

THE NEHRU HOUSEHOLD is the only one (to my knowledge) in which three generations of women participated in national political life during the Independence struggle. Anand Bhawan (the Nehru home in Allahabad) became the central point for all nationalist activities, not only in Allahabad, but for the whole of Uttar Pradesh.

The Nehrus were Saraswat Brahmins and hailed originally from Kashmir. Besides being an elite household, the Nehrus were “different because the family was more progressive than others and our way of living was foreign oriented.” (Pandit, 1979: 32), Motilal Nehru was drawn immensely towards the British way of living. As Vijaylakshmi remarks: “He mostly wore European clothes outside the home, ... entertained lavishly and gracefully. The guests were carefully chosen, the dining table set with Sevres, crystal and silver...” (Pandit, 1979: 36, 37). Motilal’s second daughter, commenting on their lifestyle, said: “Six days a week we ate in western style, wearing our English clothes and sitting in Victorian chairs... On the seventh day, or on Hindu festivals, we ate in the Hindu manner.” (Hutheesingh, 1967:7).

Swaruprani Thussu, Motilal’s second wife, also came from a Kashmiri Brahmin family, but unlike her husband or daughters, “There had been no western influence in her upbringing... She understood but spoke no English, yet this did not prevent her from doing her duties as a hostess at western style parties.” (Pandit, 1979: 38). Her orthodox upbringing also influenced her ideas towards the upbringing of the second generation, that is, her daughters. Krishna Nehru writes, “The person who frustrated Miss Hooper most in her attempt to make me an English lady was my mother, who wanted to

The Nehru Women

Conflicts and Stresses During the Freedom Movement

Suruchi Thapar

make a good Hindu out of me [and who] insisted on taking me to the temple.” (Hutheesingh, 1967: 26).

Swaruprani was from the first generation of women, but also the only one from her generation in that particular household to have participated in the nationalist movement. Age, education, nature of the immediate influence (be it from father, brother or uncle) and social constraints of the time affected the

level of awareness and involvement in political work of individual women. Women did not take to nationalist activities ‘naturally’. They were ridden with conflicts and ambiguities which had to be resolved. For some, like Vijaylakshmi Pandit, domestic life was endangered, while for women like Swaruprani, politics was a totally new activity. Dilemmas had to be resolved both in the home and ‘in the streets’.

Swaruprani initially found it

difficult to fully comprehend the changing reality. As her daughter writes: “Mother’s horizon did not extend beyond the family. Her philosophy of life was simple and her mind uncluttered by doubts. She accepted the background and traditions that she had inherited and was content to function unquestioningly within that framework.” (Pandit, 1979: 39). Thus it came as no surprise when Swaruprani objected to both her husband and her son’s nationalist activities. She was a woman for whom family life was very important.



Nehru’s mother, Swaruprani

Vijaylakshmi writes: "This was a time of great domestic strain, and constant adjustments and compromises were called for. New thinking was necessary for new designs that would affect the national destiny that now began to take shape. Mother felt acutely miserable over all that was happening. The person she loved most, her son, was deeply disturbed and unhappy. He was obviously on the verge of some action that she would have appreciated in a mythological figure but not in one on whom her hopes of happiness on earth and her place in heaven depended. Then there was the serious situation developing between her husband and her son. What was going to happen? How could she take sides or understand this new 'mahatma' whose business, if any thing, should have been to look after people's morals instead of meddling in family matters? It was a ridiculous idea to fight a powerful government by getting oneself locked up in jail. It was wrong to abandon one's family." (Pandit, 1967: 69).

On December 6, 1921 Jawahar and Motilal were arrested due to their involvement in non-cooperation. This was the first time that they were being put behind prison bars. Writing about the stress and uncertainty experienced by individual members of the Nehru family, KrishnaNehru states: "We did not know what hardships were in store for them. It was hardest of all for my mother to whom the past few months of constant change had been a sort of nightmare she had not quite fathomed. But she was a brave wife and a still more brave mother. On no account would she allow the others to see how wretched she felt at that moment." (Hutheesingh, 1944:25).

Elsewhere, KrishnaNehru writes: "The police swooped down on us at any hour of the day or night—to make



Motila Nehru

an arrest or to cart away costly rugs or furniture in payment of small fines... From moment to moment we lived a confused and unpredictable life, never knowing what might happen next." (Hutheesingh, 1969: 34).

I have described the tensions and uncertainties in the Nehru household during the early years of the nationalist movement because I think they were crucial in shaping the consciousness of the women members, women who had been dependent on their menfolk (Jawahar and Motilal) not only emotionally but for physical comforts too. Krishna Nehru writes: "Father had a strong, over-powering personality and a kingliness which made him stand apart... To us children and many others dependent upon him, he was a tower of strength. And I am afraid we took full advantage of the fact." (Hutheesingh, 1944: 70). And when Motilal Nehru died (the oldest male member), dependency was shifted on to Jawahar. There were many family matters that had to be looked after by Jawahar, but had to be kept pending due to his absence. At that time all of us needed his presence badly,

especially mother, who was completely broken. On Jawahar's shoulders fell the entire burden of our little family... soon he took his father's place and we started to depend on him more and more for every little thing. We still do so..." (Hutheesingh, 1944: 74).

It was Swaruprani who had a difficult time both in adjusting to the changing family situation and the various demands of the nationalist movement which were threatening her traditional orthodoxy and certain of her fixed notions about Hindu womanhood.

In the 1920s, the charkha and khadi were seen as the cultural symbols of nationalism and swaraj. Gandhi, who encouraged spinning and weaving khadi, saw it not only as a means of self-reliance but also as a means of promoting the indigenous industries. He asked the nation to forsake foreign cloth and take to handspun cloth. Swaruprani was not appreciative about burning foreign cloth; nor was her elder daughter, Vijaylakshmi Pandit. The rest of the family was supportive about the boycott. Vijaylakshmi Pandit remarks: "However, in this, as in most other things, our family took the lead, with only mother protesting and I silently a betting her." (Pandit, 1979: 83).

Swaruprani's resentment towards khadi was apparent at her daughter, Vijaylakshmi's wedding. Kashmiri brides usually wear pink cotton saris on their wedding, along with jewellery (given to them by their parents). This was conveyed to Gandhiji, and he came a letter saying he could not approve of this at all. I must wear toad and fee was no question of jewels being worn." (Pandit, 1979:72).

Vijaylakshmi describes her mother's reaction: "Mother could not have been more angry. She had, so far, not accepted Gandhiji as a friend,

could not understand Ms politics and certainly did not think he had the right to advise the family on personal matters.” (Pandit, 1979: 72). Swaruprani remarked: “If she must be dressed like a villager’s child, there will be no wedding.” (Andrews, 1967: 68). A compromise was reached between Motilal and Swaruprani that the khadi would be dyed shell pink! Similar anxiety was expressed at Krishna’s wedding by her mother. On Krishna’s wedding, Sarojini Naidu sent a letter to her in which one of the things that was mentioned was that “I see that Swamp and Kamala are here to get together a hurried trousseau for you, and are complaining of the limited choice that *shudh* khadi offers for bridal raiment.” (Hutheesingh, 1944).

Swaruprani’s consciousness, which had also to resolve the social constraints of her generation, could not foresee younger women (daughter and daughters-in-law) giving up their jewellery and other finery that they were accustomed to. In 1932, Kamala Nehru visited Ramakrishna Math at Belur to meet Swami Abhayananda and also Jawahar, who was in Alipore jail. Swami Abhayananda re-members one occasion when the mother-in-law expressed her anxiety at her daughter-in-law leading an ascetic life. “She ate very little, was absolutely indifferent to dress, and had given up wearing jewellery totally,” said Swaruprani. “Almost in tears, Swaruprani implored the swami to request Kamala to wear at least a necklace and a pair of bangles. After all, she was in the prime of life, and as befitted a Hindu wife, she should keep up her position by dressing suitably. According to Hindu custom, this was

necessary for the well being of Kamala’s husband.” (Kalhan, 1973: 89).

In the capacity of a mother-in-law, she had certain fixed ideas — a close reflection of her orthodox upbringing and the prevailing social ideology. For example, Swaruprani’s idea of having only grandsons. Krishna Nehru narrates an episode: “After what seemed an age to me, the doctors came out. The Scottish doctor who delivered Kamala announced to my brother: ‘It’s a bonny lassie, sir’. My mother blurted out: ‘Oh! But it should have been a boy’. She had wanted a son for her only son, and the women folk around her pulled long faces in sympathy. Father, irritated, chided her: ‘Have we made any difference between our son and daughters in their upbringing? Do you not love them equally?’” (Hutheesingh, 1969: 18).

What then finally made Swaruprani come out on the streets

and participate requires more research. Swaruprani was involved in a number of activities and carried on with them even after the death of her husband. The fact that her husband was dead and by January 1932, the main leaders, Jawahar, Gandhiji and Vallabhbhai, were arrested, might have given sufficient cause to Swaruprani to participate and keep the movement going. Krishna Nehru writes: “Many of us who had not taken a very active part in the previous movements, now threw ourselves with all the strength and enthusiasm at our command into the struggle. My mother, aged and delicate though she was, did not lag behind. She went about addressing meetings both in the towns and adjoining villages. She was a constant source of surprise to us. All her life she had been more or less an invalid, but suddenly she seemed to have gained strength and great determination from some higher sources.” (Hutheesingh, 1944: 77).

Her activities ranged from breaking the salt laws to appeals to other women to participate. Presiding over a meeting in Allahabad, she said: “If you are true to the motherland, then you should start manufacturing salt in every home.” (*The Leader*, April 20, 1930; p. 10). When she was not occupied with her activities, she was visiting her children in the jail, “parted by grim prison walls from those she loved best.” (Hutheesingh, 1944: 126). As a mother, she also wanted to experience the jail conditions. Swami Abhayananda mentions one incident: “It was an unusually hot day when I went to call on the two ladies. To my great surprise I found that the ceiling fan in their room was not working and Swaruprani looked as if she was boiling in the heat.



Vijayalakshmi Pandit

Kamala quietly told me the reason. They had visited Jawahar's cell in the jail on the previous day. It was not provided with a fan and he was feeling the heat intensely.. The mother's heart was touched, and, henceforth, she refused to enjoy the comfort of an electric fan while her son rotted in the hot prison cell." (Kalhan, 1973:91). A feeling of guilt after her husband's death and her seeing Jawahar as the only surviving link between her husband and her could also explain Swaruprani's sudden activities in the nationalist movement. Swaruprani's participation can possibly be seen as involving more a factor of political and emotional support to her family than a keenness towards political life. What Krishna Nehru has to say about her mother could perhaps explain more. "The years that followed were more difficult



Kamala Nehru

for her. Yet we never heard one word of complaint or regret at the change that had taken place so late in her life, breaking its ordered routine of security and peace into uncertainty and hardships. After father's death, she was completely broken. Being very orthodox at heart, she believed that she must have committed some terrible sin in a previous birth to have her husband taken away from her in this life. Besides, she had always been the weak and ailing one and had always imagined that she would die first, as was the right and proper thing for a Hindu wife to do... Father had never known aday's illness. It was jail life with all its privations that brought him to a premature end... mother continued to exist but only for her children, especially Jawahar." (Hutheesingh, 1944: 127).

The second generation of Kamala (born 1899), Vijaylakshmi (born 1900), Krishna (1907), Uma (1884) and

Rameshwari were active participants in the nationalist movement. Rameshwari Nehru; wife of Brijlal Nehru, and cousin of Krishna Nehru, was more inclined towards social re-form work. She was the editor of a Hindi magazine from Allahabad, *Stree Darpan*, and in 1909, she started the Prayag Mahila Samiti. She advocated women's rights and linked women's freedom with national freedom. "Swaraj cannot be attained by people whose other halves are stricken by paralysis. The process of curing that paralysis, of shaking the sleepy partner out of her inertia, by infusing life into her, cannot but bring strength to the whole nation. The battle of swaraj has to be fought by men and women alike. The women of India, who are suffering from innumerable disabilities and are the victims of bad customs and unjust laws, are incapable of performing the duty of fighting for swaraj in any large numbers." (Nehru, 1950:12)

For Rameshwari Nehru, "home" was important not only "in the life of an individual but also in the life of a nation." She argued that "a reconciliation has to be brought about between the family and the outside world and both have to be saved and conserved as both are equally needed by the individual." "I would make a few suggestions below which, if carried out faithfully, would enable every young housewife to serve the country effectively without interfering with her household duties." "A determination should be made (1) to make exclusive use of Swadeshi with preference to khadi. (2) to spin the charkha regularly for half-an-hour' a day." (Nehru, 1950: 60-70).

It can be argued that Rameshwari Nehru adjusted well to the political demands of the period.

As has been said for her: "She started her earthly career with the birth of the Indian National Congress" and after marriage, "found her public career linked up with that of the family of Pandit Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru." (Nehru, 1950: 3). For women activists like Kamala and Vijaylakshmi, the nationalist period was trying. The needs and demands of their personal lives, their ambiguities and conflicts were brought to the forefront and had to be resolved. Kamala Nehru belonged to a traditional orthodox Hindu home. Purdah was observed when the family was on a visit to another place. "She was given firm instructions to stay indoors like the rest of the women folk of the family." (Kalhan, 1973:3). However, "She found a way out. Donning her brother's clothes, her long hair tucked inside a small turban, she would sneak out to play with them." (Ibid). True to her childhood nature, Kamala's 'way out' from the suffocating joint family set

up after her marriage, was 'politics.' But before that she had to first adjust to the westernised lifestyle that she was wed-ded to. Jawaharlal remarked: "Except for a little schooling, she had no formal education; her mind had not gone through the educational process. She came to us an unsophisticated girl..." (Nehru, 1946: 40). Motilal Nehru himself took on the task of educating Kamala. "Besides, he wanted her to acquire some of the accomplishments necessary for one who was to become a member of a house well known for its lavish hospitality and the wife of a... well educated... young man." (Kalhan, 1973:8).

"The English governess of the Nehru sisters was given an additional charge, that of grooming Kamala." (Kalhan, 1973: 8). On one occasion, Motilal, in one of his attempts to "educate" Kamala, wrote to Jawaharlal: "As a necessary part of the treatment, I have cancelled the order about writing short de-scriptive essays or letters. Her headache was chiefly, if not en-tirely, due to the constant nag-ging to which I subjected her by insisting on her writing something." (Kalhan, 1917: 127).

The dividing line for adjust-ments had yet to be drawn. Adjustments were required with two contemporaries, Vijaylakshmi and Krishna, sisters of Jawaharlal Nehru. The differences with the latter were mainly over their En-glish education and westernised living. KrishnaNehru writes: "At first Kamala was completely confused and uncomfortable in a place so different from her home. The big dinners with crystal and china on the long table and rows of wine glasses

... at everyone's place, the strange food, and most of all perhaps, the quick loud voices of our many British guests, made her feel lost and lonely."

(Hutheesingh, 1967: 9). "My sister, Nan, who was almost exactly her age, felt the usual complicated sister-in-law feelings for her." (Ibid).

Jawaharlal also remarked: "We were attracted to each other and got on well enough, but our backgrounds were different and there was a want of ad-justment." Ironically, Jawahar's clear cut disposition changed to ambiguity, later on, after Kamala's death, when he expressed: "What was Kamala? Did I know her? Understand her real self? Did she know or understand me? For I too was an abnormal person with mystery and unplumbed depths within me, which I could not myself fathom. I had been, and was, a most unsatisfactory person tp marry." (Nehru, 1946: 44). Coupled with the maladjustments of married life was the fact that Kamala was

financially dependent on her in-laws. Jawahar himself, except for the small sum that he received as dividend from shares, was totally dependent on his father. Financial insecurity and long separations from her hus-band, it can be argued, worked on Kamala's mind and made her more determined to make her life more meaningful and purposeful. Jawaharlal makes the picture more clear when he says: "Neither of us could live a hum-drum domestic life, accepting things as they were. There could either be complete understanding, a perfect union of minds, or difficulties." (Nehru, 1946: 44).

However, Kamala Nehru, in due course, was to find it much easier to adapt to the changing nationalist de-mands. Used to a simple lifestyle, she had no difficulty in forsaking jewellery and taking to khadi (as opposed to her sisters-in-law). Ironically, the change of lifestyle of the Nehru household, from extravagance to simplicity, brought about more understanding between Kamala and Jawaharlal Nehru. "The change in their mode of life from one of luxury to the simple and austere, was to Kamala's liking. The veneer of westernisation chipped off the Nehru family and *thalis* and Indian food took the place of cut glass and flowered china. The change in their way of living also brought Kamala and Jawahar closer together. Unfortunately, it also brought with it long spells of separation because of Jawahar's frequent terms of im-prisonment." (Kalhan, 1973: 19). Another factor that facilitated Kamala's adjustment with the changing political scenario was her strong sense of individuality and independence. About his wife, Jawahar remarks:



Krishna Nehru Hutheesingh

“With her inordinate pride and sensi-tiveness she did not want to come to me to ask for help, although I could have given her that help more than anyone else. She wanted to play her own part in the national struggle and not be merely a hanger on and a shadow of her husband.” (Nehru, 1946: 41). Krishna Nehru adds: “Living as she did, over-shadowed by strong personalities like her husband’s and father-in-law’s, she still made a place for herself in politics. She was naturally overshadowed by Jawahar to some extent, but not entirely so, for she had a personality of her own.” (Hutheesingh, 1944: 117).

Thus, there were two sides to the picture. On the one hand, Kamala, because of her traditional background, felt like a misfit, but on the other hand, the new demands of the political movement (like simplicity) made her feel more at ease with herself. That still leaves an important question un-answered. What factors precipitated Kamala’s involvement with politics? An opinion could be formed from the letter that Kamala sent to Jawahar: “Jawahar! I have your letter. I was waiting for it. The days of your release are nearing. But I have little hope of your remaining free. If perchance you are set free, you will be re-arrested. I do not worry about this because I am prepared for all eventualities. There are many things I want to talk to you about but I do not always get an oppor-tunity to do so and things remain un-said in my heart. The sort of things happening here require of you in fair-ness to be acquainted with both sides of the picture. At the moment you know only what Ranjit and Swarup tell you. It is, therefore, becoming difficult for me to work here.

“I wish each day that somehow I and Uma *Bhabi* (Uma Nehru) should be arrested. That would be a good

thing. Those who think that we are afraid of going to jail are in fact themselves impeding work.

“All summer have they been sitting comfortably indoors, behind *khas chiks* (sun blinds), under the cool breeze of a fan. They have not stirred out in the heat to work. On the other hand, we are being blamed for making up stories. I do not wish to write all this because I am learning self-sacrifice. But I am unhappy that some people talk irresponsibly and they are be-lieved. I do wish to be arrested and sent to jail before you are released, but I have scant hope of this happening. My dedication, with a little luck, I hope to be rewarded with imprison-ment.” (Kalhan, 1973: 27).

Two things come out clearly from this letter. Firstly, she was a keen supporter of Jawahar’s activities. Kamala’s daughter, Indira, later was to testify to this fact. Indira said: “She [Kamala] was a very intense person, and whenever she took up anything, she felt very strongly about it. Firstly, when my father came into the political scene, there was a certain amount of opposition from the family. They did not want him to go to that extent, to submerge himself, and I think that was the time when my mother’s influence counted and she supported him fully.” (Interview with Indira Gandhi on No-venber 29, 1972: Kalhan, 1973; 134).

Secondly, it is quite apparent that Kamala wanted to get away from the critical comments and differences with the joint family. And the only way out was through politics which, besides keeping her involved, would also as-sist her in a closer interaction with Jawahar because, all said and done, she remained a strong traditionalist and a devoted wife to Jawahar throughout: “*Mein apnepatike charan chihon par chalte hue apaar prasannta ka anubhav kar*

rahi hoon.” (*Swatantrata Sangram ki Sainik*).

Since lack of formal education of Kamala had become an issue and point of difference with Vijaylakshmi and Krishna, this directed Kamala’s con-sciousness towards persuading other women to educate themselves. In a letter she sent from London, she stated: “We have degraded ourselves beyond limits. Women are even less enlightened than men due to lack of educa-tion. When I think of the plight of my sisters, my heart bleeds for they are indifferent to the question of their own rights. Day by day I am getting more and more determined that on my return home, I shall take my sisters along with me, I shall urge them to place their trust in God and fight for their own freedom, educate their daughters so that they are not in trouble like us.” (Kalhan, 1973: 34).

Kamala served as president of the Allahabad district Congress and moved about the city to prepare people for the Civil Disobedience movement. Jawaharlal was to comment later: “In this upheaval, Kamala had played a brave and notable part and on her inexperienced shoulders fell the task of organising our work in the city of Allahabad when every known worker was in prison.” (Nehru, 1946:42).

Kamala was actively involved in various nationalist activities. She helped in the breaking of the salt law at Handia, a tehsil about 20 miles east of Allahabad. (*The Leader, April 9, 1930*, p. 11). A newspaper report added: “Over 10,000 people collected to witness the inauguration of the satyagraha campaign at Allahabad. Today’s volunteers were Mrs Jawaharlal Nehru, Miss Krishna Nehru, Mrs Motilal Nehru and Babu Purushottam Das Tandon. While in preparation, Mrs K. Nehru picked up fuel, put it into the furnace and lighted

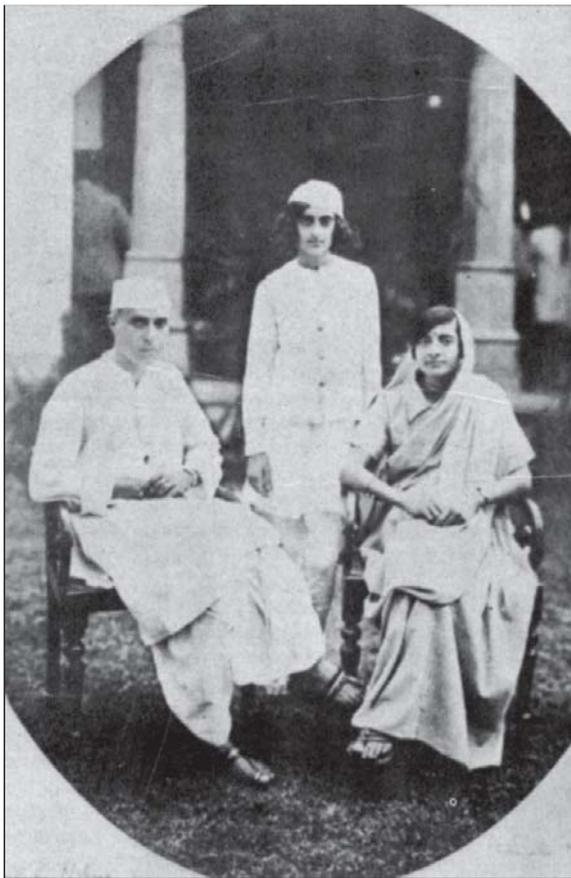
a fire.” (*The Leader*, 1930: April 12, p. 10).

She also picketed foreign cloth shops and liquor shops. It was said: “48 volunteers were there including 15 from the first batch of volunteers. They kept walking in front of the cloth shops, looking for people buying. Mrs Kamala Nehru caught sight of a Muslim gentleman purchasing foreign cloth. He was so impressed with her reasons that there and then he set fire to the cloth.” (*The Leader*, May 1, 1930, p.11).

For Kamala Nehru, the transition from simple traditional living to a ‘westernised’ joint family set up caused her anxiety and stress, so much so that politics was seen by her as a way out of this. However, as explained earlier, she was well equipped with the political prerequisites of the early nationalist period, for example, nationalist stress on

austere living, stress on vernacular as opposed to English education, and boycott of everything foreign.

For the Nehru household, particularly Vijayalakshmi and Krishna, it was a trying period. Not only did they have to give up their ‘westernised’ life and resort to simpler things; the nationalist movement and its needs and demands completely transformed their lives. The daughters who, till now, were used to an English education and an English governess, had to give that up. As Krishna Nehru writes: “One of the items of the movement was the boycott of British schools. I had been so absorbed with my studies and my own little world that I had hardly noticed the incoming storm or the changes that were taking place around me in my own home. So it came as rather a blow when father



Jawaharlal, Kamala and Indira

sent for me one day and having explained the situation, told me that I must leave school. The idea of giving it up made me unhappy for a while, though I realised that was the only right thing to do.” (Hutheesingh, 1944: 21).

Their day to day existence also changed from one of splendour to a simple one. “The first thing father did was to sell his horses and carriages. Then we had to dismiss quite a few of the army of servants we had and curtail expenses in every direction. Father sold most of mother’s jewels with her consent and *bhai* sold Kamala’s.” (Hutheesingh, 1967: 48). “From that time forth, we all wore khadi...” (Hutheesingh, 1967:48).

The changes must have been the most trying for the head of the family, Motilal Nehru, who not only had to

give up his practice but had to discourage his British clients from visiting Anand Bhawan. Krishna Nehru narrates: “By chance I happened to be in a room when the final confrontation between Gandhiji and my father took place. In a reasonable tone, my father said: ‘You have taken my son but I have a great law practice in the British courts. If you will permit me to continue it, I will pour great sums of the money I make into your movement. Your cause will profit far more than if I give it up to follow you’. ‘No’, Gandhiji said. ‘No. I don’t want money. I want you — and every member of your family’.” (Hutheesingh, 1967:34). The small problems, minor altercations and conflicts that arose, had more of an economic basis to it. The confusion and dilemmas were yet to arise when the question of

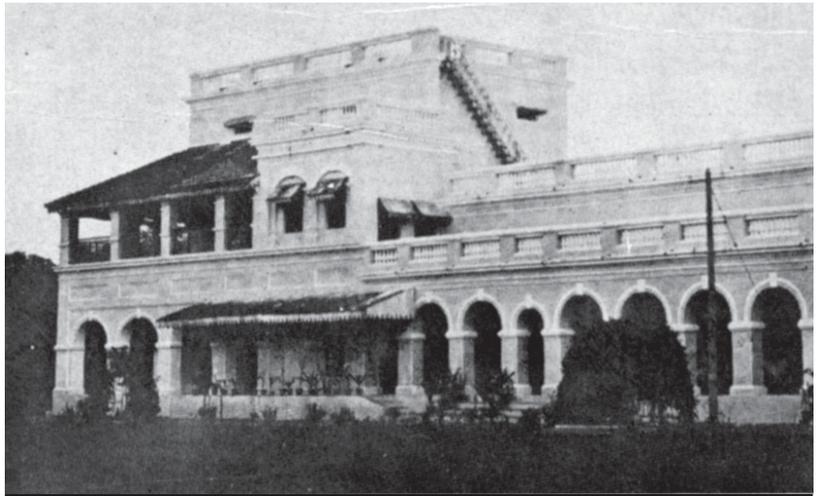
understanding the Gandhian movement arose. Who was Gandhi? What did he want? And what was ‘our’ contribution? Of the two sisters, it seems that Krishna faced more dilemmas coupled with insecurities than Vijayalakshmi. The only reason I can think of that might explain this is that Krishna was the youngest in the family and was isolated once her father and brother joined politics and Vijayalakshmi got married in 1921.

Krishna writes about her first reaction to Gandhi: “Is this the man who is changing all our lives?” “Is this insignificant person going to make everybody go to prison and overthrow the British?” “One thing I understood even at that age. To follow Gandhi’s idealistic way meant giving up all the pleasant things of life.” (Hutheesingh, 1967:34). From

Krishna's reactions it seems that her primary motivation for joining the nationalist movement was to experience something 'new', something to change the monotony of day to day existence. "Something new happened everyday to change my once dull and monotonous life of strict routine into an ever changing and exciting day, never knowing what was going to happen next." Otherwise, she was finding it very difficult, at every step, to change in accordance with the new demands. "I did not enjoy the changes satyagraha made in my life, though I accepted them with growing ardor." (Hutheesingh, 1967: 49). "At first I resented having to wear the coarse, handspun, handwoven khadi, but after a while it seemed the common sense thing to do. Somehow, the new mode of life, with its austerities, cast a spell on us." (Hutheesingh, 1969:40).

Though Krishna Nehru participated in the movement, she did not have very strong political convictions. Coupled with experiencing something 'new', Krishna could not resist the general enthusiasm generated by the resistance. The final straw was the death of Motilal, which pushed Kamala into the movement. "My enthusiasm for satyagraha was but a pale reflection of the tide of emotion that was sweeping India." (Hutheesingh, 1967:50). "After father's death I threw myself into the movement recklessly. Something vital had gone and for the time being nothing seemed to matter." (Hutheesingh, 1963: 12).

Krishna Nehru, along with other Nehru women, participated in boycotts, foreign cloth bonfires and picketing. "I was secretary of the Youth League and had the honour of being the first to be arrested on the distaff side of our family." (Hutheesingh, 1969: 55).



Anand Bhawan, the Nehrus' famous house, which has been given to the nation and is now called Swaraj Bhawan

The situation was more complicated for Vijaylakshmi Pandit, who had to resolve not only her individual dilemmas but had also to come around to the viewpoint of her husband, Ranjit. Vijaylakshmi's initial confrontation with Gandhi was on the issue of 'chastity'. She describes her experience with Gandhi when, after marriage, they went to take his blessing. Talking about Gandhi, she says: "Then he looked very grave and began to talk of our duty to the country at this time — the strength required could only come from purity of the highest order. Chastity in married life was difficult, he knew, but so was the great struggle for freedom upon which we had entered and which demanded every sacrifice. Suddenly, the Nehru spirit asserted itself. I looked at Bapu and said haltingly: 'Why did you give your permission to our marriage if you thought it was wrong for us to live together as husband and wife'? There was no response." (Pandit, 1979: 73).

The emerging problem now was how to respond to the call of Gandhi to participate. Vijaylakshmi writes: "The problem was whether Ranjit should respond to Gandhiji's call and

suspend his practice. Practice at the bar was not easy to suspend and would also mean loss of prestige. The conflict continued for some weeks but, finally, the call of Gandhiji could not be denied." (Pandit, 1979: 79).

Vijaylakshmi herself initially did not understand the significance and symbolism of bonfires and boycotts. "Great bonfires of British cloth had taken place in every town in India. This was a great shock to me. I did not understand the symbolism, and it seemed wicked that mountains of clothing should be publicly burned when all around one there was nakedness."

The uncertainty of life, traumas of palling while serving sentences of life imprisonment, took a toll. Though Vijaylakshmi participated in the nationalist movement and also later served as ambassador to the United States, she could not reconcile to the upheavals that the nationalist movement brought in her personal life. Even before her husband died, Vijaylakshmi wrote of him: "Ranjit is not meant for the rough and tumble of Indian politics. With his wealth and learning and fastidious scholarship, his love of art and all of those finer

aspects of life ... prison life is breaking him down physically. It is a slow daily sacrifice which can be so much more deadly than some big heroic gesture made in the moment of emotional upheaval.” (Hutheesingh, 1967: 169).

Of the third generation, one knows the least, but the picture that comes through is one of alarming clarity and perception. The third generation did not experience any major upheavals in their day to day existence as did the other two. Primarily, this was because they were born into politics, heard and thought of politics at early stages of their lives. Krishna Hutheesingh had two sons, Ajit and Harsha, whose involvement in politics has not come into the limelight. Vijaylakshmi Pandit had three daughters: Chandralekha (Chand), Rita and Nayantara (Tara). Of the three, Lekha was quite active in the nationalist movement initially, but there is no evidence of her political activities (like her mother’s) later on. Amongst all the cousins, Indira, daughter of KamalaNehru, maintained a steady momentum and inclination towards politics. It has been said for Indu: “From the time she was three or four, she heard nothing but talk of politics. Instead of playing childish games, she would line up servants and make political speeches to them.” (Hutheesingh, 1967: 54). “The atmosphere of politics that pervaded our home put unusual ideas into Indira’s head. She put Congress flags of paper into the hands of dolls and then lectured the assemblage... Calling upon her satyagrahis to march and keep the Congress flag flying, she asked them not to fear the might of the government...” (Hutheesingh, 1969). When she was eight years old, she is supposed to have said: “I am going to lead my people to freedom just as Joan of Arc.” (ibid: 55).

In the nationalist movement, the third generation (when they were

eight-thirteen years old) formed the ‘vanar sena’ (monkey brigade) and took out processions. It is said that on the arrest of Purushottam Das Tandon, “Little children under the leadership of Miss Indu Nehru and Miss Chand Pandit took out a procession.” (*The Leader*, 1930, June 27, p.6).

From this brief mention of the third generation, attention can be focused on two points. Firstly, from the third generation, Indira deserves special attention, as one who continued working for the nation and, secondly, within the third generation, political inclinations and commitments varied from individual to individual — child to child.

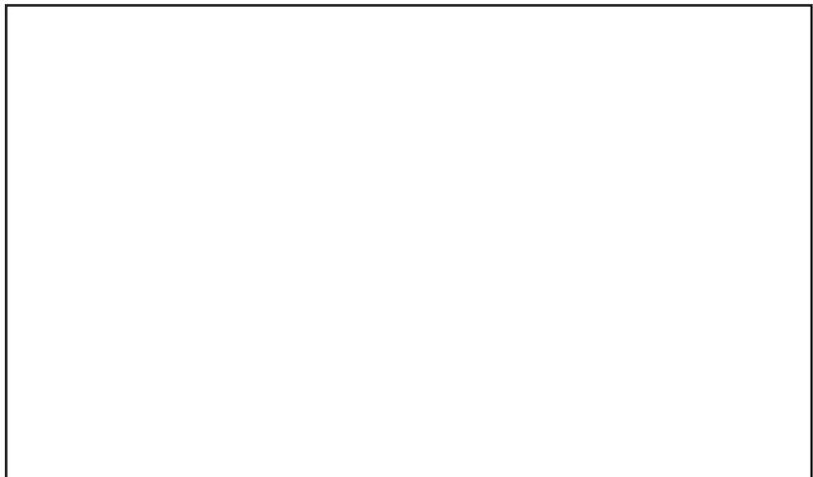
Conclusion

The nationalist movement period was very stressful for the Nehru household. Unlike the suggestions in historical tracts, the Nehru women did not take to nationalist activities ‘natu-rally’. It was a period of great transition and upheaval in their personal lives. While, for women like Krishna and Vijaylakshmi, it was an adjustment from a ‘westernised’ lifestyle to an ‘austere’ way of life, for women like Kamala politics was a way out from the ‘westernised’ joint family to participation in activities with which she was more comfortable, and that also gave her a way to be more close to her husband, Jawahar.

Thus, before any concrete statements are made about women’s nationalist activities, one should analyse the process through which they passed, whether it was resolving personal conflicts or understanding what the nationalist movement stood for.

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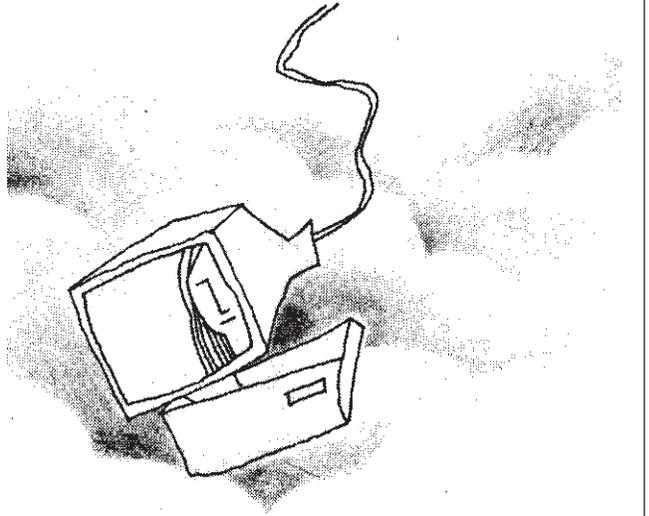
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Rape After

*One detail sticks in my mind
from the New York Times article
titled "Rape After Rape After Rape"
A young woman has been interned
along with hundreds of other
women, children, and old men
in a Croatian town. One day it is her turn
in the crowded room where they all stay
to be pulled to the middle by Serbian soldiers
and raped, while the others look on.
She casts a glance at her baby
who sits nearby on the floor during the rape
and cries loudly.*

*When the rape is over, a soldier
goes to the child, cuts off its head,
and hands it to the mother.
I am thinking about
the computer I plan to apply for
with funds newly made available
by the university, despite the present
budget crunch, it will have a built-in
hard disk, and if they let me keep the old one,
I can have a system at home too.
Will the funds allow for
a new printer? I'm framing the request
in my mind: my research, how sad it is
that my computer is so small and old*



*compared to my colleagues'.
I'm picturing
the application form, black instructions,
white spaces, boxes,
I'm imagining
the new, odourless keyboard
I want to get my hands on, the clean plastic
case,
the everyday, fabulous power
of circuitry I don't need to understand
to use, the swish and hum of my printer,
the almost friendly ping of the bell
when the box goes on.
Threading through these images
like flickers of a poor film
or almost unremembered dream
are others—
dirty white wooden floorboards,
metal beds, shadowy female figures, someone
with a large chest and unkempt uniform,
a baby's head on ivory-white
computer keys.*

Linda Hess

