There seemed to be no reason for Behn to remain: The ashram had plenty of residents, Behn had become more interested in animal husbandry than khadi work. Even the international presses believed that Behn’s time with Gandhi was over. The USA-based *Daily Press* implied that Behn in Gandhi’s world had been “replaced” by Dr. Sushila Nayar who had received advanced medical training.⁶⁸⁴ But this decision to stay in India and work in Peshawar had lasting impacts for India. Had Behn left at this time, she would not have gone on to provide aid in Orissa during World War Two, found multiple ashrams on her own in India, and raise environmental awareness in India after independence.⁶⁸⁵

In Peshawar, she experienced pervasive sexism because men only accepted her tutelage as a favor to Gandhi and Khan. She was restricted from walking around alone.⁶⁸⁶ She eventually took it upon herself to go for solo walks around the village without Khan’s permission and noted

⁶⁸³ Mahatma Gandhi, “Letter to Mahadev Desai,” November 3, 1938, *CWMG*, vol. 74, 196.

⁶⁸⁴ Associated Press, “Beautiful Hindi Woman New Aide to India’s Gandhi,” August 7, 1938, *Daily Press*, Newport News Virginia, 1, *ProQuest Southeast News*. This was not the only time that the press implied a separation between Behn and Gandhi.

⁶⁸⁵ For more on this see Chapter Seven.

⁶⁸⁶ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 213.

that the people “welcomed” her, but health, and I argue aimlessness, brought Behn back to Sevagram in the summer of 1939, where she fell in love for the second time in her life with Prithvi Singh.

Prithvi Singh

At every stage, my affectionate friends were generous with help, but we were disagreed on two issues. One of these was my obstinate refusal to marry Miraben. The other was that I had given up Bapu and strayed from the path.

-Baba Prithvi Singh Azad⁶⁸⁷

Baba Prithvi Singh Azad, more commonly known as Prithvi Singh, had escaped from prison in 1922 while he was serving a sentence for his role in the failed Ghadar Conspiracy of 1915.⁶⁸⁸ Prior to his arrest, and after, he spent his younger years traveling all over the world including in the Soviet Union and the United States. After he escaped from prison, he spent years as an underground resistance fighter in numerous efforts to aid in the freedom of India from Britain; while, he attended Congress meetings, he was not one to follow Gandhi’s “non-violent” rule strictly.⁶⁸⁹ At Gandhi’s behest, Singh eventually surrendered to the British government to serve the remainder of his sentence and was released to Gandhi’s custody at the start of World War Two in late 1939.⁶⁹⁰ While he had a reverence and respect for Gandhi (and it appeared the feeling was mutual), he equated the terms of his prison release to Gandhi’s ashram to “that of the discipline of prison-life.”⁶⁹¹ Despite this sense of prolonged imprisonment, Singh fell in line with ashram-life at Sevagram, yet unaware how his charms were going to ensnare Mira Behn.

⁶⁸⁷ Baba Prithvi Singh Azad, *The Legendary Crusader: An Autobiography*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan: Bombay, 1987, x.

⁶⁸⁸ For more on the Conspiracy see Harish K. Puri, “Revolutionary Organization: A Study of the Ghadar movement,” *Social Scientist* 9, no. 2/3 (1980): 53-66, available at: doi:10.2307/3516925, accessed April 9, 2021.

⁶⁸⁹ Azad, *Legendary Crusader*, 229.

⁶⁹⁰ Azad, *Legendary Crusader*, 219.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Upon seeing Singh for the first time, Behn was taken aback by this “powerful, fearless-looking man.”⁶⁹² She was assigned the task of helping Singh “polish” up the English version of his autobiography as well as teaching him other ashram-related things. In terms of their interactions with each other, they both had a completely different take about what occurred between them. Behn

Felt at home with him, and rejoiced in his frank and fearless manner. I began to feel, here at last is someone with whom I could perhaps work outside independently, as Bapu always wanted me to do.⁶⁹³

However, Singh described their interactions differently: “He (Gandhi) entrusted me to Miraben, who began to teach me with tenderness. I welcomed her method of instruction but her tender regard for me was rather obtrusive.”⁶⁹⁴

Behn tried her earnest to get as close to Singh as possible. Singh respected and admired Behn, but as a sister rather than romantically, and tried to push her away as her feelings became more apparent. In November 1939, Singh left the ashram for days at a time and Behn sent him notes professing her attachment to him by stating “don’t stay away too long” and promising him a corner in her soon-to-be finished hut.⁶⁹⁵ He left the ashram again on November 10, 1939, and one day afterward she wrote to him that “God has changed the vague pain of all these years into a burning fire. But the great difference is that now I know why that pain and this fire. I have found you at last!”⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹² Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 216.

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ Azad, *Legendary Crusader*, 230.

⁶⁹⁵ Mira Behn, “Letter to Prithvi Singh,” November 5, 1939, in Sudhir Kakar, *Mira and the Mahatma*, (New Delhi: Penguin, 2004), 236. While Kakar’s book is fiction, the letters in the text are copies of the actual letters between Mira Behn and Singh.

⁶⁹⁶ Mira Behn, “Letter to Prithvi Singh,” first letter, November 11, 1939, Kakar, *Mira and the Mahatma*, 236-7.

In an undated letter to Singh, Behn espoused “I have been but half a being. You have made me whole.”⁶⁹⁷ To Mira Behn, Prithvi Singh seemed answer to all of her problems and awoke feelings in her that she had not felt since she first fell in love with the married German pianist so many years prior.⁶⁹⁸ She even spoke to Gandhi about it who gave her permission to marry Singh and promised to speak to Singh on her behalf. Upon hearing this she cheerfully wrote to Singh:

Yesterday evening on the walk I talked with Babu, I told him about what you and I had discussed about taking up his work. He said “I should now like you to be guided entirely by Prithvi Singh. You have understood one another, you need that guidance, and he can give it to you.” So there we are! Do not feel burdened by this change. Simply look upon me as further means of serving the country.⁶⁹⁹

Gandhi provided Behn a generous gift, it seemed. Through marriage to Singh, she could act upon her feelings AND serve India. Gandhi, while he loved Behn like a daughter, was not heartbroken at the idea of her attaching herself to someone else. However, Singh did not agree with Gandhi and Behn’s assertion that their union might be beneficial. Bluntly, Singh explained to Gandhi that he was not against marriage but if and when he did marry it would be to a “young woman,” not a “lady who would want to make me her slave for the fulfilment of her sexual urge.”⁷⁰⁰ Mira Behn, who was in her 40s at this point, was crushed by this rejection.

In early 1940, reeling from Singh’s rejection, Behn went to spend some time with Pandit Jagat Ram Bharadwaj and his wife at their estate in the Himalayas at Singh’s suggestion. I suggest that even though he had vehemently rejected her, she made this trip because Singh suggested it thinking she might still have a chance to win him over. She enjoyed her time there but returned to Sevagram after a short stay still clinging to her love of Prithvi Singh. She had

⁶⁹⁷ Mira Behn, “Letter to Prithvi Singh,” undated, Kakar, *Mira and the Mahatma*, 239.

⁶⁹⁸ See the Introduction.

⁶⁹⁹ Mira Behn, “Letter to Prithvi Singh,” second letter, November 11, 1939, in Kakar, *Mira and the Mahatma*, 237.

⁷⁰⁰ Gandhi, Suhrud, and Weber, *Beloved Babu*, 503; Azad, *Legendary Crusader*, 263.

convinced herself that her love for him was due to the fact that they had been lovers in a previous life, but Singh did not remember this in this life.⁷⁰¹ Recurrent familiar feelings of uselessness among the crowds of Sevagram coupled with coping with the wounds of romantic rejection became too much for Behn and she prescribed herself a self-imposed silent retreat in the Himalayas, far away from Sevagram.

Fifteen-Month Silence

The inner struggle had come to a crisis and such bewildering and delusive mists and fogs had enveloped my path that, in my anguish, I went into silence and seclusion that I might better pray to God for help.

-Mira Behn⁷⁰²

Mira Behn set a goal for herself to go to a forest and

read only the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas, receive no newspaper, and no letters except Bapu's...I decided I would spin 1,000 yards of yarn daily. I felt that during this spinning the mind would work in a healthy way and I should run no risk of hallucinations.⁷⁰³

From this comment, one can tell that Behn knew that solitude might have the opposite effect intended from silence and had the sense to know that spinning was a sort of soothing occupational therapy. She also did not go out into an actual forest. She went to the estate of Lala Kanhaiyalal, an associate of Gandhi's, who had a hut constructed for her half a mile from his own house to enable her to observe her silence. She chose October 2, 1940 (Gandhi's birthday), as the moment to begin her silence.⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰¹ Mahatma Gandhi, "Letter to Prithvi Singh," March 12, 1941, *CWMG*, vol. 80, 107; Mahatma Gandhi, "Letter to Prithvi Singh," March 8, 1941, in Azad, *The Legendary Crusader*, 326; Mahatma Gandhi, "Letter to Nisinhprasad K. Bratt," August 9, 1940, *CWMG*, vol. 79, 105.

⁷⁰² Mira Behn, "Commentary to September 7, 1940 Letter," in Mira Behn and Mahatma Gandhi, *Bapu's Letters to Mira*, 339.

⁷⁰³ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 219.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 220

At Kanhaiyalal's estate, she only spoke in half-hour increments if Kanhaiyalal visited her hut on his evening walk for his "sake."⁷⁰⁵ In her words, she "befriended" the trees, bushes, boulders, and birds.⁷⁰⁶ This appears similar to how she connected with the ants while she was in prison. When not convening with nature, she read the Vedas and battled the elements from her little hut. Perhaps not finding exactly what she sought on the estate, she returned to her hut in Veroda in February 1941 and then moved once again in April 1941 to Charwad in the Junagarh State where she lived in a mud cottage in the middle of a garden of a "rich friend" of Gandhi's retinue, a mile from the coast of the Arabian Sea.⁷⁰⁷ While Behn used this time to read the Hindu religious texts and spin yarn, she also used this time to connect with the animals of Charwad and reflect. Her autobiography spends two pages reflecting on the connection she made with toads of Charwad and goes on to describe her interactions with scorpions and two resident snakes. She returned to her cottage outside of Sevagram sometime after June 1941 to complete her cure of silence.

During her silence, she did not follow news of the outside world except what Gandhi wrote to her in letters. Throughout this time, she and Gandhi continued to deal with rumors of "severed connections," and of having a rocky relationship.⁷⁰⁸ Those who opposed Indian independence believed that portraying a strained relationship between Behn and Gandhi might somehow reveal a chink in the armor of the fight for independence. However, during this period of silence, Gandhi and Behn communicated through letters and short twice-weekly twenty-minute breaks in her observance of silence during which they discussed the religious texts that Behn was reading.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., 220-1

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., 222

Her love of Singh never waned. She wrote Singh that to deny her love for him was equivalent to denying her faith in God because it would be “untrue.”⁷⁰⁹ However, she utilized her retreat into silence to channel her love of Singh into a rededication to the work toward independent India. Around March 1942, rejuvenated from her silence, her love channeled and refocused, and with the war from Europe finding its way into India, Behn broke her silence.

Conclusion

Mira Behn’s passion and dedication were a strength to the movement overall. However, when she had no outlet for her passion in the post-1934 lull in the civil disobedience campaigns, she struggled in terms of her identity and role in the independence movement. Behn was able to continue to aid the movement at a very practical level through her work in Sindi and Sevagram, which introduced invaluable sanitation practices in the villages. However, in her own mind, she meandered from project to project “aimlessly,” until she refocused that passion and dedication to Prithvi Singh. When Singh did not return her affections, Behn ultimately forced herself into a long period of self-imposed silence during which she prayed, studied, and reflected to find a new purpose in life. Behn never truly accepted Singh’s rejection but found solace in accepting her love for him and receiving affection from him as a “sister,” as when he ended letters to her “with brotherly regards.”⁷¹⁰ Singh and Behn continued their correspondence throughout the 1960s with Behn wishing Singh well in his work with the youth of India and his writing.⁷¹¹ Eventually, Behn ended her silence and in late March 1942 set out to work with Kamala Devi to help with the organization of a women’s camp north of Bombay. Mira Behn was back in action.

⁷⁰⁹ Behn, “Letter to Prithvi Singh,” March 23, 1942, in Kakar, *Mira and the Mahatma*, 257.

⁷¹⁰ Prithvi Singh, “Letter to Mira Behn,” early 1940s, date unclear, perhaps 1941 or 1942, in Kakar, *Mira and the Mahatma*, 255.

⁷¹¹ Mira Behn, “Letter to Prithvi Singh,” June 25, 1965, Azad, *Legendary Crusader*, 340.

CHAPTER SEVEN: WAR AND MORE: TO INDEPENDENCE AND BEYOND

Introduction

Throughout the early 1940s, the Indian independence movement seemed to be in a constant state of making one step forward only to fall two steps back. During this time, India was formally, as part of the British Empire, entangled with World War Two, but those championing its independence had to sail between the Scylla and Charybdis of both Britain and Japan.⁷¹² Mira Behn broke her self-imposed fifteen-month silence to work in Orissa and renew her participation in grassroots campaigns within India promoting swadeshi, productive animal husbandry, and good medicinal practices until she found herself imprisoned with Gandhi in Aga Khan Palace from late 1942 to 1944. Throughout this imprisonment, Gandhi and Behn suffered from health issues and personal tragedies but attempted to correspond with government officials for the benefit of their movement. From 1944 through the actual granting of independence in the summer of 1947, Behn went back to grassroots work, and found herself forming her own ashram and working as a government representative in the “Grow More Food” movement. After India achieved independence in 1947, Behn continued to work there for another twelve years.

The aim of this chapter, which takes us to and through India achieving independence from Britain, is to demonstrate how Mira Behn exerted an impact on the movement in its final years and continued to live in post-colonial India by the high values and lofty virtues espoused throughout the independence movement when Gandhi was its leader. I argue that Mira Behn

⁷¹² While World War Two began in Europe in 1939, its effect in India was not truly felt until the Japanese advance through Burma in 1942 and the 1943 Bengal famine. Mira Behn did not get involved with anything relating to the war until 1942. That is why, chronologically speaking, I chose to discuss the war in this chapter, versus chapter six which covers the years 1935 through early 1942.

remained a positive force in aiding India to find its footing as an independent state throughout these years through her grassroots efforts and ability to align herself with both the local population and foreign officials in India. To contextualize the circumstances under which Behn was working, India's involvement in World War Two and other global conflicts needs to be sketched first.

Fighting Britain's Wars: India's Involvement in Global Conflicts

Indian troops played a pivotal role for the British in the World War Two. It saw them defend the Raj's borders in Burma, while numerous soldiers from the subcontinent fought in various other theaters across the world in which the war played out. World War Two was not the first time that Indian soldiers had been utilized by the British to help solve military dilemmas. In the nineteenth century already, Indian troops were used for "imperial defense" at Malacca, Penang, Singapore, and China; they also "fought against the Madhi uprisings in Sudan, in the Boxer Rebellion in China, in the Afghan Wars, and in Tibet."⁷¹³ Much to Gandhi's disappointment and disapproval, Indian troops also participated in the 1919 Amritsar Massacre.⁷¹⁴ Yet, it was the role India and Indian troops played in both the World Wars that would help end Britain's place as imperial rulers of India.

World War One

During World War One, 1.5 million Indian recruits consisting of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and "pagans" filled the ranks of the Indian Army.⁷¹⁵ Eighty-five percent of the Indian Army came from British Indian Provinces with the other fifteen percent consisting of immigrants and those from parts of India not directly ruled by the British;

⁷¹³ Yasmin Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), 19.

⁷¹⁴ George Morton-Jack, *Army of Empire: The Untold Story of the Indian Army in World War One*, (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 17.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3, 4

this contingent was the Allies' "most widespread Army of 1914-1918 across Africa, Asia, and Europe."⁷¹⁶ Indian soldiers benefitted materially from their participation in the war, while Indians, for the first time in any significant number, were led to believe by the British government that some form of Indian independence might result from India's help with the war effort.

For, in March 1916, the British Viceroy Charles Hardinge stated that the self-government of India was a "perfectly legitimate aspiration" in his farewell address, implying that India's war efforts might be rewarded in such manner.⁷¹⁷ In fact, Gandhi even recruited for the Indian Army in the villages because while, in principle, he did not support war, he believed in the idea that Indian efforts in the war might lead to some form of swaraj.⁷¹⁸ It is estimated that 34,000 Indian soldiers were killed in World War One, with 62,000 were wounded.⁷¹⁹ Despite these sacrifices, the Indians were not rewarded with swaraj for their efforts after the war. Instead, a series of calamitous chain reactions occurred. Instead of loosening their imperial reins on India, Britain tightened them.

In 1919, the British enacted the Rowlatt Acts which tightened security laws and allowed the government to detain people without proof and sentence people to death without an appeal, in other words, a kind of state of emergency. Gandhi felt "betrayed" by the British for their deceit and encouraged civil disobedience. Protests culminated in the 1919 Amritsar Massacre and the beginnings of "mass independence movements."⁷²⁰ The treatment of Indian soldiers and India as

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., 3, 5.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., 431. One sees a clear parallel with the Balfour Declaration, which equally led to great albeit thwarted expectations among Zionists.

⁷¹⁸ Morton-Jack, *Army of Empire*, 443.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid., 517.

⁷²⁰ Ibid., 496.

a whole during World War One had a direct effect on how Indians responded when Britain called for help during World War Two.

World War Two and the 1943 Bengal Famine:

India's willingness to be participate in World War Two was not without reservations. On the one hand, many Indians, especially those within the Indian National Congress, had not forgotten the ills done to India immediately following World War One and were none too pleased when Britain enlisted Indian Army's soldiers at the outset of World War Two without any consultation with Indian officials or community leaders.⁷²¹ As previous chapters have demonstrated, Gandhi and his movement had made a lot of strides throughout the 1930s with their grassroots and international efforts in terms of inspiring self-government and self-sufficiency. Nonetheless, Indians could be motivated to fight by the British offer of materialistic or social gains that were similar to those enjoyed as rewards by the Indians who fought in World War One. Then, Indian veterans had received land grants, cash pensions, state care, and education in trade and technical schools.⁷²² These veterans also told stories "not only of horror, but also of heroism, adventure, travel, and exotic women," which helped with recruitment for World War Two.⁷²³ Within the first eight months of World War Two, 53,000 men enlisted in the Indian Army, and by late 1940, upwards of 20,000 men a month enlisted.⁷²⁴ However, much of this enthusiasm to enlist and fight waned after the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor and their advance into the eastern part of the British Asian Empire in late 1941 and early 1942.

⁷²¹ Denis Judd, *The Lion and the Tiger: The Rise and Fall of the British Raj, 1600-1947*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 151.

⁷²² Morton-Jack, *Army of Empire*, 505.

⁷²³ Khan, *India at War*, 19.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

Many Indians, believed before Pearl Harbor that World War Two would be identical to World War One, when none of the fighting had made its way to Indian shores.⁷²⁵ With the Japanese attacks, however, much changed in the perception of the Indian population and the imperial officials that ruled them. Fighting the war in Europe as well as protecting their colonies cost the British government more capital, materials, and soldiers, than it actually possessed. This caused the British government to have to find new ways to pay for these necessities. A 1940 agreement between Britain and India promised that “a portion of India’s war expenditure would ultimately be reimbursed by His Majesty’s Government.”⁷²⁶

The amount owed to India, called the ‘Sterling Debt,’ swelled during the course of the war until it came to reverse the traditional economic relationship between colonizer and colony... India for the past century had ‘owed’ money to the United Kingdom for ‘the mutiny charge (of 1857), the investment of building railways, the pensions owed to British civil servants, and other loans and expenses.’⁷²⁷

This made many British wonder why they stayed in India if they no longer enjoyed a financial advantage. This heavy reliance on India concomitantly ravaged Indian people and lands. The British created a “War Fund,” of which Indians became “reluctant donors” as they quickly learned that

The War Fund, in the hands of the administrators, came to serve as an acid test of loyalty to the imperial state... If a man needed a favour from local officials or was submitting a job application for state services, a subscription to the War Fund became all but obligatory.⁷²⁸

It was not only those seeking favor who suffered at the needs of the British and the militaries, but those simply wanting to eat as well. Much of the Indian populace already survived

⁷²⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁷²⁶ Madhusree Mukerjee, *Churchill’s Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India During World War Two*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010), xxxi.

⁷²⁷ Ibid.

⁷²⁸ Khan, *India at War*, 52.

day-to-day prior to the war, but the additional strain on the economy ultimately led to massive famine in Bengal in 1943.

The number of casualties caused by the Bengal Famine was officially estimated to be 1.5 million, but many experts estimate that a total of 3 million deaths is closer to the mark. Because of the war in Europe and the Japanese attack and occupation of British colonies constantly looming in the early 1940s, India had to provide for American and British soldiers as well as Polish refugees in the UK in addition to the already prohibitive amount of mouths it had to feed. Indian cows were slaughtered in mass numbers to accommodate soldier's appetites; the social worker, Ashoka Gupta, described how between 1942 and 1943:

Fish, eggs, fruit, everything, was being collected and fed to the army. Big rice banks were formed. They told everyone give us your rice, we'll give it back to you when you need it, but they didn't give any, even after people started dying.⁷²⁹

Before it was too late, the British government did not believe that the shortages were as bad as they were. Civil service workers were told that the shortage was "a thing entirely of [their] own imagination," and in the first seven months of 1943, India exported 71,000 tons of rice when portions of the Indian population turned to murder, suicide, and child abandonment to escape the hunger pains.⁷³⁰ While the Indian Army troops received their rations during this time, morale was low as many realized that they could do little for their starving families; AWOL (absent without leave) cases rose as Indian soldiers visited their families to see if they could relieve their suffering.⁷³¹ As the war went on, it became more difficult for the British to continue

⁷²⁹ Mukerjee, *Churchill's Secret War*, 102.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*, 128, 130, 151-2.

⁷³¹ Kaushik Roy, "Discipline and Morale of the African, British, and Indian Army Units in Burma and India During World War Two," *Modern Asia Studies* 44, No. 6, (November 2010): 1255-1282, 1265, 1267.

to justify their imperial presence if they signally failed to take care of the colonized whom they claimed to have to rule because they could not take care very well of themselves.⁷³²

After December 7, 1941, the Japanese threat of invasion loomed large, and the British did little to deflate this threat. Churchill did not trust the Indian people with an arsenal of defensive weapons and the Indian population had to “make do” with trench shelters; meanwhile, thousands of pounds were allocated for a “state-of-the-art shelter” under the viceroy’s house.⁷³³ There were Indians who believed that Japanese occupation would be less onerous than British rule. This was not helped by the fact that, in an attempt to ally themselves with the local territories they wanted to occupy, the Japanese would draw “attention to the racial inequities of British colonial rule in (through) propaganda.”⁷³⁴ Much more profoundly than in the First World War, the ideals of British superiority shattered in the early 1940s.

Although in no way supportive of Japan, Mira Behn contributed to this wartime challenge to British superiority through her writings, talks, and actions, as she did throughout her time in India by challenging cultural, class, race, and gender norms. The ideas about human equality she espoused were reinforced by the presence of the soldiers and the action of various governments who resided in, or traversed, India. When Polish refugee camps were constructed in India, many Indians, for the first time in their lives, witnessed “impoverished white Europeans” which demonstrated to them that “the white man was not invincible.”⁷³⁵ Indian troops began circulating “glossy prints of American pin-up girls” among themselves.⁷³⁶ White women, whom Indian men

⁷³² Amartya Sen aptly discusses how that while several famines occurred in India during British rule, “there has been no famine in India since independence in 1947” (Sen, “Illusions of Empire,” *Guardian*).

⁷³³ Mukerjee, *Churchill’s Secret War*, 57-58; Khan, *India at War*, 110.

⁷³⁴ Felicia Yap, “Japanese Racial Propaganda in Occupied British Asia During the Second World War,” in Ashley Jackson, Yasmin Khan, and Gajendra Singh, *An Imperial World at War: Aspects of the British Empire’s War Experience, 1939-1945*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 103-17. 103.

⁷³⁵ Khan, *India at War*, 125.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

could have been beaten or imprisoned for merely speaking to, were now overtly sexualized by these men.

Between the increasing debts, the lack of food and supplies, and the overall weariness of fighting, both the British and the Indians were ready for the war to end soon. Many British soldiers felt that the “real war” was in Europe, and they were wasted “rotting in India.”⁷³⁷ The Japanese attack changed the rules of war in ways that neither the British nor the Indians expected which will be further explored later in this chapter. The changing rules were just as true for Gandhi and the independence movement. When the Japanese attacked, Gandhi had to change the way he promoted swaraj. One tactic he chose was to send Mira Behn to Orissa.

Mira Behn in Orissa

Though the blood and thunder may be less than that of the war fronts, the root tragedy it brings to view is deeper.

- Mira Behn on Orissa⁷³⁸

Gandhi’s non-violent movement was not only threatened by British forces, but also by Japanese forces, although some oppositional groups in India believed that the Japanese would make for a better ally or ruler than the British. Subhas Chandra Bose, a former president of the Indian National Congress, left Congress because of his ideological differences with Gandhi and founded the Indian National Army, allying with from the Germans and Japanese.⁷³⁹ Bose’s ideas were supported by a “fairly large number who believe[d] in the declaration of the Japanese and think that they [would] deliver the country from the British yoke and retire.”⁷⁴⁰ In order to

⁷³⁷ Andrew Muldoon, “‘India is a Fine Country After All!’: The Cultivation of Military Morale in Colonial India,” in Jackson, Khan, and Singh, *An Imperial World at War*, 176-192, 177.

⁷³⁸ Mira Behn, “Our Ordered Anarchy,” *Harijan*, in Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 96-99, 96. Orissa has been renamed Odisha since Independence.

⁷³⁹ Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Last Eighteen Years*, eds. Olmsted, Heller, and Olmsted, 109. For more on Bose see Yasmin Khan, *India at War* and Arthur Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill: The Epic Rivalry that Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age*, (New York: Bantam Dell, 2008).

⁷⁴⁰ Gandhi, “Non-Violent Resistance,” *Gandhi: The Last Eighteen Years*, eds. Olmsted, Heller, and Olmsted, 146.

combat these notions, Gandhi sent representatives of his movement to places in India with the greatest risk of being attacked by the Japanese.

In March 1942, Mira Behn worked with Kamala Devi to organize and run a women's camp near Navsari, north of Bombay.⁷⁴¹ Her job at the camp varied from that of a sort of guidance counselor, to inspector of sanitation, overseer of clothes washing, and instructor in horseback riding and bicycling.⁷⁴² However, in the face of the rising threat of Japanese attack, Gandhi reassigned Mira Behn to the eastern coastal province of Orissa, where she was to tour the coastline and "help to prepare the masses for non-violent non-cooperative resistance to the expected Japanese invasion..."⁷⁴³

Mira Behn arrived in Orissa on May 11, 1942 and received shortly after specific instructions in a letter from Gandhi on how to interact with the Japanese.⁷⁴⁴ It conveyed how his primary mission was to obtain independence for Indians, not trade one ruler for another:

Remember that our attitude is that of complete non-cooperation with the Japanese Army, therefore we may not help them in any way, nor may we profit by any dealings with them. Therefore we cannot sell anything to them... One thing they should never do - to yield willing submission to the Japanese. That will be a cowardly act, and unworthy of freedom-loving people. They must not escape from one fire only to fall into another and probably more terrible. Their attitude therefore must always be of resistance to the Japanese. No question, therefore, arises of accepting British currency notes or Japanese coins. They will handle nothing from Japanese hands. So far as dealings with our own people are concerned they will either resort to barter or make use of such British currency that they have, in the hope that the National Government that may take the place of British Government will take up from the people all the British currency in accordance with its capacity.⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴¹ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 226. Behn does not mention what type of "camp" this was, just that it was a "women's camp." In the text, Kamala is spelled "Kamla."

⁷⁴² Ibid.

⁷⁴³ Ibid., 230.

⁷⁴⁴ Mira Behn, "Our Ordered Anarchy," *Harijan*, July 12, 1942, in Krishna Murti Gupta's *Mira Behn*, 96-99, 96.

⁷⁴⁵ Mahatma Gandhi, "Letter to Mirabehn," May 31, 1942, *CWCG*, vol. 82, pg. 353.

Mira Behn documented her experiences in Orissa in her autobiography as well as in a more “in-the-moment” way in the 12 July 1942 issue of *Harijan*, with the article titled “Our Ordered Anarchy.”⁷⁴⁶ In these writings, Mira Behn described Orissa as experiencing the many problems that the secondary sources used in the previous section already described: Starvation, overcrowding, migrating strangers, lack of supplies, etc. In her autobiography, she explained just how abandoned by the British the people of India truly were:

It was an open secret that the moment the Japanese approached, all government officials were to burn their files, blow up the bridges, which had already been laid with dynamite and decamp to the hills. For the evacuation of the population, or for their protection against air raids, etc., no arrangements had been made.⁷⁴⁷

Mira Behn used her time in Orissa to help the Indians through education and labor, but also fostered some unconventional friendships and temporary alliances with British government officials and military men. One of the first things she was able to do after arriving in Orissa was interview two English officials from the advisory board, during which she was forewarned about the plan for government officials to “retire to the hills” in the event of Japanese invasion.⁷⁴⁸ In June 1942, she worked with local Irish military men stationed there to establish trenches “to provide some protection in the event of air raids.”⁷⁴⁹ These friendships and alliances that she created subsequently helped her and the movement when working with the British government and local communities during and after the transition of power from the British to independent India.

⁷⁴⁶ Mira Behn, “Our Ordered Anarchy,” July 12, 1942, *Harijan*, available at: <https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/journals-by-gandhiji/harijan>, accessed January 14, 2021

⁷⁴⁷ Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 188.

⁷⁴⁸ Mira Behn and Mahatma Gandhi, *Bapu's Letters to Mira: 1924-1928*, (Navajivan Publishing House: Ahmedabad, 1949), E-book. 359, available at: <https://archive.org/details/bapusletterstomi00gand/mode/2up>, accessed November 17, 2020.

⁷⁴⁹ Mira Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 191.

Although she received some aid from these unconventional sources, overall, soldiers and government officials in Orissa stayed, at best, aloof from the locals; at worst, they behaved destructively for the area and the people. The British did not provide Indians with enough, or in some places, any, defensive weapons to protect themselves. They then made it impossible for the Indian people to gather together to figure out how to defend themselves as a collective or community. The British government prohibited “the formation of any volunteer organizations for self-protection or any groups patrolling, except under government authority and guidance.”⁷⁵⁰ In the process of attempting to deter the Japanese and feed their soldiers, the British plundered the land and caused hunger and tension among the local Indian communities. Canals were drained and kept dry so that the Japanese could not use them, but the local population was given no notice of this.⁷⁵¹ What limited water supply that existed was further exhausted by the addition of 3000 laborers brought in from other provinces, while merchants feared the worst, and kept smaller supplies of food in stock rather than sell them.⁷⁵² In June 1942, the “worst” did happen, when Travancore and Cochran laborers attacked forty villages, which led to 258 rooms, including bazaar shops, being “burnt and looted, and eighty-eight families rendered homeless.”⁷⁵³ The starvation and looting which Behn witnessed in Orissa occurred throughout India, and made it clear to Gandhi and his followers that the British would do little to aid India during the war. Mira Behn’s work in Orissa continued to upset and blacken the face of the British Government. Even before the events in Orissa further exposed the fact that the British were losing their imperial

⁷⁵⁰ Mira Behn, “Our Ordered Anarchy,” in Krishna Murti Gupta’s *Mira Behn*, 97.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, 97-8.

⁷⁵³ *Ibid.*, 98.

hold on India, Gandhi had been hard at work on a declaration that proclaimed it was time for the British to “Quit India.”⁷⁵⁴

The Quit India Initiative and Aga Khan Imprisonment

Here is a mantra, a short one that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The mantra is: “Do or Die.” We shall either free India or die in the attempt, we shall not live the perpetuation of our slavery. Every true Congressman or [Congress] woman will join the struggle with an inflexible determination not to remain due to see the country in bondage and slavery... let every man and woman live every moment of his or her life hereafter in the consciousness that he or she eats or lives for achieving freedom and will die, if need be, to attain that goal...Freedom is not for the coward or the faint-hearted.

-Gandhi to the All India Congress Committee (AICC) August 8, 1942⁷⁵⁵

Quit India

While Gandhi was preparing the AICC to “Quit India,” Mira Behn made her way to see Viceroy Linlithgow in July 1942 to try and plead Gandhi and the Congress’ case for a free and independent India. The Viceroy would not see her, but, she was able to meet with his private secretary for over an hour. She informed him that the government was faced with either declaring India’s independence or killing Gandhi:⁷⁵⁶

Gandhiji is deadly earnest. This time it will be impossible for you to hold him. No jail will contain him; no crushing force will silence him... And once you kill him you kill forever all hope of friendship between India and England... What are you going to do about it?⁷⁵⁷

Congress passed the “Quit India” resolution on July 14, 1942, and on August 8, 1942, Gandhi called for mass non-violent civil disobedience across India in his historic “Quit India” speech. The British colonial government declared “Congress and its affiliated organizations ‘unlawful,’” and Gandhi, Kasturba, Mira Behn, and other Congress members were subsequently

⁷⁵⁴ Thanks to Bidisha Mallik for helping with the transition wording at the end of the paragraph between Orissa and Quit India.

⁷⁵⁵ Mahatma Gandhi, “Speech at All India Congress Committee Meeting,” *CWMG* vol. 83, 197.

⁷⁵⁶ Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill*, 493.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

arrested, beginning at 2 AM the following morning.⁷⁵⁸ Unrest occurred throughout India, and following the news of the arrests, riots broke out in Delhi, Behar/Bihar, Bombay, and the United Provinces.⁷⁵⁹ Anti-British sentiment abounded and Viceroy Linlithgow described the unrest following the arrests after the announcement of Quit India, as “by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reason of military security.”⁷⁶⁰ The repercussions were so severe that Justice Wickenden was asked to analyze intelligence reports, published and unpublished sources, and produce a report to assess Gandhi and the Congress’ role in the uprisings of 1942 and to demonstrate whether or not Gandhi had collaborated with the Japanese attempted attacks in India.

*Justice Wickenden’s Report*⁷⁶¹

With the turbulence that emerged after the arrests of Gandhi and other Congress leaders, the British Government decided that there would be no public trial for the Congress leaders, whose organization had been made illegal in India shortly after their arrests. There was fear that a public trial “would eventually create worldwide interest and might well stir popular feeling in this country (India) to a dangerous pitch.”⁷⁶² Throughout the 1930s, global awareness of Gandhi and his movement increased had exponentially, so it is no surprise that the British did not want an old, frail-looking Gandhi on-camera pleading his case in a criminal trial for the world to see.⁷⁶³ The British hoped that Justice Wickenden would be able to find something that would incriminate Gandhi in some way to justify their continuing rule in India. Wickenden was asked

⁷⁵⁸ Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi: The Years that Changed the World, 1914-1918*, (USA: Vintage Dell, 2018), 648; Behn, *The Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 195.

⁷⁵⁹ Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill*, 494-495.

⁷⁶⁰ Wilson, *India Conquered*, 449; P.N. Chopra, “Preface,” *Historic Judgment on Quit India movement: Justice Wickenden’s Report*, edited by P.N. Chopra, (Delhi: Konark Publishers PVT LTD., 1989), i.

⁷⁶¹ While Justice Wickenden was deemed important enough to create the report, I cannot find much on the man himself. I have learned that he was a lawyer and that his initials were T.D.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁶³ Also keep in mind that Gandhi was a British-trained lawyer by trade, so he was familiar with trial practices.

to analyze many private and public reports, while he also took it upon himself to analyze the writings in Gandhi's weekly publication, *Harijan*.

Harijan, which was published in multiple languages including English and Hindi, was the mouthpiece used by Gandhi and his followers to inform the people of India and the world about the plight of the Indian people under British rule. The fact that Wickenden studied it for his report demonstrates that Gandhi's message was being received not only by people who supported his movement, but those opposed to it as well.

Despite his best efforts, Wickenden was not able to connect Gandhi to any of the violent actions or to any collaboration with the Japanese. The most incriminating thing that he could suggest was that some people close to Gandhi "approved" of the violence that occurred during Quit India.⁷⁶⁴ However, despite Gandhi having no direct responsibility for the violent actions, Wickenden drew

Conclusions which fix responsibility upon Gandhi and the Congress for the violent disturbances which occurred in August 1942 and the following months...Gandhi must bear the prime responsibility because he initiated the conception of an immediate withdrawal of Britain from India, coupling with a threat of civil disobedience.⁷⁶⁵

Wickenden's report helped the government justify Gandhi's imprisonment, at least to themselves. There were also other motives behind the drafting of the report as well. For, in the report, Wickenden stated that

This movement (Quit India) was not the creation of Congress, which in the first place was hardly prepared to follow him at all, reluctantly fell in line and gradually developed a generally whole-hearted support.⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁴ Justice Wickenden, *Historic Judgment on Quit India movement: Justice Wickenden's Report*, edited by P.N. Chopra, (Delhi: Konark Publishers PVT LTD., 1989), 247; P.N. Chopra, "Preface," *Historic Judgment on Quit India movement*, 20-21.

⁷⁶⁵ Wickenden, *Historic Judgment*, 245.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

Even if the report could not verify any connections to Gandhi and the violent actions, Wickenden's findings were a way for the British to indicate that there was dissension in the Congressional ranks in order to demean their efforts. The report also demonstrated that Mira Behn did not play a small role in Gandhi's movement. In the report, Wickenden described Mira Behn as "perhaps his (Gandhi's) most devoted disciple..." who was one whom was "undoubtedly most zealous in carrying out anything aimed at attaining independence."⁷⁶⁷ That zealousness landed Mira Behn imprisoned in Aga Khan Palace, together with Gandhi.

*Aga Khan Palace: August 1942- May 1944*⁷⁶⁸

News of Gandhi and company's arrests made headlines across Britain; yet it was not the initial arrests that interested the reporters, but Gandhi's living conditions. Headlines such as "BED BIG ENOUGH FOR 18" and "The Prisoner Who Can Sleep in the World's Biggest Bed," appeared in British newspapers and the lodgings were described as "a spacious and well-furnished bungalow, with wide green lawns and a beautiful garden."⁷⁶⁹ Gandhi, his wife, Mira Behn, Mahadev Desai, and Gandhi's great niece, Manubahana (Manu) Gandhi, were all interned together at Aga Khan Palace in Poona for almost two years. The property had been rented by the British Government in anticipation of having to arrest Gandhi and his followers and, while it was a "spacious bungalow," it was also "fenced all around" with "special police guards" stationed throughout.⁷⁷⁰ Mira Behn described the initial experience of getting interned as

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid., 31, 32.

⁷⁶⁸ The Aga Khan was a man deemed "divine" by Muslims and the palace was a gift to him when he came to India; at the time of the imprisonment, the Aga Khan was in England (Manubahana Gandhi, *The Diary of Manu Gandhi 1943-1944*, edited and translated by Tridip Suhrud, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2019), 155).

⁷⁶⁹ Wilton Charles, "Gandhi's Prison: BED BIG ENOUGH FOR 18," *Evening Chronicle*, August 11, 1942, 5, *British Newspaper Archive*; Wilton Charles, "The Prisoner who can Sleep in the World's Biggest Bed," *Belfast Telegraph*, August 11, 1942, 2, *British Newspaper Archive*; From Our Own Correspondent, "Mr. Gandhi and Congress Leaders Arrested," *Times*, August 10, 1942, 4, *The Times Digital Archive*, available at: <http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS67320586/TTDA?u=tamp4489&sid=TTDA&xid=e6f10b96>, accessed July 22, 2020.

⁷⁷⁰ From Our Own Correspondent, "Mr. Gandhi and Congress Leaders Arrested," *Times*, 4.

We could neither receive nor write any letters, nor were we allowed any newspapers. The only thing which reached us was a copy of the Government of India's Communique justifying the policy of wholesale repression. No communication of any kind with the outside world was permitted, but some sounds floated on the air from Poona City, and we guessed and knew that there must be disturbances in every city of India.⁷⁷¹

As time went on, restrictions were loosened and the prisoners were allowed to write letters and read some newspapers, but they could do little to quell the violent disturbances occurring outside the Poona prison. While Gandhi had spent plenty of time imprisoned, his tenure at the Aga Khan Palace affected him differently than his previous imprisonments. He had to defend himself from accusations of Japanese collaboration, as part of which he was asked to produce the letters between himself and Mira Behn about her time in Orissa. It was initially believed that Gandhi had instructed Behn to align herself and the Congress with the Japanese during the war; in publishing the correspondence, the *Bombay Chronicle* clarified over the course of several issues that "the letter contains no such words," which implied any attempt at concluding such an alliance.⁷⁷² On top of fighting against false propaganda in his advanced age, he also was faced with the loss of his long-time private secretary, Mahadev Desai, very shortly after they were all imprisoned. Gandhi was utterly distraught by the violence occurring in India and the news that the Indian people were not following his non-violent guidelines. In 1943, Gandhi took it upon himself to partake in another fast, which took a lasting toll on his health. In February 1944, his wife Kasturba, who suffered from depression and declining health while in prison, died; the British government only allowed for 150-person "private" funeral because, as Gandhi worded in *Harijan*,

⁷⁷¹ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 197.

⁷⁷² "Maxwell Mumbles at Mrs. Naidu's Challenge to the Government," *The Bombay Chronicle*, February 9, 1944, 4, *Granth Sanjeevani*; "Mahatma on Japanese Invasion," *The Bombay Chronicle*, February 7, 1944, 1, *Granth Sanjeevani*; "Gandhi-Slade Correspondence," *The Bombay Chronicle*, February 8, 1944, 1, *Granth Sanjeevani*.

...The Government were not prepared to allow a public funeral. A public funeral would have meant a big procession. It would have led to further awakening and enthusiasm amongst the people. How could they take such a risk?⁷⁷³

Kasturba's death was particularly hard on Gandhi, and he developed malaria shortly after she died, contributing to his declining health.

Challenged by the charges that she was a Japanese sympathizer, Mira Behn suffered as well during the imprisonment. She helped to deflect the anti-Japanese attacks leveled against Gandhi and herself. In December 1942, she took it upon herself to write to Linlithgow and provided him with copies of letters between herself and Gandhi that demonstrated he was "anti-Japanese."⁷⁷⁴ In the letter to the British colonial chief, she mentions the attempted propaganda in the British press attempting to connect Gandhi with the Japanese and described herself as "one born of English parents," perhaps both in an attempt to connect with Linlithgow and to point out the absurdity that she would prefer Japan over her native country. She attempted to appeal to Linlithgow's pride and power by stating that

Seeing that no God-fearing ruler could, with any peace of mind, allow the above-mentioned slanderous propaganda, on the part of his own people, against those whom he rendered unable to reply, to continue unchecked once he had had unchallengeable proof of its falsehood, I put trust in the belief that you will publish the enclosed correspondence together with this covering letter and refute the assertions of these British journals.⁷⁷⁵

Despite this plea, she and Gandhi were forced to continue to refute the Japanese-alliance rumors until their 1944 release. Like Gandhi, her health suffered as well in the stressful conditions of the internment. Gandhi began a multi-letter correspondence with Colonial Administrator, Sir Richard Tottenham, in late 1943 as well as with Lord Wavell, who became the

⁷⁷³ Mahatma Gandhi, "Request to Government on Kasturba's Funeral," *Harijan*, February 22, 1944, in *Gandhi: The Last 18 Years*, eds. Olmsted, Heller, and Olmsted, 152.

⁷⁷⁴ Mira Behn, "Mira Behn's Letter to Lord Linlithgow," Detention Camp, Poona, December 24, 1942, *CWMG* vol. 83, 400-1.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 401.

Governor of India in 1944, pleading for medical help to treat their ailments. Gandhi describes a condition, from which he began to suffer beginning around May 1943, as “pains in the region from the left shoulder blade, which often extend from the neck to the tips of her fingers.”⁷⁷⁶

Tottenham was able to arrange for a chiropractor to visit occasionally, but when that did not help, Gandhi pleaded to a higher power with Lord Wavell:

But what about Mirabai? As you know she is the daughter of an admiral and former commander-in-chief of these waters. But she led the life of ease and chose instead to throw in her lot with me. Her parents, recognizing her urge to come to me, gave her their full blessings. She went to Orissa at my request to understand the plight of the people of that benighted land. That Government was hourly expecting Japanese invasion. Papers were to be removed or burnt, and withdrawal of the civil authority from the coast was being contemplated. Shri Mirabai made Chaudwar (Cuttack) airfield her headquarters, and the local military commander was glad of the help she could give him. Later she went to New Delhi and saw General Sir Alan Hartley and General Molesworth, who both appreciated her work and greeted her as one of their own class and caste. It, therefore, baffles me to understand her incarceration. The only reason for burying her alive, so far as I can see, is that she has committed the crime of associating herself with me. I suggest your immediately releasing her, or your seeing her and then deciding. I may add that she is not yet free from the pain for the alleviation of which the Government sent Captain Simcox at my request. It would be a tragedy if she became permanently disabled in detention.⁷⁷⁷

Although she was imprisoned in the palace and suffered from chronic health issues, Mira Behn tried to make the best of the situation. Manu Gandhi kept a diary during her time in Aga Khan and documents some of the more light-hearted things that Mira Behn did during their stay. Mira Behn wanted to do “skits” for Gandhi’s seventy-fifth birthday where they would dress up as Churchill and Roosevelt; no one ended up dressing up as the famous politicians, but they ended up doing some form of costumed skit, according to Manu Gandhi.⁷⁷⁸ When not performing

⁷⁷⁶ Mahatma Gandhi, “Letter to Sir Richard Tottenham,” Detention Camp, Poona, December 22, 1943, *CWMG* vol. 83, 437.

⁷⁷⁷ Mahatma Gandhi, “Letter to Lord Wavell,” March 9, 1944, *CWMG* vol. 84, 30-1.

⁷⁷⁸ Manubahana Gandhi, *The Diary of Manu Gandhi 1943-1944*, ed. Tridip Suhrud, 66.

skits, Behn spent her days reading the Bible and newspapers to Gandhi, gathering flowers for decorations, and taking walks.⁷⁷⁹

After the death of Kasturba, it appeared that the Government did not wish to make any more martyrs of the movement. Both Gandhi and Mira Behn were suffering from poor health and were released, with the other prisoners of Aga Khan, on May 6, 1944, into an India that was transitioning from a British colony into an independent country.

Transitioning from the British Raj to Independent India⁷⁸⁰

After their release from prison, tensions between the Indians and British continued to build. Throughout World War Two, the UK used India as a military base, while the British used Indian men to fight the war for the British, and drained already depleted resources, without offering in exchange the promise of Indian independence after the war.⁷⁸¹ However, after the war ended, the British people found itself feeling “a sense of relief mingled with exhaustion and a desire to ‘get on with things[,which] included shedding India as a part of the Empire.’”⁷⁸² The longer the British maintained a presence in India, the more that they noticed their sole purpose for being there was to defend their presence there. Many British soldiers and officials stationed there ever more resented being so far from home without much purpose.⁷⁸³

Young India and *Harijan* continued to alert the world to injustices occurring in India, drawing in donations and more important international pressure. While Britain owed India nearly 1.5 billion pound sterling after the war, India emerged with a “strong and thriving” industry sector.⁷⁸⁴ In 1946, the Royal Indian Navy witnessed mutinies. The outbreak of an independence

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., 163.

⁷⁸⁰ Portions of this section were originally published in Malerk’s “There is No ‘I’ in Mahatma: Mira Behn and Indian Independence,” 67-87.

⁷⁸¹ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 226.

⁷⁸² Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill*, 541.

⁷⁸³ Wilson, *India Conquered*, 2,6.

⁷⁸⁴ Herman, *Gandhi and Churchill*, 541.

war threatened. In August of that same year, the viceroy invited the Indian National Congress to form an interim government and on September 2, 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru was sworn in as leader of the interim government.⁷⁸⁵ Almost a year later on August 15, 1947, India became officially independent. Judith M. Brown describes Indian Independence best when she states “1947 is more important to the historian searching for demarcations than a deeply critical point of division in the Indian Experience.” As you can see from this chapter and earlier chapters of this project, independence was not a black-and-white issue for India. British influence waned years before independence was official; yet Britain was able to maintain some political and economic influence after independence. Upon independence, India was divided into, essentially Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. Because of this project’s focus on Mira Behn, I will not dwell on the partition of India and Pakistan.⁷⁸⁶

Mira Behn in a Transitioning and Independent India

After her release from Aga Khan Palace, Behn continued to work for the betterment of the Indian people. In 1944, Behn felt she was ready to follow in Gandhi’s footsteps and found her own ashram. Gandhi and Behn were working apart from each other during this time, which explains the tense correspondence between them that followed her request and the evident misunderstandings between the two on how her ashram would be funded, as well as her relationship with Prithvi Singh.⁷⁸⁷

⁷⁸⁵ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 217.

⁷⁸⁶ Judith Brown, *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy*, second edition, (Oxford UP: Oxford, 1994), 318. For more information on the partition see Brown’s *Modern India* and Nisid Hajari, *Midnight’s Furies: The Deadly Legacy of India’s Partition*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).

⁷⁸⁷ For more on Mira Behn’s unrequited love of Prithvi Singh see chapter six. It was during this time, June 1944, Gandhi learned that Prithvi Singh was trying to use his association with Gandhi for his own personal benefit rather than for the betterment of India. Gandhi came to believe that he had “been using questionable means to exhort money” and that the Communist Party to which Singh belonged was “exploiting Behn,” (see Gandhi, “Gandhi to Mira Behn, June 11, 1944,” in *Beloved Babu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 497).

Mira Behn expressed her frustrations about the situations to Gandhi in a letter dated June 12, 1944 to him:

I had the impression that the whole sum was being kept intact and that I was receiving food, clothing, travelling expenses, etc., like some others who gave their whole time to the cause according to their individual capacity. But this was a misunderstanding. So, I will gladly put the matter straight at once. I cannot bear any bargaining in such matters. I, therefore, ask that Rs. 20,000 should be deducted from the total, which should cover the expenses incurred by the Ashram for me during these 20 years. The remainder can be transferred to my name.

I had understood that when I had this money, I should be free to do constructive national work without let or hindrance, so long as I made it clear that the scheme of work was entirely my own and without your personal approval. I did not realize that you would feel called upon publicly to express disapproval of my work.

You have given me my freedom with one hand and taken it away with the other. To give me my money and freedom, and at the same time to say that as soon as I begin to use them you will publicly disapprove, is to sabotage anything I may try to do. You at the same time sabotage any chance of my being able to prove to you that you are wrong. You have brought up a whole lot of reports and prejudices against Sardarji (Prithvi Singh). I have avoided discussing these matters with you because I could see that everything I said excited you. The result is that you have not understood my position. You have made up your mind that I am completely under his influence. It is you who have tried to urge me to that position, but as you know, I have protested all along.⁷⁸⁸

After initially joining with Gandhi in 1925, he had always addressed his correspondence to Behn with “Chi Mira,” meaning “dear Mira.”⁷⁸⁹ It was during this exchange of correspondence in 1944, however, that he switched from his term of endearment first to “My Dear Madeleine,” followed by “Miss Slade,” expressing a growing detachment from Mira Behn. In response to the above letter Gandhi stated that he “liked the English coldness and correctness,” that she had “no reason to change your course because of any opinion I express,”

⁷⁸⁸ Mira Behn, “Mira Behn to Gandhi, June 12, 1944,” *CWMG* vol. 84, 442-3. Rs. is shorthand for rupees. As demonstrated by previous chapters, Behn does some of her best work for the independence movement and India when she works away from Gandhi. This ashram would be another way to demonstrate the kind of work she could get done when not constantly with Gandhi.

⁷⁸⁹ “Chi” is a short form for *Chiranjivi* which is a blessing given by an elderly to someone young, it means the “long lived one.”

and “the change of form was necessary because I saw my mistake.”⁷⁹⁰ The quarrel between Gandhi and Mira Behn lasted for about a month.

In July 1944, he relented after she heartedly expressed her pain about the change of sentiment, and noted how hurting her feelings “was and is avoidable” and he had “already arranged for transfer to Devdas (Gandhi) of Rs. 25,000 to be placed at your disposal,” and that she could “look” to him for the additional 50,000 rupees she needed.⁷⁹¹ In the later part of 1944, then, Mira Behn founded her first ashram, Kisan Ashram.

*Kisan Ashram*⁷⁹²

Mira Behn chose a spot for Kisan in northern India, halfway between Roorkee and Hardwar, which had a population that was a mix of Muslims and Hindus and had a “glorious view of the Great Himalayan Range.”⁷⁹³ Kisan was to allow for Mira Behn to run an ashram according to standards to which she felt Gandhi’s ashrams had sometimes not been held (see Chapters One and Four). Kisan ashram developed fairly quickly. Early on she was able to establish a steady stream of khadi production and secure four cows and calves, two bullocks, and a pony that she could use to get around the countryside more easily.⁷⁹⁴ She was also able to ensure literary classes for children in nearby villages.⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹⁰ Gandhi, “June 12, 1944,” *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Tridip and Suhrud, 499; Gandhi, “June 14, 1944,” *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Tridip and Suhrud, 500.

⁷⁹¹ Gandhi, “July 18, 1944,” *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 500; Gandhi, “July 24, 1944,” *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 501; Gandhi, “August 28, 1944,” *Beloved Bapu*, eds. Suhrud and Weber, 502.

⁷⁹² Information regarding Mira Behn’s environmental work within this section and the *After Independence* section comes from Bidisha Mallik’s unpublished dissertation “The Contribution of Mira Behn and Sarala Behn to Social and Environmental Transformation in the Indian State of Uttarakhand,” University of North Texas, 2014. Rather than merely reiterate everything that Mallik states, I have incorporated the most relevant information into these sections. For more information on Mira Behn’s environmental work, see Mallik’s upcoming monograph *Bridging Divides: Mira Behn and Sarala Behn in Gandhian Activism*.

⁷⁹³ Behn, *Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 260.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁷⁹⁵ Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 20.

Life at Kisan consisted of morning and evening prayers and “at the end of the evening prayer, the inmates gave reports of their reports of their work during the day, and the programme for the next day was decided.”⁷⁹⁶ Meals were vegetarian and eaten together and Kisan was lit with hurricane lanterns; Behn herself took on the responsibility of cleaning the lanterns and filling them with kerosene.⁷⁹⁷ Behn trained her inmates in nursing techniques and her work and presence at Kisan drew attention from the British as well as international presses.

Mira Behn’s efforts at Kisan reached the surrounding areas and inspired the “socioeconomic uplift” of eight villages: Muldaspur, Daulatpur, Baheri Raj Putan, Bahadarpur Saini, Shantarasa, Kamalpur Sainivas, Bharapur and Bhonri.⁷⁹⁸ Mira Behn helped to cultivate the self-sufficient ideals that Gandhi wished for India:

The villagers were in control of the production of the raw materials and the means of manufacture of both the vital necessities of life, food and clothing. They grew their own grain and cotton, the food grains they pounded by hand, and the cotton they carded, spun and wove by hand. They were therefore masters of their fundamental needs.⁷⁹⁹

Kisan was a way for Behn to prove to herself, and the outside world, that Gandhi’s goals for India could be successful. During her time at Kisan, an agent from British Intelligence Department “always kept a watch on Mira Behn’s activities.”⁸⁰⁰ Throughout the mid-1940s, Mira Behn had to constantly refute rumors that there was a rift between herself and Gandhi. Ironically, these rumors did not begin until after the tension and issues from 1944 between the two had been resolved. The *Miami Daily News* dedicated not one, but two, articles about Behn and the creation of Kisan Ashram. The first one, published on December 23, 1945, included quotations from Behn where she not only discussed the formation of an idea behind Kisan, but had to defend

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid

⁷⁹⁸ Mallik, “The Contribution of Mira Behn and Sarala Behn,” 99.

⁷⁹⁹ Behn, *The Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, 269; Mallik, “The Contribution of Mira Behn and Sarala Behn,” 100.

⁸⁰⁰ Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 19.

against rumors of a “break” with Gandhi by discussing his upcoming visit, as well as defray rumors of having become a communist:

Certainly, I believe that peace cannot come to the world until capitalism is removed and the poor man is set on his feet in all countries. But that does not make me a communist, or, if that does, the Gandhi-ji is one also.⁸⁰¹

Roughly two weeks later, the *Miami Daily News* published Mira Behn’s continued defense of her relationship with Gandhi and also how the British “regarded” her:

She was regarded by the British as a traitor to her class and as an inspiration to other English men and women to forsake the ties of empire of a free India that would ruin some of the oldest and largest fortunes.⁸⁰²

Even though it had been over a decade since her tour in America, it is clear that Mira Behn and her ties to Gandhi and the movement still attracted international attention. Meanwhile, the British believed that publicizing a “rift” between Mira Behn and Gandhi demonstrated dissension in the movement. Mira Behn branded such attempts as “malicious propagandist gossip.”⁸⁰³ As time wore on and it was apparent that independence was inevitable, the British went from attacking Behn’s relationship with Gandhi to offering her a government position, in an attempt to have her aid in a smooth transition of power, that of Special Advisor to the United Province Government.

Special Advisor to the United Province Government

The colonial government of India launched a “Grow More Food Campaign” and awarded Behn the advisor position in April 1946. She had to travel to the city of Lucknow to “to make myself acquainted with the workings of government machinery,” but did not care for the

⁸⁰¹ “English Woman Disciple Denies Reports of Rift with Gandhi,” *Miami Daily News*, Sunday, December 23, 1945, 6-C, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

⁸⁰² Chester Hope, “British Girl who Forsook Fortune for Gandhi, Denies Loss of Faith,” *Miami Daily News*, Friday, January 11, 1946, 14-A, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. The article also incorrectly stated that her father “used every device at his command to make her change her mind,” when she joined Gandhi. Behn herself admits that her parents were not thrilled, but her father ultimately supported her and hired her an Urdu tutor in preparation.

⁸⁰³ *Ibid.*

“Anglicized bureaucracy.”⁸⁰⁴ Although Behn preferred to work and interact directly with rural Indians in the villages and Kisan, she realized that she needed to learn some government techniques for this new role. She wrote about her experience with Indians in Government positions in a *Harijan* article, “Cultural Conquest”:

Strange looking people each trying to look more English than the other, were on all sides... They were all Misters: Mr. Sharma, Mr. Varna, Mr. Gupta, and so on... When I refused to be called “miss” or “madam,” they groped like foreigners or Indian forms of address...⁸⁰⁵

This was the very cultural erasure that Gandhi and the movement were fighting against. She now witnessed the racial biases that occurred in government circles. She saw how British soldiers were allowed to “strip to the waist,” while in the British colonial civil-service departments “the poor Anglicized Indians sat sweltering in shirts, and coats over shirts, in order to be correct!”⁸⁰⁶ She described the things she witnessed as making her “more and more aware of the terrible machine we were taking over from the British...”⁸⁰⁷ She learned what she needed to know in the city and set off as quickly as possible back to the rural areas of India to begin her work.

The colonial government equipped its new Advisor with “a secretary, stenographer, two peons, a driver, and a big blue motor van in order to perform her job.”⁸⁰⁸ While Behn kept Kisan as her home-base, her first mission was to go on a tour of the Provinces to scout out their food-related problems. This was very similar to the khadi tours she did early in her career with Gandhi, but now she had government-backing and funding. She published her findings in various articles in *Harijan*.

⁸⁰⁴ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, Adobe Edition, 216.

⁸⁰⁵ Behn, “Cultural Conquest,” *Harijan*, October 27, 1946, in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 63.

⁸⁰⁶ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 266.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid.

The effects of the decimation of the cattle populations during the war were felt throughout the 1940s.⁸⁰⁹ She proposed that composting would be one the most beneficial for the Indian people. Not only could good composting help produce more food, she believed that it could also be helpful to the creation of khadi “for it will grow better cotton.”⁸¹⁰ And indeed, the ministry of agriculture of the government of India praised her self-created method of preparing compost.⁸¹¹ Because independence in India was a transition beginning, some would argue with the *Government of India Act, 1935* and the provincial elections of 1937, rather than something that was completely achieved over night in August 1947, Mira Behn’s role did not change much after independence.

After Independence

In the latter part of 1947, Mira Behn turned Kisan Ashram over to the now officially independent Indian government’s Rural Development Department, moved to Rishikesh, and founded her second ashram, Pashulok. Meaning, “Animal World,” Mira Behn imagined the 2146 acres that made up Pashulok “as a sanctuary, protected from materialistic exploitation and disfigurement, such as building of factories or towns, and as a potential cattle-breeding area developed into a good grazing land for the Indian cow.”⁸¹² Pashulok faced its own particular set of challenges. She had to learn how to cope with wild bulls and elephants with the elephants walking “through the fences as if they weren’t there and eat(ing) any crops that took their fancy;” however, she eventually trained a domesticated elephant to work on the farm who allowed Behn

⁸⁰⁹ Behn, “Tractors vs. Bullocks,” *Harijan*, September 29, 1946, in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 133; Gandhi, “Cattle Wealth,” September 29, 1946, *CWMG* vol. 92, 192.

⁸¹⁰ Mira Behn, “The New Family Member,” *Harijan*, February 1, 1948, in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn, Gandhiji's Daughter Disciple*, 140.

⁸¹¹ Gupta, *Mira Behn, Gandhiji's Daughter Disciple*, 21-2.

⁸¹² Mallik, “Contribution of Mira Behn and Sarala Behn,” 107-8.

to ride it.⁸¹³ It was at Pashulok on January 30, 1948, that she was informed that Gandhi had been assassinated.

I stood silent and still. A vast emotion held me as in a trance. The only thought that came to me was Bapu, Bapu, so it has come! I looked up into the heavens and there, through the boughs of the trees, the stars were shining peaceful splendor, far, far away. They told of Bapu's spirit released and at peace, and as I gazed on them it was as if Bapu was there-yes, there and with me too. It all became one. And surely Bapu's spirit was with me, for I did not weep when I came back to earth.⁸¹⁴

It was not until the day after his death that Behn truly began to experience the loss:

The next morning I went about my work as usual-outwardly as usual, but inside there was a new and unknown world to which I was trying hard to adjust myself. So closely had Bapu been interwoven in all the thoughts and actions of my daily life, that at every turn I had to pull myself up and remember that Bapu in the flesh was no longer there. Now there would be no more letter-writing, no more building of cottages with the hope of Bapu coming to stay in them. The very cottage that was then growing up on the sacred river Ganga I had pictured being a perfect spot for Bapu to come to for rest from time to time, and it was hard to bear that morning when I went to supervise the work which was going on.⁸¹⁵

As sad as she was, Mira Behn did not let Gandhi's death overwhelm her. She continued to work in India for the betterment of the people and animals there. According to scholar Bidisha Mallik, soon after its inception, Pashulok

Emerged as the first modern animal and welfare sanctuary in post-independent India devoted to the care of old, infirm, and dry cattle and for undertaking major economic and agricultural experiments like upgrading local breed of cattle, settling of landless farmers, compost-making, agro-forestry etc.⁸¹⁶

In addition to the work within Pashulok, Behn ensured her work could be shared with the outside world. During this time, she published a small instructional booklet on proper composting techniques that juxtaposes the techniques with a message of reliance on traditional

⁸¹³ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 297-9.

⁸¹⁴ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 292.

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁸¹⁶ Mallik, "Contribution of Mira Behn and Sarala Behn," 108.

methods rather than mechanized (British) methods.⁸¹⁷ This booklet helped these farming techniques to spread to areas to which Behn may not have been able to travel directly herself and allowed for her ideas to linger when she moved on. This booklet also propagated the idea that in this traditional the Indian method was superior to the British way; therefore, there was no need to hold onto British values, but instead the Indian one should be embraced.

In 1949, she published her first book about Gandhi, *Bapu's Letters to Mira*, which gave the world its first look at Gandhi outside of the public sphere. The book was priced at four rupees and intended to demonstrate Gandhi's "inner personal life" rather than his "dramatic outer life."⁸¹⁸ After the publication of the book, and due to constant health issues, she left Pashulok; she proceeded to found another ashram, Gopal Ashram, in the Himalayas in 1951.

Behn remained at Gopal from 1951 to 1954. Gopal was different from the other ashrams as there were only three to four other ashramites there.⁸¹⁹ Gopal has been described as "aesthetically uplifting, located at a height of 5600 feet overlooking the snow-clad ranges of the Himalaya, surrounded by thick forests of sweet smelling pine, and the gentle murmur of the river Bhilangana several hundred feet below at the foot of the mountain slope."⁸²⁰ Behn published her early experiences in the Himalayas in a seven installment series in *Harijan* between January and July 1951. At Gopal, Behn published a short-lived publication *Bapu Raj Patrika* (February 1952), which promoted a self-reliant economy for India.⁸²¹

She remained in the Himalayan region throughout the latter part of the 1950s. During this time she turned her attention to deforestation and experimental cattle-breeding. While at

⁸¹⁷ Mira Behn, *Why India Starves and the Remedy*, (Delhi: United Press, 1948), 2.

⁸¹⁸ "Books of Today," *the Bombay Chronicle*, December 23, 1949, 6, *Granth Sanjeevani*.

⁸¹⁹ Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 34.

⁸²⁰ Mallik, "The Contribution of Mira Behn and Sarala Behn," 129.

⁸²¹ Gupta, *Mira Behn, Gandhiji's Daughter Disciple*, 36.

Pashulok, Mira Behn realized that the massive floods in Indo-Gangetic plains were due to deforestation and mentored one of India's most well-known environmentalists, Sunderlal Bahuguna, most famous for the Chipko movement in the 1970s.⁸²² In terms of experimental cattle-breeding, according to Mallik,

In order to develop good breeding cattle and milk products for the marginalized Himalayan peasantry, Mira Behn advocated natural cattle crossbreeding along with better management practices like fodder crops and hay production for improved feeding of cattle as an imperative for the conservation and sustainable use of domestic animal biodiversity and a stable, self-sufficient pastoral livelihood.⁸²³

In her text, Mallik discusses in-depth the impact and exact nature of Mira Behn's cattle experiments:

Mira Behn came up with a rather forward-looking idea for her time, advocating scientific crossbreeding of climatically adapted pedigree bulls from Europe like Dexters and Jersey with local breeds under village conditions and with full participation of the people concerned.⁸²⁴

Through her ashrams and her work in the Himalayas, she demonstrated her passion in wanting to make life better for all living creatures in India. No matter where she was in India, throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, she continued to emulate, and even went beyond, Gandhi's and the movement's values. She invented creative ways to advance his ideas suitable for a different world.

Along with informing readers about environmental awareness and farming techniques, she used her publications in *Harijan* to continue to promote self-reliance and Indian culture

⁸²² Sunderlal Bahuguna, "Chipko: The People's movement with a Hope for the Survival of Humankind," in Chipko Information Centre, *The Chipko Message*, Silyara Tehri-Garhwal, (Uttar Pradesh, India: Chipko Information Centre, 1987), 9-34, 11; George James, "Mira Behn: An Environmentalist of the Himalayas," in *World's Religions After September 11*, and Arvind Sharma. *Windows to World's Religions: Selected Proceedings of the Global Congress on the World's Religions After September 11*, (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2009), 105-118, 106.

⁸²³ Mallik, "The Contribution of Mira Behn and Sarala Behn," 156.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*

throughout India. In “This Mr. Business,” she argues against the use of the title “Mr.” as an expression of an Indian collective inferiority complex:

For many years during the freedom struggle, there was a strong aversion to the use of “Mr.” and we were awake to the dangers of foreign mesmerism. But now that so-called freedom is ours, strangely enough the old slave mentality has again come to the surface.⁸²⁵

She also brought attention to the class differences within the rural Indian populations and continued to argue for the abolishment of class and caste divisions. In “But Where are the Kisans and Mazdoors?” she challenged the middle class’ ability to care for themselves:

...but is there one amongst them who knows how to plough the field or who lives in a hut, or who can fell a tree or who can milk a cow? Not one I guess.⁸²⁶

She worked hard during these years to continue to work for the ideals of the movement. Yet, no matter what she tried to do or where in India she tried to do it, she seemed to constantly be derailed by government red-tape and bureaucracy. While she demonstrated that Gandhi’s ideals could work in the ashram communities, she found that the methods applied at the ashrams were not what the new government of India envisioned for the newly independent country. According to Mallik, “the decentralized rural development scheme of Mira Behn was philosophically opposed to the objectives of a centralized state bureaucracy who wanted all administrative control vested in their hands.”⁸²⁷ It appeared that the Government did not want the people completely self-sufficient. Amidst government bureaucracy and constantly battling health issues, at the end of the 1950s, she felt her time in India was coming to end.

⁸²⁵ Behn, “This ‘Mr. Business,’ in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 65.

⁸²⁶ Behn, “But where are the Kisans and Mazdoors?” *Harijan*, September 29, 1951, in ed. Gupta, 166.

⁸²⁷ Mallik, “Contribution of Mira Behn and Sarala Behn,” 150.

Conclusion

Between 1942 and 1959, Behn worked consistently to promote self-reliance, farming, animal husbandry, khadi, and all the movement's ideals across India. She forged alliances with British military members that others could not and taught vital skills for villagers to flourish. Before Gandhi's death, she ventured out on her own and established her own ashrams. After his death, she proved to the world that she had not merely followed the man but truly believed in the independence movement and the ideals associated with it by continuing to live and work in India. She continued to prove that she could work independently from Gandhi, and, in fact, did her most-lasting and worthwhile work for India when she worked on her own rather than as an assistant to Gandhi. Although her work was constantly impeded by government interference, she had a lasting impact in the Himalayan communities. In 2011, Bidisha Mallik interviewed Prem Singh Rawat, a villager who helped Mira Behn at Gopal Ashram, who discussed her influence in the area:

Mira Behn came to serve here [Geonli] for two reasons: to uplift the socially and economically downtrodden in the most backward area of the mountain society, and to raise awareness about the need for preserving the forests and the environment. Today everyone talks about the need for saving the environment, but it was Mira Behn, who made us aware of these problems so many decades back.⁸²⁸

Behn sought advice from the local villagers at the time and of marrying the needs of villagers to the needs of the people and land. Behn noted about deforestation that the “issue was not merely one of planting trees, but of planting *ecologically appropriate* trees.”⁸²⁹ Her former-mentee-turned-famous-environmentalist, Sunderlal Bahuguna, once said of Behn that she would be remembered as “one of the most important inspirations for environmental movements in India

⁸²⁸ Ibid., 130.

⁸²⁹ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*, (London: Zed Books, 1988), 69.

that continue to work towards village economic self-reliance.”⁸³⁰ While her work was vital and had a lasting impact on the areas, towards the end of the 1950s she began to feel called elsewhere and wrote about her feelings in a letter to her former assistant, Krishna Murti Gupta:

Since a restless urge has been with me for some time that sooner or later I shall have to go West, I take it that I must accept the call now and do my best. In some ways I believe there is more response to Bapu’s thoughts over there than in present-day India.⁸³¹

She felt that she did all that she could have done in India. Her health continued to suffer no matter where in India she tried to stay. So, on January 29, 1959, she said goodbye to India and returned to her homeland England and then retired to Austria, the home of her first love, Beethoven.

⁸³⁰ James, “Mira Behn,” 118.

⁸³¹ Mira Behn, “Letter to Krishna Murti Gupta” April 4, 1958, in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 37.

EPILOGUE

Why have I been given this double knowledge of West and East if not to put it to use?
-Mira Behn, September 1959⁸³²

Mira Behn definitively retired to Europe in 1959. She first went to Paris to meet with Rolland's sister, then to England, then, in September 1959, moved to Austria, the home of Ludwig van Beethoven, the man whose music she first loved in her pre-India days. She kept up with news of India by reading copies of *The Hindustan Times* printed for overseas readers.⁸³³ She lived a simple life in her retirement and often faced financial difficulties until Indira Gandhi intervened. However, that did not mean the end of her crusade to educate the world on Gandhian ideology.

Behn is remembered throughout India and the world as someone vital to the Indian independence movement. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, she spoke on several BBC radio broadcasts about her life, her time in India, and Gandhi's work.⁸³⁴ She utilized her autobiography to promote Gandhi and his work rather than espouse her own merits and talents. The last decades of her life were spent writing and promoting the works of Gandhi and Beethoven. One can look at these last two decades of her life and see how, even in her retirement, she immersed herself in the Gandhian ideals and beliefs.

In 1960, Mira Behn released her autobiography, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, in which she describes her life from her early childhood to settling in Austria. While the book was about

⁸³² Mira Behn, "Letter to Krishna Murti Gupta," September 21, 1959, in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 41.

⁸³³ Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 41.

⁸³⁴ A blurb for one of her interviews appears in *The Birmingham Post*. It states that Mira Behn talks about "her unusual life." "Weekend Television and Radio," *The Birmingham Post*, July 18, 1970, 2, *British Newspaper Archive*.

Behn's life, readers learn much more about what Gandhi was doing and who he was outside of his far better known very public persona. Reviews of the book use phrases such as "Hero worship," "the portrait (of Gandhi) is enthusiastic but never idolatrous," and "Mira Behn's impressions of Gandhi are of the deepest interest, revealing in full measure the extent of the devotion that surrounded him."⁸³⁵ As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Mira Behn glossed over her pivotal role in major events in the movement for Indian independence. The book about her own life focuses rather more on the private life of someone else. Still, for this project, her autobiography helped me to gain insight into how she saw herself and her role in the movement, as well as chronologize events, but I had to rely on other sources to tease out her vital role in India. Yet, while Gandhi always held a special place in her life and heart, in Austria, Behn shifted her focus from solely promulgating Gandhian ideology to also promoting the life and work of Beethoven.

Mira Behn ends *The Spirit's Pilgrimage* with a short page-long story about stumbling upon a box containing material about Beethoven, *Beethoven-Les Grandes Époques Créatives*.

Now I went to the box, took them out and sat down to read, and as I read something began to stir-something fundamental. I shut my eyes. Yes- it was the spirit of him from whose music I had been separated for over thirty years that I heard and felt but now with new vision and inspiration. I became conscious of the realization of my true self. For a while I remained lost in the World of the Spirit, and when I finally came back the former tension and restlessness had passed out of me. The third and last chapter of this present birth had begun. Not a finishing, but a preparation.⁸³⁶

⁸³⁵ Gilbert Thomas, "Hero Worship and Service of Man," *The Birmingham Post*, October 11, 1960, 3, *British Newspaper Archive*; "Women at Work," *The Sphere*, October 15, 1960, 30, *British Newspaper Archive*. *The Times* also featured a small blurb, "The autobiography of an English woman who became one of Gandhi's closest disciples." "Multiple Display Advertisements," *Times*, 13 Oct. 1960, 17, *The Times Digital Archive*, available at: <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS286744397/TTDA?u=44898&sid=TTDA&xid=10e96de1>, accessed 22 July 2020.

⁸³⁶ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, 316.

On October 21, 1969, Behn was the fourth-billed speaker for the Centenary Tribute to Gandhi held in England.⁸³⁷ During this visit, she was interviewed by several UK newspapers and not only discussed her role in Gandhi's life, but her new venture, writing a biography about Beethoven. In an interview with *The Times* she discusses her first encounter with hearing Beethoven's music played on a pianola.

My family was not a musical one- but the moment I heard the allegretto from Opus 31 I was set spiritually on fire. Originally I had intended to serve his message through his music, but fate had it another way and sent me to India.⁸³⁸

She spent her first nine years in Austria “with a library of Beethoven books and a complete set of recordings,” surrounded in the same woods in which Beethoven found his inspiration.⁸³⁹ It was not her goal to write a rote-fact traditional biography, but to draw comparisons between Beethoven and “Eastern” thought, particularly the spiritually-influenced parallels of Beethoven and Gandhi. She titled the work, “Beethoven the Mystic.”

In “Beethoven the Mystic,” she noted that Beethoven came into “contact with ancient Egyptian and Hindu thought,” and “for Beethoven inspiration came straight from the Beyond, never through stimulants or other artificial means.”⁸⁴⁰ She challenged the work of Beethoven's earlier biographers who portrayed him as “morose” and “difficult.”⁸⁴¹ She believed so much in the importance of Beethoven's work that she tried to convince *Gandhi* movie director, Richard Attenborough, to help her secure the making of a *BBC* Beethoven film (this never came to fruition).⁸⁴²

⁸³⁷ “Opera and Ballet,” *Times*, 11 Oct. 1969, II, *The Times Digital Archive*, available at: <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS369324363/TTDA?u=tamp44898&sid=TTDA&xid=1ac5f724>, accessed 22 July 2020.

⁸³⁸ PHS, “The Times Diary,” *Times*, 27 Oct. 1969, 8. *The Times Digital Archive*, available at: <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS134967643/TTDA?u=tamp44898&xid=1badb882>, accessed 22 July 2020.

⁸³⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁰ Behn, “Beethoven the Mystic,” in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 180-1.

⁸⁴¹ PHS, “The Times Diary,” 8.

⁸⁴² Rosetta Spalt, “Retracing Mira Behn's Path,” in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 226.

There is a portion of the finished biography in Krishna Murti Gupta's *Mira Behn, Gandhiji's Daughter Disciple: Birth Centenary Volume*. Perhaps, part of the reason that she did not finish the biography was due to the fact that she spent much of these final decades suffering from financial difficulties.

In Austria, a close friend noted that Behn lived

In two rooms and a kitchen heated by a wood stove (the winters in Austria can be bitterly cold), and she was attended on by a shy and gentle man who had come from India to take care of her and her housekeeping and personal needs, Bramacharji or Datt, as her friends called him.⁸⁴³

While Behn may have had a servant, she lived off of a modest pension from the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, an organization created by the INC after Gandhi's assassination, and whatever profits she gained from her book sales.⁸⁴⁴ Her pension began as 300 Rupees a month and was raised eventually to 500 Rupees, roughly the equivalent of \$117.00 to \$196.00, which went into effect July 1962.⁸⁴⁵ However, she used this money not only to care for her simple life but to support her assistant and send money to his family in India. Therefore, this was still not a lot of money to survive on.⁸⁴⁶ Her former assistant from during her 1950s ashram-days, Krishna Murti Gupta, noted in his publication about Behn that she did not have enough money to even prepare woolen clothes for herself and resorted to wearing the same clothes for three years.⁸⁴⁷ While Gupta did not meet up with Behn in-person during this era, he garnered this knowledge through

⁸⁴³ Ibid., 225; Earlier in Gupta's text, Mira Behn mentions a Garhwali attendant named "Rameshwar Dutt" and I suspect but cannot confirm that he and Datt are the same person. If this is true, Datt/Dutt had been with Mira Behn since her days in the Himalayas (Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 42-3). Datt and Brahmachariji refer to the same person. Behn used to call him "Brahmachariji" and his real name was Rameshwar Datt. Datt passed away in 2013.

⁸⁴⁴ For more on this see *Gandhi Smarak Nidhi*, available at: <http://www.gandhismaraknidhi.org/>, accessed June 17, 2021.

⁸⁴⁵ Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 41-3. It is difficult to get exact numbers in terms of when this occurred. For the currency rate exchange, I used the years 1970 and 2015 respectively. "Historical Currency Converter, 1.0," available at: <https://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html>. accessed 24 April 2021

⁸⁴⁶ Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 43.

⁸⁴⁷ Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 49.

their frequent correspondence and wrote to Indian politician Indira Gandhi (Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter) in the late 1970s requesting aid which helped to secure Mira Behn an increased pension and a one-time payment of 6000 Rupees; this greatly improved Behn's financial situation by 1980.⁸⁴⁸

In September 1980 Mira Behn wrote a letter of thanks to Indira Gandhi. In it she stated

You can hardly imagine how deeply I appreciate the warm generosity of your response to reports from others of my difficulties. When your ambassador came personally with a cheque and full news of your concern for my welfare, I felt very much touched. Beyond the financial aid, it is the returned contact with India as of old that warms my heart, and the feelings of how glad Bapu would have been about our coming together at this time.⁸⁴⁹

This was not the last time that Mira Behn was rewarded for her efforts in the Indian independence movement. India had one last surprise for Behn.

In early 1982, the India Ambassador in Austria gave the bed-ridden Mira Behn the Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civil decoration in India.⁸⁵⁰ A few months later, Mira Behn died on July 20, 1982 at 12:35pm, at age of ninety; her ashes were scattered in both India and Austria.⁸⁵¹

Through her class, race, and gender-defying actions, Mira Behn played a vital role in the movement for Indian independence. She used her knowledge of "Western" culture and customs and her skills gained under the tutelage of Gandhi to form a bridge between the two worlds. She utilized her connections to bring international attention to the plight of the average Indian villager, while believing in the power of grassroots efforts in work and education in the Indian villages themselves. She chose to remain in India after independence to ensure that Gandhi's

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid., 44, 46.

⁸⁴⁹ Mira Behn, "Letter to Indira Gandhi," September 9, 1980, in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 217.

⁸⁵⁰ Spalt, "Retracing Mira Behn's Path," in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn* 227; Mira Behn is Dead," *The Times of India (1861-Current)*, July 21, 1982, 1,9, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid., 1 ; Spalt, "Retracing Mira Behn's Path," in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 230.

ideals did not disappear and continued to promote his ideology even after she departed India. Her actions have impacted India long past Gandhi's assassination and even her own death.

In 1991, Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao noted that

Mira Behn represented the voice of humanity, appalled at the bondage to which the Indian people were subject and to the injustice inherent in a situation which prevented them from shaping their own destiny. The story of Mira Behn's life will continue to inspire generations of Indians, as well as people the world over who are concerned with base moral issues, with freedom and human dignity.⁸⁵²

Other prominent Indian politicians have noted that she is a "household name in India," that "her role in winning support from the U.K. and other countries for the Indian freedom movement was indeed significant," and "her life has been a glorious example of dedicated service towards the upliftment of the poor."⁸⁵³ Yet, in a lot of scholarship outside of Gupta's and Kumari Jayawardena's works, Behn has often been relegated to a supporting role at best and an obsessed fan girl at worst. This project has set out to prove that Behn's role was much more complicated and significant.

Behn was a very fervent and passionate person. When she dedicated herself to something or someone it was completely and whole heartedly. One can see this in terms of her attitude towards Beethoven, Prithvi Singh, but especially Gandhi. She spent decades of her life dedicated to Gandhi and the movement for Indian independence. Behn's close friend Rosetta Spalt stated that

Mira saw India through Bapu's eyes, experienced India through his feelings, her activities were inspired by his principles and his drive to free India and to shape the Indian people into an independent and peace-loving nation.⁸⁵⁴

⁸⁵² P.V. Narasimha Rao, "Messages," November 11, 1991, in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, xiii.

⁸⁵³ President Shanker Doyal Sharma, "Messages," September 14, 1992, in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, xi; Vice President of India K.R. Narayanan, "Messages," October 14, 1992, in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, xii.

⁸⁵⁴ Spalt, "Retracing Mira Behn's Path," in ed. Gupta, *Mira Behn*, 228.

There is no denying that Behn was naïve and attached in terms of her emotions and devotions towards Gandhi, but such flaws do not diminish her positive contributions. She poured herself into learning how to best serve the movement whether through grassroots efforts, education, spinning, writing, or international networking. Rather than leave India as soon as Gandhi died, she remained for over a decade to continue to help the people, land, and animals in India thrive in his absence.

Mira Behn challenged everything that was the norm for an upper-class British woman in the early twentieth century. As Kumari Jayawardena has noted, Behn went from being a “rebel” in England to a “nationally honored” person in India.⁸⁵⁵ Through Behn’s open defiance of traditional British gender and societal norms, grassroots work and tours through India, international travels, and news correspondence, she demonstrated her vitalness to the success of the movement for Indian independence. Gandhi himself wrote that her “faults are negligible, but her merits are worthy of emulation,” and that is the perfect manner to describe Mira Behn’s life and involvement with the Indian independence movement.⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵⁵ Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden*, 180.

⁸⁵⁶ Mahatma Gandhi, “Letter to Jammalal Bajaj,” May 21, 1936, *CWMG* vol. 69, 21.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Unpublished Primary Sources and Digital Archives

British Newspaper Archive
Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)
Eleanor Roosevelt Papers
Horace Alexander Gundry Papers
Gandhi Heritage Portal
Granth Sanjeevani by The Asiatic Society of Mumbai
The Library of Congress
Moorland-Spingarn Research Center
Peace Collection
ProQuest Historical Newspapers
ProQuest Southeast News
Richard Bartlett Gregg Papers
South Asian American Digital Archive
The Times Digital Archive

Newspapers and Periodicals

Aberdeen Press and Journal
Belfast News-Letter
Belfast Telegraph
Belfast Telegram
Birmingham Gazette
Birmingham Daily Gazette
The Birmingham Post
The Bombay Chronicle
Bristol Mirror
The Citizen
The Courier and Advertiser
Daily Herald
The Daily Mail
Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser
Dundee Evening Telegraph and Post
Edinburgh Evening News
Evening Chronicle
The Fort Myers Press
Gloucestershire Echo
Harijan
Haverford News

The Hilltop
The Lancashire Daily Post
Lancashire Evening Post
The Leeds Mercury
The Liverpool Echo
The Londonderry Sentinel
Miami Daily News
Midland Daily Telegraph
Newcastle Evening Chronicle
New York Times
Northern Daily Mail
The Nottingham Journal
Pall Mall Gazette
The People
The Scotsman
Sheffield Daily Telegraph
The Sphere
The Sunday Guardian Live
The Sunderland Echo
Surrey Advertiser
Swarthmore Phoenix
Times
Times of India
The Vote
Trinity Mirror
Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser & Leamington Gazette
Weekly Report
Western Daily Press
Western Morning News and Daily Gazette
The Western Morning News and Mercury
Western Mail and South Wales News
Western Sussex Gazette
Westminster Gazette
The Yorkshire Post
Young India

Primary Sources

- Barker, Frederic Allan. *The Modern Prison System of India, A Report to the Department, the Progress of Prison Reform in India During the Twenty Years Following the Publication of the Report of the 1919-1920 Indian Jails Committee*. London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1944.
- Bernays, Robert. *Naked Fakir*. London: Camelot Press Ltd., 1931.
- Besant, Annie. *Annie Besant: An Autobiography*. Madras, India: Theosophical Pub. House, Fourth Edition, 1935.
- Gandhi, Mahatma. *Ashram Observances in Action*, translated by Valji Govindi Desai. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 2011 (originally published around 1955 with the introduction being written in 1932). Accessed July 6, 2021. <https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/ashramobservance.pdf>
- Gandhi, Mahatma, Tridip Suhrud, Thomas Weber, and Mirabehn. *Beloved Bapu: The Gandhi-Mirabehn Correspondence*, by New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2014.
- Gandhi, Mahatma. "India's Freedom," *Selected Letters of Mahatma Gandhi*, edited by Shriman Nayarayan, Navajivan Publishing House: Ahmedabad, 1969. Accessed July 6, 2021. https://www.mkgandhi.org/selectedletters/13indias_freedom.html
- Gandhi, Mahatma. *Gandhi: The Last Eighteen Years* edited by Sterling P. Olmsted, Mike Heller, and Ruth Olmsted. Wilmington: Wilmington College Peace Resource Center, 2011.
- Gandhi, MK. *Letters to Sardar Patel*, translated and edited by Valji Govindji Desai and Sudarshan Desai, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1957. Accessed April 2, 2021. <https://archive.org/details/letterstosardarv00gand/mode/2up>
- Gandhi, Mahatma. *Mahatma Gandhi: Letters to Americans*. Edited by E.S. Reddy. New York, New York: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1998. Accessed July 6, 2021. <http://www.fredsakademiet.dk/library/americans.pdf>.
- Gandhi, Mahatma. "Speech at Round Table Conference, 1931, November 30, 1931." *Gandhi Sevagram Ashram*. Accessed July 6, 2021. <https://www.gandhishramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/speech-at-the-round-table-conference-1931.php>
- Gandhi, Mahatma. *Wheel of Fortune*. USA: Gonaval Press, 2007 (originally published 1922).
- Gandhi, Manubahana. *The Diary of Manu Gandhi 1943-1944*. Edited and translated by Tridip Suhrud. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019
- Gandhi Smarak Nidhi*. Accessed June 17, 2021. <http://www.gandhismaraknidhi.org/>

- Government of India Act, 1935*. Accessed July 6, 2021.
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5and1Edw8/26/2/enacted>
- Gupta, Krishna Murti. *Mira Behn, Gandhiji's Daughter Disciple: Birth Centenary Volume*. New Delhi: Himalaya Seva Sangh, 1992.
- Hariharan (ed.), Revathi. "1924 Postcard Signed By Mahatma Gandhi Auctioned For \$20,000 In US." *NDTV*. June 15, 2018. Accessed July 6, 2021.
<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/1924-postcard-from-mahatma-gandhi-to-annie-besant-auctioned-for-20-000-in-us-1867757>
- Holmes, John Haynes. "Mahatma Gandhi: I Meet Gandhi." *Community Pulpit*, Series 1931-1932, Sermon No. 2. October 11, 1931. 1-9. *Harvard Square Library*. Accessed July 6, 2021. <https://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/biographies/mahatma-gandhi-i-meet-gandhi/>
- India League of America, "Information about the India League of America." *Peace Collection*. South Asian Digital Archive at Swarthmore College. Accessed June 14, 2021.
<https://www.saada.org/item/20120712-729>
- India League of America, "Membership Application." *Peace Collection*. South Asian Digital Archive at Swarthmore College: New York 1940-1949.
<https://www.saada.org/item/20120712-727>
- Justice Wickenden, *Historic Judgment on Quit India movement: Justice Wickenden's Report*. Edited by P.N. Chopra. Delhi: Konark Publishers PVT LTD., 1989
- Lenin, Vladimir. *April Theses*. 1917. Accessed August 8, 2021.
<https://wp.stu.ca/worldhistory/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2015/08/Lenins-April-Theses.pdf>
- Mayo, Katherine. *Mother India*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.
<http://books.google.com/books?id=50-GAAAAMAAJ>
- Mira Behn and Mahatma Gandhi. *Bapu's Letters to Mira: 1924-1928*. Navajivan Publishing House: Ahmedabad, 1949. <https://archive.org/details/bapusletterstomi00gand/mode/2up>
- Mira Behn. "Preface." In *Gandhi's Letters to a Disciple* by Mahatma Gandhi, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950. 1990 Reprint by Out-of- Print Books on Demand.
- Mira Behn. *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*. Delhi: Coward, 1960
- Mira Behn. *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*. Adobe Digital Edition. Delhi: Coward, 1960.
- Mira Behn. *Why India Starves and the Remedy*. Delhi: United Press, 1948.
<https://usf.hosts.atlas-sys.com/illiad/illiad.dll?Action=10&Form=75&Value=1227378>

- Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru*. Cornwall: Cornwall Press, 1942.
- Pandit, Vijaya Lakshmi. *Prison Days*. Calcutta: The Signet Press, 1946.
- Rolland, Romain. *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondence: Letters, Diary Extracts, Articles, etc.* Translated by R.A. Francis. Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India: New Delhi, 1976.
<https://archive.org/details/romainrollandgan00roll/mode/2up>
- Seeley, J.R. *The Expansion of England*. Edited and with an introduction by John Gross. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.
- Thurman, Howard. *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979.
- Wilson, Woodrow. *Fourteen Points*. January 8, 1918. Accessed August 8, 2021.
https://web.ics.purdue.edu/~wggray/Teaching/His300/Handouts/Fourteen_Points.pdf,

Secondary Sources

- “About.” *Jamnallal Bajaj Foundation*. Accessed July 6, 2021.
<http://www.jamnallalbajajfoundation.org/jamnallal-bajaj/about>
- Abul Fazal, D. “The Leadership Crises in Congress: Muslims and the Rise of Gandhi.” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 62, (2001): 456-462.
<http://www.jstor.com/stable/44155789>
- Ahmad, Aijaz. "Fascism and National Culture: Reading Gramsci in the Days of Hindutva." *Social Scientist* 21, no. 3/4 (1993): 32-68. Accessed August 4, 2021. doi:10.2307/3517630.
- Ahmed, Talat. *Mohandas Gandhi: Experiments in Civil Disobedience*. Pluto Press, 2019.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv9zcjmc.12>
- Ahmed, Talat. *Mohandas Gandhi: Experiments in Civil Disobedience (Revolutionary Lives)*. London: Pluto Press. 2019. Kindle Edition.
- Anam, Md. Khairul. "The Salt Satyagraha movement, 1930-31: A Case Study on the Nature of its Impact on Murshidabad (W.B.)." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 68 (2007): 806-24. Accessed January 21, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44147889>
- Anand, C.L. *Law and History of the Government of India: Government of India Act, 1935 and the Constitution of India*. Eighth edition. Delhi: Universal Law Publishing ltd., 2008.
- Armitage, David. *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Arnold, David. “The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge, and Penology in 19th Century India.” In *Essays in Honor of Ranjit Guha*. 148-187. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Arnold, David. “India: the Contested Prison.” In *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia and Latin America* edited by Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown, 147-184. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007.
- Azad, Baba Prithvi Singh. *The Legendary Crusader: An Autobiography*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan: Bombay, 1987.
- Bagri, Ramu. "Development of Indian Federalism & Role of President's Rule in the Light of the S.R. Bommai Case (1994)." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 73, no. 3 (2012): 443-52. Accessed July 6, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41852116>
- Bakshi, Rajni. *Bapu Kutli: Journeys in Rediscovery of Gandhi*. India: Penguin Books, 1998.

- Balasubrahmanyam, Suchitra. "Imagining the Indian Nation: The Design of Gandhi's Dandi March and Nehru's Republic Day Parade." In *Designing Worlds: National Design Histories in an Age of Globalization*. Edited by Fallan Kjetil and Lees-Maffei Grace. 108-24. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016. Accessed January 21, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv8bt1mv.10>
- Barr, Pat. *The Dust in the Balance: British Women in India, 1905-1945*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989.
- Bean, Susan S. "Gandhi and Khadi, the Fabric of Indian Independence." In *Cloth and the Human Experience*. Edited by Annetta B. Weiner and Jane Schneider. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989. 355-376. <https://archive.org/details/clothhumanexperi00wein/mode/2up>
- Bevir, Mark. "In Opposition to the Raj: Annie Besant and the Dialectic of Empire," *History of Political Thought* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 61-77. Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26217453>
- Bhagwat, Niloufer. "Mahatma Gandhi: His Political Relevance and Global Impact." *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 18, no. 1 (2014): 50-63. Accessed August 5, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48504952>.
- Bhattacharyya, Anouska. "Indian Insanes: Lunacy in the 'Native' Asylums of Colonial India, 1858-1912." Doctoral diss., Harvard University. 2013. Accessed August 14, 2021. https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/11181217/Bhattacharyya_gsas.harvard_0084_L_11204.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y
- "Biography," *J. Krishnamurti*. Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://jkrishnamurti.org/biography>
- Binayak Ray. *Climate Change: IPCC, Water Crisis, and Policy Riddles with Reference to India and Her Surroundings*. Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2011.
- Brijbhushan, Jamila. *Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya: Portrait of a Rebel*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publishing, 1976.
- "British India 1930: Provinces," *WHJMLA Historical Atlas*, 2006. Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://www.zum.de/whkmla/histatlas/india/haxbrindia.html>
- Brown, Judith M. *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy*, second edition, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1994.
- Broughton, Trev Lynn, and Linda R. Anderson. *Women's Lives/Women's Times: New Essays on Auto/Biography*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

- Burnett, Lynn. "African Americans Make Contact With Gandhi." *Cross Culture Solidarity*. 1-20. Accessed July 6, 2021. <http://crossculturalsolidarity.com/african-americans-make-contact-with-gandhi-the-1930s/>
- Burton, Antoinette. *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- Buettner, Elizabeth. *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005.
- Chaudhuri, Nupur, and Margaret Strobel. *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Chopra, P.N. "Preface," *Historic Judgment on Quit India movement: Justice Wickenden's Report*, edited by P.N. Chopra, Delhi: Konark Publishers PVT LTD., 1989
- Clark, Anna. *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Clymer, Kenton J. *Quest for Freedom: The United States and Indian Independence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Cohn, Bernard S. "Cloths, Clothes, and Colonialism: India in the 19th Century." In *Cloth and the Human Experience*. Edited by Annetta B. Weiner and Jane Schneider, 304-354. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989. <https://archive.org/details/clothhumanexperi00wein/mode/2up>
- Colley, Linda. *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- CPI Inflation Counter. Accessed July 6, 2021 <https://www.in2013dollars.com/uk/inflation/1931?amount=10231>
- Darwin, John. *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- "Description," *South Asian American Digital Archive*. Accessed July 6, 2021. <https://www.saada.org/item/20110912-359>
- Dikötter, Frank. "Introduction." In *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia and Latin America*. Edited by Frank Dikötter and Ian Brown, 1-13. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007.
- Dirks, Nicholas B. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001. Accessed April 27, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400840946>

- Dixie, Quinton Hosford and Peter R. Eisenstadt. *Visions of a Better World: Howard Thurman's Pilgrimage to India and the Origins of African American Nonviolence*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2011.
- “Dominion Status.” *Indian National Congress*. Accessed January 21, 2021.
<https://neo.inc.in/brief-history-of-congress/1925-1935>
- “East Indies Station.” *Naval History Archive*. Accessed July 14, 2021.
https://www.navalhistoryarchive.org/index.php/East_Indies_Station
- Edib, Halidé and Mushirul Hasan. “The Trio Around Mahatma Gandhi,” in *Inside India*, 1-4, October 2012, Oxford Scholarship Online. Accessed February 20, 2022.
<https://oxford-universitypressscholarship-com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195699999.001.0001/acprof-9780195699999-chapter-7?print=pdf>
- Ernst, Waltraud. *Mad Tales from the Raj: Colonial Psychiatry in South Asia, 1800-58*. London: Anthem Press, 2010.
- Ernst, Waltraud. “The Rise of the European Lunatic Asylum in Colonial India (1750-1858),” *Bulletin of the Indian Institute of History of Medicine, Hyderabad*, 17, no. 2, (1987): 94-107.
- Forgacs, David (ed.). *Antonio Gramsci Reader, The*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988. muse.jhu.edu/book/34790.
- Fisher, Michael H. “Asians in Britain: Negotiations of Identity through Self-Representation.” In *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire 1660-1840*. Edited by Kathleen Wilson, 91-112. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Framke, Maria. “India’s Freedom and the League of Nations: Public Debates, 1919-1933.” In *Asia After Versailles: Asian Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Interwar Order, 1919-1933*. Edited by Urs Mathias Zachmann, 1-432. University of Edinburgh Press: Edinburgh, 2017. Kindle Edition.
- George, Rosemary Marangoly. “Homes in the Empire, Empires in the Home.” *Cultural Critique*, no. 26 (1993): 95–127. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354457>.
- Gilmore, David. *The Ruling Caste: Imperial Lives in the Victorian Raj*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006.
- Ghosh, Durba. *Sex and the Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008

- Gopal, Priyamvada. *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent*. London: Verso, 2019
- Gopal, S. *The Viceroyalty of Lord Irwin, 1926-1931*. London: Oxford University Press, 1957.
- Gramsci, Antonio. "Notes on Italian History." *Gramsci: Prison Notebooks*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991. Accessed August 7, 2021.
<https://archive.org/details/Gramsci-History/page/n9/mode/2up?q=subaltern>.
- Grant, Kevin. *Last Weapons: Hunger Strikes and Fasts in the British Empire, 1890-1948*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2019.
- Grayzel, Susan. *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Gregg, Richard Bartlett. *The Power of Nonviolence*. Edited by James Tully. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Guha, Ramachandra. *Gandhi: The Years that Changed the World, 1914-1918*. USA: Vintage Dell, 2018.
- Haseena, V.A. "The History of Dalit Culture and Their Deplorable Situation in India," *Historical Research Letter* 23 (2015): 1-4. 1. Accessed April 27, 2021.
<https://iiste.org/Journals/index.php/HRL/article/view/24700>
- Hajari, Nisid. *Midnight's Furies: The Deadly Legacy of India's Partition*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: New York, 2016.
- Harris, Ruth. "Rolland, Gandhi, and Madeleine Slade: Spiritual Politics, France and the Wider World," *French History* 10, no. 4. (2013): 579-599. Accessed July 6, 2021.
<http://academic.oup.com/fh/article-abstract/27/4/579/584080>
- "Hinduism: The Caste System and Reincarnation." Accessed March 2, 2022.
<https://philosophy.lander.edu/oriental/caste.html>
- "Historical Currency Converter" (test version 1.0). Accessed July 6, 2021.
<https://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html>
- Herman, Arthur. *Gandhi and Churchill: The Epic Rivalry that Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age*. Bantam Dell: New York, 2008
- Holmes, John Haynes. *Gandhi and Non-Violence*. Delhi: Akashdeep Pub. House, 1988.
- Hope, Ashley Guy. *America and the Swaraj; the US Role in Indian Independence*. Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1968

- Hyam, Ronald. *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990.
- Imperial Conference, 1926*. 3. Accessed January 21, 2021.
https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/cth11_doc_1926.pdf
- Jackson, Ashley, Yasmin Khan, and Gajendra Singh. *An Imperial World at War: Aspects of the British Empire's War Experience, 1939-1945*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.
- Jayawardena, Kumari. *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. London/New York: Verso, 2016.
- Jayawardena, Kumari. *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia during British Colonial Rule*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Jelinek, Estelle C. *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography from Antiquity to the Present*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986.
- Johnson, Robert. *British Imperialism*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Judd, Denis. *The Lion and the Tiger: The Rise and Fall of the British Raj, 1600-1947*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Kakar, Sudhir. *Mira and the Mahatma*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2004.
- Kemp, Tom. "Leaders and Classes in the India National Congress, 1918-1939," *Science and Society* 28, no. 1 (Winter 1964): 1-19. Accessed August 14, 2021.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40400999>.
- Kent, Susan. *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Khan, Yasmin. *India at War: The Subcontinent and the Second World War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Kishwar, Madhu. "Gandhi on Women." *Economic and Political Weekly* 20, no. 40 (1985): 1691-702. Accessed June 14, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4374897>.
- Klink, Rebecca M. *Educating Activists: Development and Gender in the Making of Modern Gandhians*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010.
- Kulkarni, Sudheendra. *Music of the Spinning Wheel: Mahatma Gandhi's Manifesto for the Internet Age*. New Delhi: Amaryllyis, 2012.

- Kumar, Akshaya. "Latter-Day Meeras: From Nationalist Icon to Subaltern Subject." *Indian Literature*, 51, no. 2 (238), Sahitya Akademi, 2007, pp. 176–95, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23340623>.
- Leake, Elisabeth Mariko. "British India versus the British Empire: The Indian Army and an impasse in imperial defense, circa 1919– 39," *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (JANUARY 2014): 301- 329. Accessed July 15, 2020. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/24494189>
- Lee, Kevin Stuart. "Abstract." *Richard Bartlett Gregg Papers Finding Aid*. Accessed January 28, 2021. http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/ead/detail.html?id=EAD_upenn_rbml_PUSpMsColl954
- Lejeune, Philippe, Paul John Eakin, and Katherine Margaret Leary. *On Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
- Liddle, Joanna and Rama Joshi. *Daughters of Independence: Gender, Caste, and Class in India*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1986
- "Lillian Wald," *Henry Street Settlement*. Accessed August 14, 2021. <https://www.henrystreet.org/about/our-history/lillian-wald/>
- Lind, Mary Ann. *The Compassionate Memsahibs: Welfare Activities of British Women in India, 1900-1947*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.
- Lindley, Mark. "Mirabehn, Gandhi, and Beethoven." In *Sarvodaya Talisman* 1 (2000): 1-2. Accessed August 14, 2021. https://www.academia.edu/1182808/Mirabehn_Gandhi_and_Beethoven?auto=download
- Lord Hailey. "Forward." In *The Modern Prison System of India, A Report to the Department, the Progress of Prison Reform in India During the Twenty Years Following the Publication of the Report of the 1919-1920 Indian Jails Committee.*, by F.A. Barker, vii-x. London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1944.
- Louai, El Habib. "Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: Historical Developments and New Applications." *African Journal of History and Culture (AJHC)* 4, no. 1, (January 2012): 4-8. Accessed August 7, 2021 https://academicjournals.org/article/article1381909550_Louai.pdf.
- Low, D.A. *Britain and Indian Nationalism: The Imprint of Ambiguity, 1929-1942*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Macmillan, Margaret. *Women of the Raj*. New York.: Random House, 1988

- Maddipati, Venugopal. *Building Impressions: Gandhi and Mira Behn's Hut: 1935-1936*. New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 2014.
- Mandra, Amandeep Singh and Parmjit Singh. *Eyewitness At Amritsar: A Visual History of the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh Massacre*. London: Kashi House CIC, 2019.
- Mani, Lata. *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Malerk, Tamala. "There is No 'I' in Mahatma: Mira Behn and Indian Independence." In *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association 2020*. March 2020. 67-87.
- Mallik, Bidisha. "The Contribution of Mira Behn and Sarala Behn to Social and Environmental Transformation in the Indian State of Uttarakhand." Ph.D. diss., University of North Texas, 2014.
- Marx, Karl. "The Future Results of the British in India." *New-York Daily Tribune*, August 8, 1853. Accessed July 21, 2021. <https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/marx/works/1853/07/22.htm>,
- Mastroianni, Dominic. "Hegemony in Gramsci." Accessed August 5, 2021. <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/2014/06/20/hegemony-in-gramsci/>
- Mclaine, Karine. "Gandhi's Ashrams: Residential Experiments for Universal Well-Being in South Africa and India," *Utopian Studies* 30, no. 3 (2019): 462-485. Accessed September 4, 2020. <http://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/744695>
- Mehta, Ved. *Gandhi and His Apostles*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1976.
- Midgley, Clare. "Can Women Be Missionaries? Envisioning Female Agency in the Early Nineteenth-Century British Empire." *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 335-58. <https://doi.org/10.1086/499791>
- Mitra, Durba. *Indian Sex Life: Sexuality and the Colonial Origins of Modern Social Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020.
- Mookerjee-Leonard, Debali. "To Be Pure or Not to Be: Gandhi, Women, and the Partition of India." *Feminist Review*, no. 94 (2010): 38-54. Accessed June 14, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40664128>.
- Morton, Eleanor. *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi*, Reinhart: London, 1954. <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.150009/page/n1>
- Morton-Jack, George. *Army of Empire: The Untold Story of the Indian Army in World War One*. Basic Books: New York, 2018.

- Mukerjee, Madhusree. *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India During World War Two*. Basic Books: New York, 2010.
- Muldoon, Andrew. *Empire, Politics, and the Creation of the 1935 India Act: Last Act of the Raj*. Surrey, England: Ashgate Pub. Ltd., 2009.
- Nethercot, Arthur H. *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1963.
- Nym, Laura and al (eds.). *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation, and Race*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- O'Hanlon, Rosalind. "Recovering the Subject Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia." *Modern Asian Studies* 22, no. 1 (1988): 189-224. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312498>.
- Pande, Rekha. "The History of Feminism and Doing Gender in India." *Estudos Feministas* 26, no. 3 (2018): 1-17. Accessed January 22, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26538500>.
- Pass, Andrea. "Swaraj, the Raj, and the British Woman Missionary in India, c. 1917–1950." *Transformation* 31, no. 3 (2014): 175–88. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/90008218>.
- Pillai, Sarath. "Fragmenting the Nation: Divisible Sovereignty and Travancore's Quest for Federal Independence." *Law and History Review* 34, no. 3 (2016): 743-82. Accessed March 11, 2021. 745. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24771433>
- Pirro, Dierdre. "Mahatma Gandhi's Italian Visit: A Meeting of Mohandas and Mussolini." *The Florentine*. Issue 253, February 6, 2019. Accessed July 6, 2021. <https://www.theflorentine.net/2019/02/06/mahatma-gandhi-italian-visit-mussolini/>
- Pratt, Frederick G. "The Indian Round Table Conference: Second Session." *Pacific Affairs* 5, no. 2 (February 1932): 151-167. Accessed July 6, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2749987>
- Prayer, Mario. "The Vatican Church and Mahatma Gandhi's India, 1920-1948." *Social Scientist* 37, no. 1/2 (2009): 39-63. Accessed August 5, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27644309>.
- Puri, Harish K. "Revolutionary Organization: A Study of the Ghadar Movement." *Social Scientist* 9, no. 2/3 (1980): 53-66. Accessed August 14, 2021. doi:10.2307/3516925
- Puri, Rashmi-Sudha. "Gandhi and the Second World War." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 1 (1977): 30-53. Accessed August 5, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41854773>.
- Rao, Dr. R.V. *Sevagram: Gandhiji's Ashram and other Institutions in Wardha*. Sevagram Ashram Publications, 1969.

- Raucher, Alan. "American Anti-Imperialists and the Pro-India movement, 1900-1932," *Pacific Historical Review* 43, no.1 (Feb. 1974): 83-110. Accessed July 6, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3637592>.
- Reid, Walter. *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown: The British Betrayal of India*, Birlinn Limited: Edenborough, 2016
- Riello, Giorgio and Roy Tirthankar. *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- Rothermund D. "Gandhi as a Politician." *India Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (1970): 362-67. Accessed July 6, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45069632>
- Roy, Kaushik. "Discipline and Morale of the African, British, and Indian Army Units in Burma and India During World War Two," *Modern Asia Studies* 44, no. 6 (November 2010): 1255-1282. Accessed November 10, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40926529>
- Roye, Sumsita. Introduction," in *Flora Annia Steel: A Critical Study of an Unconventional Memsahib*, 12-52, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: University of Alberta Press, 2017
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994. Accessed July 20, 2021. <https://archive.org/details/cultureimperiali0000said>
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979
- Sen, Amartya. "Illusions of Empire: Amartya Sen on what British Rule Really did for India." *Guardian*, June 29, 2021. Accessed July 21, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/29/british-empire-india-amartya-sen>
- Sen, Satadru. "The Female Jails of Colonial India," *The India Economic and Social History Review* 39 no.2 (Dec 2002): 417-438. Accessed August 14, 2021. Doi 10.1177/001946460203900405.
- Shaffer, Robert. "J.J. Singh and the India League of America, 1945-1959: Pressing at the Margins of the Cold War Consensus," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 30, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 68-103. Accessed June 14, 2021. doi:10.5406/jamerethnhist.31.2.0068.
- Shankardass, Rani Dhavan. "Introduction: The Problems and Paradoxes of Punishment," in *Punishment and Prison: Indian and International Perspectives*, edited by Rani Dhavan Shankardass, 13-48. Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd, 2000. New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2013.
- Sheean, Vincent. "Forward." In *The Spirit's Pilgrimage* by Mira Behn, 3-8. Adobe Digital Edition. Delhi: Coward, 1960.

- Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*, London: Zed Books, 1988.
- Shoenberg, D. "Memories of India." *Current Science* 77, no. 7 (1999): 983–86.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24103677>.
- Singh, K. Natwar. "How Mussolini used Tagore and Gandhi." *The Sunday Guardian Live*, February 23, 2019. Accessed July 6, 2021.
<https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/opinion/mussolini-used-tagore-gandhi>
- Singh, Raghvendra. *India's Lost Frontier: The Story of the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan*. New Delhi: Rupa, 2019.
- Singh, Ujjwal Kumar. "Political Prisoners and the Prison System: Colonial Purposes and Praxiological Problems," in *Punishment and Prison: Indian and International Perspectives*, edited by Rani Dhavan Shankardass, 370-383. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000.
- Sinha, Manish. "The Bengal Famine of 1943 and the American Insensitiveness to Food Aid," *Proceedings of the India History Congress 70* (2009-2010): 887-893. Accessed June 14, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44147736>.
- Sinha, Mrinalini. *Colonial Masculinity: The 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995.
- Sinha, Mrinalini. *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.
- Sinha, Subhir. "Democratic Trajectories I: Congressism, Anti-Congressism, and Composing the 'People-as-a-Whole.'" In *Indian Democracy: Origins, Trajectories, Contestations*. Edited by Alf Gunvald Nilsen, Kenneth Bo Nielsen, and Anand Vaidya, 88-101. Pluto Press, 2019. Accessed July 6, 2021. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/j.ctvdmwxfb.11>
- Smith, William Roy. *Nationalism and Reform in India*. Kennikat Press: New York/London, 1938.
- Spade, James W. "Pakistan's North-West Frontier." *Middle East Journal* 8, no. 1 (Winter, 1954): 27-40. Accessed July 15, 2020. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/4322563>
- Spencer, Herbert. *Progress: It's Laws and Causes, 1857*, *Modern History Sourcebook*, 2020. Accessed July 6, 2021. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/spencer-darwin.asp>
- Strobel, Margaret. *European Women and the Second British Empire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991

“Tapasya,” *Yogapedia*. Accessed August 14, 2021.
<https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/6638/tapasya>

Taylor, Anne. *Annie Besant: A Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Thapar-Björkert, Suruchi. *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006

Thomson, Mark. *Gandhi and his Ashrams*. Mumbai: Popolar Prakashan Pvt. Ltd, 1993.
https://www.mkgandhi.org/ebks/Gandhi_and_his_Ashrams.pdf

Thresiamma, V.G. "Making of the Indian Constitution and Debate on the Issue of Tribal Development." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 72, no. 1 (2011): 179-89. Accessed March 11, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42761819>.

Trivedi, Lisa N. *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007.

U, Shumais. "Impact of the Revolt of 1857 in South India: The Case of Colonial Malabar." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 77 (2016): 410-17. Accessed August 7, 2021.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26552666>.

Verma, Jawahar Lal. "Salt Satyagraha (1930) in Kaimur (Bihar)." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 73 (2012): 619-23. Accessed January 22, 2021.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44156256>

Verna, Arvind. "Governance and Coercion in India." In *Crime and Justice in India*. Ed. By N. Prabha Unnithan, 5-27, New Delhi : SAGE Publications, 2013.

Virmani, Arundhati. "Le Sari à L'eupéenne. Vêtement Et Militantisme En Inde Coloniale." *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, no. 36 (2012): 129-52. Accessed June 13, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44405249>.

Wainwright, A. Martin. *'The Better Class' of Indians: Social Rank, Imperial Identity, and South Asians in Britain, 1858-1914*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008.

Wallach, Janet. *Desert Queen: The Extraordinary Life of Gertrude Bell, Adventurer, Adviser to Kings, Ally of Lawrence of Arabia*. New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 1996.

Weber, Thomas. *Going Native: Gandhi's Relationship with Western Women*. New Delhi: Roti Books, 2011

“What is Khadi?” Accessed July 6, 2021.
https://www.mkgandhi.org/swadeshi_khadi/whatiskhadi.htm

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Revised Edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Wilson, Jon. *India Conquered: British Raj and the Chaos of Empire*. London: Simon and Schuster, 2016.

Wilson, Kathleen. *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Zastoupil, Lynn. "The Government of India Act, 1935." In *Twentieth Century Britain: An Encyclopedia*. Edited by Fred M. Leventhal, 230/. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002. Accessed March 11, 2021.

<https://archive.org/details/twentiethcentury0000unse/mode/2up>

APPENDIX

Copyright Permissions

Copyright Permissions

for: schanhistory@gmail.com

Good afternoon,
a paper that was published in the *2020 Proceedings* "There's No "I" in Mahatma" is essentially the 20-page version of what will be my 200-page PhD dissertation. Of course, there are changes, but there are sections throughout the dissertation where I used the sentence or groups of sentences. So far, I have addressed this in the introduction of the work as "Portions of this introduction were directly taken from my March 2020 publication, "There is no 'I' in Mahatma: Mira Behn and Indian Independence," in *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association 2020*." Another example being something like "I initially made this statement in....."
I want to make sure that you as an organization are ok with this. If there is a way that you like it to be referenced/footnoted, please let me know.
Thank you for your time,

Tamala Malerk
PhD Candidate
University of South Florida

Copyright Permissions

South Carolina Historical Association <scha.history@gmail.com>
Mon 2/8/2021 3:13 PM
To: Malerk, Tamala

Dear Tamala,
I do not believe that this will be a problem on our end. You may want to check with your advisor and school to make sure they are OK with it. I do not believe that edition has gone to press yet. You could list it as a forthcoming chapter in the style of reference you have chosen. Let me check with the editors to see if a page number range has been assigned yet.
Sincerely,
Melanie

...

Elizabeth A. Georgian, President
Melanie Maddox, Vice President
South Carolina Historical Association
<https://www.scha1931.org/>

Copyright Permissions



South Carolina Historical Association <scha.history@gmail.com>



Mon 2/8/2021 3:56 PM
To: Malerk, Tamala

Tamala,

You should be fine. Use your Proceedings page numbers and reference for Pages 67-87. Make sure to verify with your professor and school about their policy on published work.

Sincerely,

Melanie

...

Elizabeth A. Georgian, President
Melanie Maddox, Vice President
South Carolina Historical Association
<https://www.scha1931.org/>