

## THE ARDENT FOLLOWERS OF GANDHI AND THE IMPACT OF GANDHIAN THOUGHT ON DIRECT POLITICS

**Nandini Ray**

*Research Scholar*

*Department of Political Science*

*Vidyasagar University, Medinipur, West Bengal*

*Email: nondini7777@gmail.com*

### **Abstract**

*The impact of Non-violence in the nationalist movement of India is beyond criticism. Gandhi wanted to inspire the nation, not for a blood-shedding struggle but rather in a theosophical way i.e. Ahimsa. The arrival of Non-violence waved the women's souls to plunge into nationalist movements such as Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, Kamal Devi, Labanya Prabha Ghosh, Urmila Devi, Sarala Devi, Sucheta Kripalani, Kasturba Gandhi etc. This work will deal with the excellence of Labanya Prabha Ghosh and Sucheta Kripalani as Gandhi adherents. Respectively they were known as the first woman member of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1957 from Lok Sevak Sangh(LSS) and the first woman Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1962 from Indian National Congress(INC) though she had a prior association with Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party(KMPP) in 1952.*

*Labanya Prabha Ghosh took part in the Indian nationalist movement following the ideas of Gandhi through the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1921 and subsequently the Quit India Movement in 1942. In this way, she spent the cream time of her life in British jail as a woman satyagraha. Labanya Prabha Ghosh and others left the Congress as a protest against the ruthless oppression that took place in the life of the Bengali-speaking people of Purulia, a sub-division of Manbhumand to resort to the constructive works obeying Gandhian ideology. But in the context of election politics, LSS was unable to protect the prestige of the ideology. Eventually, LSS refrained from the participation in electoral politics and confined themselves to several social welfare activities. In this manner, KMPP was also defeated by Congress in the 1<sup>st</sup> Lok Sabha General Election with a huge difference beyond their expectation despite the dedication to Gandhian thought. Meanwhile, Sucheta Kripalani as a member of KMPP defeated the Congress candidate Manmohini Sahgal in the year 1952. In spite of having ideological differences, KMPP and Socialist Party (SP) decided that they were much more common in thinking*

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**Nandini Ray,**

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*in them and at last, the two parties were amalgamated. Consequently, the paper will also seek the reason behind the failure of these parties despite claiming themselves the heritage of Gandhi.*

**Keywords**

*Non-violence, Election Politics, Amalgamation, Dissolution, Women Participation.*

When individuals are getting suffered, we all need to the sacred touch of a woman, the Mother. When society has been faced with peril since the era of our mythology another time we feel the necessity of women as they combat with the hostility as a warrior. India has been retaining the glorious excellence of such warriors. Labanya Prabha Ghosh and Sucheta Kripalani were those identical personalities who made India proud through their involvement in the struggle for independence and subsequently in Indian Politics to obey the ideas of Gandhi as his adherent. Besides these two women, some others enriched Indian Political History with their social and political activities viz. Sarojini Naidu, Aruna Asaf Ali, Usha Mehta, Basanti Roy, Damini Debi, Bijli Prabha Dutta.

**Labanya Prabha Ghosh (1897-2003)**

Labanya Prabha Ghosh is regarded as ‘Maa of Mabhum’<sup>1</sup> at the district of Purulia in West Bengal. She had bestowed herself to the nationalist movement as well as involved in representative democratic system and became ‘the first woman member of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1957 after the inclusion of the district Purulia in West Bengal.’<sup>2</sup> Labanya Prabha Roy was born on 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1897 in the family of Aghor Chandra Roy at Purulia<sup>3</sup>. She began her struggle living as a nationalist after getting marriage. Breaking the conventional barriers, she participated in the freedom movement. She attended Gandhi’s Non-Cooperation Movement in 1921. A group of women responded to the voice of Gandhi. On the other hand Atul Ch. Ghosh, husband of Labanya Prabha Ghosh was an eminent leader of the district court, Purulia. Mr. Ghosh made up his mind to participate in the freedom movement and plunged himself into the great ‘NOC Movement’ resigning from the roaring practice of a pleader. As Labanya took an active part in the ‘Quit India Movement in 1942, she was sent to the jail with other distinguished follower of Gandhi<sup>4</sup>. In 1928, Labanya and his husband and their colleagues formed ‘Shilpashram’ as the center for conducting political movements in Manbhum (presently Purulia)<sup>5</sup>. On the occasion of ‘Laban (salt), Satyagraha’ in 1930 Labanya used to picket in different schools and colleges with the women members of ‘Shilpashram’. During the ‘Civil Disobedience Movement’ towards Dandi, she was imprisoned with almost all the prominent leaders of the district. The British ruler targeted ‘Shilpashram’

as the center of rebellion activities and attacked several times and eventually confiscated the Ashram in the year 1945. As a result of that Labanya organized a newer political movement named 'Pataka Satyagraha' within the territory of Pancha P.S. in the same year<sup>6</sup>. This 'Pataka Satyagraha' and other political activities made the British ruler annoyed and for that Labanya was imprisoned time and again. She was not only confined herself to political activities but she was also a framer of the new social horizon and for that, she used to campaign for the benefit of village people, literacy programs, making village women united, awakening of masses against the superstitions, illiteracy and ignorance. She was very much familiar with the village women and concerned with the all anomalies of women's life and always stayed beside them. For the welfare and salvation of the women of the district, as a whole, this woman was totally down to the Earth and the successful organizer of 'women's liberation before independence and after independence.'<sup>7</sup>

In the year 1948, on 30<sup>th</sup> April a full session of the Manbhum District Congress Committee (MDCC) occurred at 'Jitan Gram' of Bandon P.S. of Manbhum (presently Purulia). This session was important for the crevice of MDCC and the District Congress was disintegrated which gave birth newer political entity named, Lok Sevak Sangh (LSS) based on Gandhian ideology<sup>8</sup>. This year it was already clear as it was published in the editorial column of the Bangla periodical 'Mukti' of Congress that the main issue of this session would get official recognition of the Bengali Language of Manbhum. But, during this session for the first time, there was a subtle disagreement over the context of the above-mentioned issue. Aftermath, this dispute broke the organization into two parts through the voting program.<sup>9</sup> 30<sup>th</sup> May, Sunday, in the same year a general session was held by the District Congress Committee to make decision on the proposal for the language issue of Manbhum that was defeated by 43-55 votes. Consequently, the prominent leaders of Congress who raised this proposal, resigned from their respective designations as MDCC members. On 14<sup>th</sup> June, in presence of 500 Congress party workers, a new political party emerged in the political history of Manbhum, named, Lok Sevak Sangh. Labanya Prabha Ghosh was one of the Secretary members of the Legislative group of LSS<sup>10</sup>. The foremost objective of LSS was to get official recognition of the Bengali Language which was not p[ossible without movement. They were trying to draw the attention of the government in different ways. To accelerate the language movement LSS organized 'Tusu Satyagraha'. The folk song of Manbhumis popular as 'Tusu'.

The young village women used to sing the 'Tusu' song throughout the month of 'Poush' with great devotion and celebrate the 'Tusu Utsab' at the end of the month by bathing in the river and taking breakfast with homemade 'Pithas'. The entire festival makes the young women gather together and also express their emotions of them. This togetherness and emotion were the main criteria for having 'Tusu Utsab' as a Tusu Movement. So 'Tusu Satyagraha' was very significant to LSS to make people aware of 'Hindi Chauvinists' and about their linguistic sufferings made by Bihar Government. Thus songs began to be written and distributed among the people. Labanya Prabha was in charge of distributing the books of this song<sup>11</sup>. The content of the books was to expose the suppression of the Bengali language as well as Bengali-speaking people. In 1953, as a leader of 'Tusu Satyagraha' Labanya Prabha was sentenced to jail for one year and was fined rupees 600.<sup>12</sup>

Manbhum wanted the dignity of the mother language, 'Bangla'. They demanded the formation of a state on the basis of language. After the first general election in 1952, the language issue was seen over the country. Naturally, the states individually had strengthened their demand for 'language based provinces'<sup>13</sup>. This incident gave a blow to the claims of Manbhum. Being unsatisfied by the decision of the State Reorganisation Commission, West Bengal and Bihar both the governments proclaimed the amalgamation of both states which would be named as 'West Bengal Bihar Sanjukta Pradesh' on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1956. The people of the two states were not in favor of the decision as a result of that they decided to move in framing the movement against the unification of both states. In order to oppose 'Bengal Bihar Unification', the decision on 'Banga Satyagraha' was announced by LSS on 25<sup>th</sup> March<sup>14</sup>. A spontaneous strike was held in West Bengal against the aforesaid proposal on 24<sup>th</sup> February. Seeing this huge public opinion, West Bengal the then Chief Minister Dr, Bidhan Ch. Roy announced that if the Congress candidate was defeated by the by-election of Lok Sabha from the Northern West Kolkata constituency, he would withdraw this controversial proposal<sup>15</sup>. 1005 wayfarer used to march from Pakbirra to Kolkata for 'Banga Satyagraha'. They were divided into 10 groups. One group was consisted of the women. Labanya Prabha was the organizer of this women's force. 20<sup>th</sup> April at 7 a.m. the march was started with great enthusiasm. On 6<sup>th</sup> May, Sunday the wayfarer arrived in Kolkata across 200 miles at 10 a.m. the next day Satyagrahees were arrested for disobeying Article 144 from Dalhousie Square at 3 p.m., Labanya Prabha was one of them.<sup>16</sup> When LSS left for Kolkata,

the by-election result was declared. Congress candidate Ashok Kr. Sen was defeated by the Leftist candidate Mohit Mitra by 33,073 votes as expected. 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1956, Thursday evening, Dr. Roy negotiated with the ministers of West Bengal and proclaimed the decision to withdraw the proposal. After a long review in the Indian Lok Sabha, the 'West Bengal and Bihar Border Determinate Bill' which was become a law and decided to implemented on and from 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1956.<sup>17</sup> In view of this the district Purulia was demarcated and a part of Manbhum was merged in West Bengal. After this settlement, Labanya Prabha was elected as MLA from the Purulia Town seat in the 1957 General Election as being a member of LSS<sup>18</sup>. But despite the huge demand of the general people, she was not in favor of contesting in general election. Rather, she devoted herself to staying beside of the leprosy patients and concentrated on other social services. In the year 1922 Labanya Prabha Ghosh was the first leading woman freedom fighter in Manbhum. she inspired women to active participation in the freedom movement of India and later the language movement of Manbhum. Her role in women's inclusion in politics is ever remembered. This generous personality passed away at Shilpashram on 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2003.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Sucheta Kripalani (1908-1974)**

After the sudden demise of her father, all responsibilities of the entire family came upon Sucheta Mazumder, the eminent women freedom fighter and great nationalist in Indian History. Though she was from an affluent family, she was very naïve, kind-hearted and was concerned very much with the grief of common people. Sucheta Mazumder was born on 25<sup>th</sup> June, 1908 in a Bengali Brahmo family in Punjab<sup>20</sup>. So, in every evening the prayer with Bramho sangeet was organized by her mother, bringing her all children to teach the Bramho tradition. Later, she went to Shantiniketan to get music training. Besides that, Sucheta was a very brilliant student. When she was in her M.A. final year, her father passed away. Despite the grief, she was awarded the highest rank in her subject from Delhi University. For her excellent academic career, she has been rewarded with a gold medal as well as the scholarships. She joined in Banaras Hindu University as a Professor of History. After getting married Sucheta left this job and engaged herself in the nationalist movement<sup>21</sup>. Meanwhile, Mahila Ashram in Wardha, a nationalist institution was formed with the immense objective to train the women for national service. According to her desire, Sucheta joined this institute<sup>22</sup>. An unprecedented event in her

life was that Gandhiji was not in favor of her marriage with JB Kripalani. Gandhiji assumed that he would lose his closest disciple JB Kripalani if he got married. He might be deviated from the path of the nationalist movement<sup>23</sup>. Soon after her political intelligence and her inclusion into politics had overcome Gandhiji's assumptions. To imply her ability Gandhiji appointed Sucheta as the General Secretary of Kasturba National Memorial Trust to serve the village women and the children. When Dr. Rammonohar Lohia left the All India Congress Committee (AICC) office, she was put in charge of the Foreign Department of the Congress. Sucheta Kripalani subsequently formed the All India Mahila Congress in the AICC which is still effective<sup>24</sup>. She was one of the women members of the Constituent Assembly from Uttar Pradesh (UP) in 1946. Afterward, Sucheta became MLA of UP and fought her first Parliamentary Election from Delhi.

Despite being the prudent leader of Congress Sucheta Kripalani left Congress because she had seen the contempt for Gandhiji's ideology as well as the factionalism among the Congress Party. Sucheta joined to the newly formed party, named, Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party (KMPP) in 1951. As KMPP was defeated in the General Election, consequently the party decided to merge with Socialist Party and the new party was named Praja Socialist Party (PSP). Sucheta was chosen as the leader of the Lok Sabha. Disassociating from the party, Sucheta re-joined the Congress in 1956. In the next year she contested as Congress candidate from the New Delhi seat for the Lok Sabha General Election, aftermath she won the seat. She became the General Secretary of the Indian National Congress (INC) in the year 1958<sup>25</sup>. Becoming the first Woman Chief Minister of UP in Indian politics in 1963, Sucheta was associated with several responsibilities, such as, she sanctioning rupees 15 lakh to Sri Ramakrishna Mission for the building of the hospital in Lucknow; Anand Mai Institution got a plot of land in Banaras under the intervention of Sucheta; if there was no adequate money in the treasury, she asked to contribute the rich to her charitable trust<sup>26</sup>. According to the then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, it can be stated that being the C.M. of the biggest state of India, Sucheta used to live not in the specified big Bangalow for the C.M. but she used to live in the annex non-significant portion of that magnificent sculpture and the most astonishing event is that she didn't have any complaint for the same. She was so generous and so humble not reluctant and idealist and she was Sucheta. During this period, she had to face criticism in many times. Whenever she would go to the movies

to spend time with her friends, her puritan colleagues condemned her for watching movies as a woman C.M. although she did not pay attention to them; she was rather firm in her duty<sup>27</sup>. She was as a housewife as she was an eminent political personality in the political history of India. Being a freedom fighter she had been imprisoned in several times. After independence, she resumed her fighter image by contesting in election politics. Becoming Indian Union Minister and Chief Minister of the largest state, Sucheta confined herself to a number of charitable and auspicious institutions. Whenever she had opportunities, she used to plunge into the welfare activities as a devoted public worker. So far, we think about Sucheta was that she never thought of herself as a woman leader. She never claimed any special consideration for being a woman. Rather, she remembered that she was a woman only in a public meeting with her position in the public life of the country her place would be on the dais. But she would go and squat among the women<sup>28</sup>!

Women are still being worshiped in India since ancient times in the form of Goddess. In this age of modernity, the women are regarded as a second-grade citizens. To overcome this identity, the necessity of 'Women's Empowerment has come to an end. We portrayed two women in this literature were an as illustrious examples of the 'empowerment of women through political participation. Labanya and Sucheta we find were intellectually and spiritually much nearer. Both had vigorous solemn and majestic personalities revealed in their social and political activities. Both were dreamt of cultural and spiritual integration of Hindustan. We find the spirit and tempo of national struggle were the ruling principle of their life. We think, they were endearingly called 'Maa' by one and all for their revolutionary patriotism, blend of moral earnestness tempered with intellectual tolerance, essential humanness, womanly sensibility, and motherly tenderness that grew and developed for the political participation.

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