



## Women and the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905–1911): A Historical Study of Political Participation and Nationalist Mobilisation

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**Abstract:** *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905–1911) was an important phase of the Indian nationalist movement that emerged in response to the Partition of Bengal in 1905. Although the movement has often been discussed through the activities of political leaders, students, revolutionary organisations, and economic boycotts, women also played an important role in its development present historical study examines the nature and forms of women's participation in the movement and explores how their involvement contributed to the spread of nationalist ideas, historical scholarship shows that women's participation in nationalism needs to be understood beyond formal political activities, as the boundaries between domestic, social and political spaces were often closely connected adopts a historical research method and draws upon both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include contemporary newspapers, journals, government records, speeches, memoirs, autobiographical accounts, and organisational documents, while secondary sources include books, scholarly articles, and historical studies; special attention is given to women's involvement in the boycott of foreign goods, promotion of Swadeshi products, support for indigenous industries, nationalist meetings, cultural activities, social networks, and other forms of political mobilisation, Sumit Sarkar's detailed study places the Swadeshi Movement within the political and social developments surrounding the Partition of Bengal and the growth of new forms of nationalist mobilisation argues that the Swadeshi Movement created important opportunities for women to participate in nationalist activities and gradually enter wider public life participation was not uniform and was shaped by social background, education, family circumstances and existing gender expectations seeks to demonstrate that women were not simply passive supporters of nationalism but active contributors to nationalist mobilisation, while their participation also began to challenge the strict separation between domestic and public roles.*

**Keywords:** *Swadeshi Movement, Bengal, Political Participation, Nationalist Mobilisation, Partition of Bengal.*

**Introduction:** The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905–1911) was an important phase in the growth of Indian nationalism developed mainly as a response to the Partition of Bengal in 1905, announced by Lord Curzon; partition created strong opposition among many sections of Bengali society and encouraged the use of boycotts, Swadeshi goods and other forms of resistance was not only an economic campaign against foreign products but also became a wider political and social movement that encouraged people to support indigenous production and oppose colonial rule; women's participation forms an important part of this history, women's political activities were generally restricted by prevailing social expectations and their responsibilities within the household. The Swadeshi Movement created new opportunities for women to

connect their everyday activities with nationalist politics. Bengali women participated by using and promoting indigenous products, rejecting foreign goods, supporting Swadeshi industries, attending meetings and encouraging nationalist ideas within their families and communities, research on women's participation in the anti-partition movement shows that some women also took part in public meetings, picketing and the promotion of Swadeshi ideas through contemporary periodicals. Women's involvement was therefore important not only because of the activities they performed but also because it gradually expanded their presence in public life; Swadeshi movement created a connection between the domestic sphere and nationalist politics. Activities traditionally associated with household life, such as choosing indigenous products and supporting hand-spun and locally produced goods, acquired political meaning; some women began to participate more directly in political and revolutionary activities; scholarship on women in the Indian nationalist movement shows that women's participation cannot be understood only through formal political organisations; their contribution also developed through family, social and community networks therefore seeks to examine the different forms of women's participation during this important period explore how women contributed to the Swadeshi and Boycott Movement and how their involvement helped spread nationalist consciousness also consider how this participation began to challenge the traditional boundary between women's domestic roles and public political life, making the Swadeshi period an important stage in the history of women's political awakening in Bengal.

**Need and Significance of the Study:** The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905–1911) occupies an important place in the history of Indian nationalism, Partition of Bengal in 1905 generated widespread anti-partition politics and encouraged boycott, Swadeshi activities and new forms of political mobilisation; Sumit Sarkar's detailed study demonstrates that Swadeshi Movement was not simply a short political protest but a significant phase in the development of nationalist politics and political culture in Bengal, there is a need to examine the movement from the perspective of women, whose contributions have often received less attention than those of prominent male leaders and revolutionary organisations is needed to understand how women participated in nationalist mobilisation; women's involvement included supporting the boycott of foreign goods, promoting indigenous products, encouraging Swadeshi practices within households and communities, and participating in wider nationalist activities. Such actions are important because they show how political nationalism entered everyday life focused specifically on women can therefore broaden the understanding of political participation beyond formal political organisations and public speeches, Thapar-Björkert's research similarly argues for understanding women's participation through both public and less formal forms of political activity is also significant because the Swadeshi Movement created an important connection between the domestic sphere and political life; activities traditionally associated with women's household responsibilities could acquire political meaning when linked with the use and promotion of indigenous goods provides an opportunity to examine whether participation in the movement contributed to changes in women's political consciousness and public identity; another important reason for the study is that women's experiences were not uniform participation was influenced by education, family background, social position, religion and access to political networks; examining these differences can prevent women's history from being presented as a single, homogeneous experience, study is historically significant because it focuses on 1905–1911, from the Partition of Bengal to the annulment of the partition can therefore trace an important early phase in the development of women's political participation in Bengal and help establish the foundation for understanding their later involvement in the wider freedom movement.

**Literature Review:** The literature on the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905–1911) has largely focused on the Partition of Bengal, nationalist politics, economic boycott, revolutionary activities, and the growth of indigenous industries; Sumit Sarkar's Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908 remains an important historical study because it examines the political and social developments that preceded and followed the Partition of Bengal, Sarkar shows that Swadeshi was more than a campaign against foreign goods; it became a wider form of political mobilisation involving boycott, national education, constructive activities, and revolutionary politics. His work provides an important historical background for examining women's

participation, although women are not the central focus of the study, Geraldine Forbes has made an important contribution to the study of women and Indian nationalism; in *Women in Modern India*, she examines women's changing social and political position and their participation in the nationalist movement, Forbes shows that women's involvement in nationalism developed within a society where domestic responsibilities and traditional expectations continued to shape their life is particularly relevant to the Swadeshi period because activities such as using indigenous goods, supporting household production and encouraging nationalist practices allowed women to connect their domestic responsibilities with the political struggle; Suruchi Thapar-Björkert's research provides a useful methodological and conceptual contribution by questioning the simple division between women's private/domestic roles and public/political participation, her study of women's participation in the nationalist movement demonstrates that political involvement could take many forms, including activities that were not always recognised as formal politics (Thapar-Björkert) perspective is valuable for studying the Swadeshi Movement because women's participation often occurred through family networks, household practices, social mobilisation and community activities.

Recent research by Mst. Rupali Khatun examines the participation of women of East Bengal in the anti-Partition movement, identifies women's use and promotion of indigenous products, spinning and weaving, participation in meetings, picketing and writing in contemporary periodicals as important forms of involvement, and argues that participation contributed to women's political awakening and self-development; is particularly relevant because it demonstrates that women were not simply recipients of nationalist ideas but could actively spread Swadeshi practices, other studies have also examined women's role in the Swadeshi and Boycott Movement; Rastogi, for example, discusses women's participation in boycott and nationalist activities, while Dutta's study places Bengali women's involvement in the Swadeshi Movement within the broader history of women's participation in India's freedom struggle, much of this literature discusses women's participation as one part of the larger nationalist narrative. So, the literature establishes that women contributed to the Swadeshi Movement through boycott, indigenous production, political mobilisation, social networks and emerging public activities, there remains scope for a focused historical study that examines women's participation specifically during 1905–1911, while connecting their political activities with nationalist mobilisation and changing gender roles; therefore seeks to bring together political, social and gender perspectives to provide a more detailed understanding of women's contribution to the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal.

## Objectives

1. To trace and examine the nature and different forms of women's political participation in the Swadeshi and Boycott Movement in Bengal from 1905 to 1911.
2. To analyse the contribution of women to nationalist mobilisation during the Swadeshi Movement and examine how their participation contributed to the development of political consciousness and their gradual entry into public life.

## Research Questions

1. What were the major forms and patterns of women's political participation in the Swadeshi and Boycott Movement in Bengal between 1905 and 1911?
2. How did women's participation contribute to nationalist mobilisation and the development of political consciousness and public involvement among women during the Swadeshi period?

**Discussion:** The present historical study of women and the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905–1911) indicates that women's participation was an important part of the anti-Partition movement, although it was often less visible in conventional accounts of nationalist politics, Partition of Bengal in 1905 created a

political situation in which the boycott of foreign goods and promotion of indigenous products became important methods of resistance; women were particularly significant because many decisions concerning clothing, household goods, food and domestic consumption were connected with their everyday responsibilities, recent historical research on women in the anti-Partition movement shows that Bengali women participated through the use of indigenous products, spinning, weaving, picketing, meetings and nationalist writing. One important finding emerging from the historical evidence is that women's political participation developed through both domestic and public activities; the home became a place where Swadeshi ideas could be practised, women encouraged family members to reject foreign goods and adopted indigenous products in their everyday lives, some women moved beyond the household and participated in meetings, picketing and political organisations suggests that the distinction between the private and public spheres was not always clear during the Swadeshi period of an interpretation is consistent with Thapar-Björkert's argument that women's nationalist participation needs to be understood through a broader definition of political activity.

The study also demonstrates the importance of women's cultural and intellectual participation. Women contributed through literature, journalism, patriotic songs, poetry and the promotion of Swadeshi ideas; contemporary women's periodicals and other publications helped create political awareness and encouraged women to participate; such as, Sarala Devi Chaudhurani became important sources of inspiration, while women writers and activists used cultural activities to connect nationalism with everyday social life; Khatun's study also identifies the importance of women's writing and periodicals in spreading Swadeshi ideas among Bengali women, another important aspect was the participation of women in economic nationalism boycott of foreign products was not simply an economic action; it became a political expression of opposition to British rule, women contributed by rejecting imported goods and supporting indigenous production, activities traditionally associated with women's household responsibilities acquired a wider political meaning; evidence therefore suggests that women helped transform nationalism from an activity concentrated in political organisations into something that could be practised in everyday life, discussion also shows that women's participation was not completely independent of existing patriarchal structures, Khatun notes that male nationalist leaders encouraged women to participate partly because women's domestic role made them important to the boycott programme, women's participation involved both agency and social limitations gained new opportunities for political expression, but their participation was still shaped by family expectations, social status and gender norms. The period 1905–1911 can consequently be understood as an important stage in the political awakening of Bengali women movement did not immediately create complete social equality, but it encouraged women to become more politically conscious, enter public spaces and develop confidence in collective action annulment of the Partition in 1911 marked the end of this particular phase, but the political experience gained during the Swadeshi Movement provided an important foundation for women's participation in later nationalist movements, women's contribution to the Swadeshi Movement should be understood not merely as support for nationalism but as an important early development in the history of women's political participation and nationalist mobilisation in Bengal.

**Findings :** The historical examination of women and the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905–1911) indicates that women played a meaningful role in the anti-Partition movement and in the wider process of nationalist mobilisation, finds that women's participation was not limited to supporting male members of their families, participated in the boycott of foreign goods, use of indigenous products, spinning and weaving, political meetings, picketing, nationalist writing and community mobilisation and contemporary evidence and recent historical research show that women in different parts of Bengal participated in meetings and other activities connected with the Swadeshi cause, second major finding is that the Swadeshi Movement created a link between women's domestic responsibilities and women were closely involved in household consumption, the decision to reject foreign products and use indigenous goods gave ordinary domestic activities a political meaning, nationalism entered the household, and women contributed to economic resistance against colonial rule supports Thapar-Björkert's broader argument that women's political

participation should not be understood only through formal public or political institutions also finds evidence of a gradual political awakening among Bengali women, participation in meetings, writing, public activities and nationalist campaigns provided some women with opportunities to develop political confidence and a stronger sense of public identity, Khatun describes the anti-Partition movement as an important stage in women's awakening and self-development, the findings also indicate that women's participation was not completely free from patriarchal control; male nationalist leaders often encouraged women to participate because their household roles made them particularly useful to the boycott programme, women's participation reflected both agency and existing gender limitations, the study finds that the Swadeshi Movement was an important early stage in the political mobilisation of Bengali women; although it did not immediately transform women's social position, it expanded their involvement in public affairs and created an important foundation for their participation in later phases of India's freedom movement.

**Recommendations:** Based on the historical evidence examined in the study several recommendations can be made. First, the contribution of women to the Swadeshi Movement should receive greater attention in regional histories of Bengal and Indian nationalism, historical accounts should not focus only on prominent male leaders and revolutionary organisations but should also document women's everyday participation, including boycott activities, use of indigenous products, spinning, weaving, meetings, picketing, writing and community mobilisation, recent research shows that these activities were important expressions of women's political awakening, researchers should make greater use of women-centred primary sources, such as contemporary women's journals, newspapers, letters, memoirs, autobiographies, organisational records and government reports can help recover the experiences of women who remained less visible in conventional nationalist histories; historical research should also critically compare different sources because nationalist writings and colonial records may represent women's participation differently, future studies should examine the experiences of women from different social, religious, economic and regional backgrounds; existing evidence particularly highlights women's participation in East Bengal, but further research is needed to compare experiences across different parts of historical Bengal, women's participation should be understood broadly rather than being limited to formal political activities. The Swadeshi Movement demonstrates that household practices could become forms of political action when women rejected imported goods and promoted indigenous production, future historical studies should connect women's political participation with long-term social transformation, examining whether the experiences of 1905–1911 influenced women's later participation in the Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience and other nationalist movements.

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1911 influenced women's later participation in the Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience and other nationalist movements.

**Conclusion:** The present historical study shows that women were an important part of the anti-Partition movement that emerged after the Partition of Bengal in 1905, conventional accounts have often focused on male political leaders and revolutionary organisations, historical evidence demonstrates that women also participated in the movement through boycott, use of indigenous products, spinning and weaving, meetings, picketing, writing and community-based activities; one important conclusion is that the Swadeshi Movement expanded the meaning of women's political participation, women did not always participate through formal political organisations or direct political confrontation; household activities could also become political when they rejected foreign goods and promoted Swadeshi products, nationalist politics entered the domestic sphere and connected women's everyday responsibilities with the wider struggle against colonial rule; Thapar-Björkert's historical research similarly argues that the categories of "private," "public," "active," and "political" need to be reconsidered when examining women's participation in Indian nationalism; suggests that participation in the Swadeshi Movement contributed to a gradual awakening of political consciousness among women; women's involvement in meetings, cultural activities, writing, boycott campaigns and other forms of mobilisation created opportunities for greater public visibility and collective action, research on Bengali women during the anti-Partition movement similarly identifies Swadeshi participation as an important stage in women's political awakening and self-development. However, the study concludes that this transformation was gradual and incomplete; women's participation continued to be influenced by patriarchy, family responsibilities, social status and access to education and political networks; Swadeshi Movement should not be seen as immediately liberating women from traditional social structures, the period 1905–1911 can be regarded as an important early stage in the development of women's political participation in Bengal, women's involvement strengthened nationalist mobilisation while simultaneously creating new possibilities for political awareness, public participation and collective identity, experiences of this period also provided an important foundation for women's greater participation in later phases of India's freedom movement.

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