



Breaking Barriers: Women of Bombay Presidency

2012

Cover Image:

Children of Sir Harilal Gosalia, c. 1911-12

Vinayak, Vasant, Tara, Sita and Subhadra were the children of Sir Harilal Gosalia, an advocate of Rajkot, who became *Diwan* (Prime Minister) of the princely state of Dhrangadhra. Vasant, Tara, Sita and Sarala (whose original name was Reva and is not in the photograph) were the children of Harilal by his first wife. Tara was married into the renowned business family of Bombay, Premchand Raichand, and Sarala married Ambalal Sarabhai, the textile magnate, of Ahmedabad. After his first wife died, Harilal remarried. The attire of Vinayak, (on the extreme left) combines Gujarati headgear - an embroidered velvet cap - and a western-style belted jacket with a Peter Pan collar, side-buttoned short pants, shoes and socks. He and Subhadra, with long hair and wearing *kurta-pyjama*, were children of Harilal's second marriage. Gosalia was very keen on educating his daughters. In this photograph, Tara holds open a large book. It was not unusual to show girls and women with large tomes, particularly if they came from families committed to women's education; the photograph came in useful, a visual metaphor that conveyed the message of gender equality.

Courtesy: Sarabhai Foundation, Ahmedabad

Anasuya Sarabhai in England, c.1913-14

Anasuya was much influenced by the suffragettes and this is reflected in her austere style of dress. The blouse is modelled on a western gown and she wears a tie. Unlike her niece, Mridula, Anasuya was not active in the freedom movement though she was greatly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. On *raksha bandhan*, Anasuya would tie a *rakhi* (a thread a sister ties on her brother's wrist for protection) on Gandhi's hand. If he was not in Ahmedabad, she would send it to him and he always made it a point to wear it. Though from a family of prominent mill-owners, she was the founder of *Majoor Mahajan*, the Ahmedabad textile workers' union, and its President for many years. The union functioned along Gandhian lines.

Courtesy: Sarabhai Foundation, Ahmedabad



CONCEPT AND TEXT

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Breaking Barriers: Women of Bombay Presidency

As in other parts of India, the social reform movement in Bombay Presidency focussed on the position of women; there were two separate but interconnected strands, a high caste movement of reform and an anti-caste movement launched by lower castes and 'untouchables'. In 1848, the Brahmin reformer, Gopal Hari Deshmukh (Lokहितavadi) began publishing attacks on Brahmin priesthood and the Dalit, Jotiba Phule founded his first school for girls in Poona, followed by three more; the students of Elphinstone College in Bombay also started a school for girls and a magazine for women. Earlier, in 1849, two girls schools had been established in Ahmedabad by mill owners. Parsis were among the first to educate their women and in 1886, Cornelia Sorabji became the first woman graduate of Bombay University. Later, in 1892, when she joined a solicitor's firm in London, her legal career was underway. Two young Gujarati women, Vidyagauri Nilkanth and her sister Sharda Mehta graduated in 1901 from a co-education college as there were no separate institutions for girls.

Apart from women's education, reformers turned their attention to child marriage and the condition of widows. In 1882, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati started the first woman's organization, Arya Mahila Sabha and later Sharda Sadan, the first home-cum-school for child widows. Maharshi Karve was another champion of women's education and widow remarriage. The 1889 session of the Indian National Congress in Bombay was attended by ten women, largely due to the efforts of Ramabai Saraswati. By this time, the

number of women in public spheres had increased considerably. Maharashtra's first woman novelist, Kashibai Kanitkar started writing in the 1890s and the first woman doctor in the region, Anandibai Joshi had qualified a few years earlier. Tarabai Shinde's *Stree Purush Tulana* published in 1882 raised a stormy debate because she argued that men suffered from the same faults commonly ascribed to women and that men and women were equal.

By 1920s women such as Maniben Kara, Ushabai Dange, Parvati Bhole were participants in the workers' movement. In 1942, at Nagpur, the newly constituted Dalit Mahila Federation, attended by more than thirty thousand women passed resolutions regarding working conditions of women mill workers, hostels for Dalit girls, scholarships for school and higher education, right to divorce and a law against bigamy. The freedom movement brought many more women into the public sphere. Bhikaiji Cama joined the revolutionary movement, while a large number participated in Gandhian *satyagrahas*, Dandi salt march and the Quit India movement of 1942. Anasuya Sarabhai led the Ahmedabad textile workers' strike and founded *Majoor Mahajan* a trade union based on Gandhian principles. In the field of creativity and performance, it was not long before women broke many taboos and defied orthodox society by singing in public, acting on the stage and in films.

Aparna Basu



Wedding party (*barat*) ready to depart from Mansa (now Gujarat), 1935

Bridegroom Rajkumar Yeshwantsinh of Mansa wears full princely regalia - brocade *sherwani*, *churidar* (tight-fitting lower garment), *safa* (turban) and state jewels. According to prevalent custom, only men of the family and retainers were included in the *barat*. Women remained at home, preparing to welcome the new bride. Maid servants and dancing girls were the only women taken along to entertain the party during the long journey. For this particular wedding, a special train was organised from Mansa to the bride's home near Rajkot. Needless to say it ran according to the convenience of the wedding party!

The little girl seated on the lap of the bridegroom is his niece, while her playmate, in keeping with her status as the daughter of a retainer, sits on a step below.

Courtesy: Vasundhara Nath, Panipat



A family photograph c 1880s

A couple of decades after the opening of the first photo studios in Bombay Presidency, better-placed families preferred to ask photographic studios for a home shoot. The Tyabjis of the Sulaimani Bohra community were among those who, when a family event had to be commemorated, on site photography was organised. These also became important occasions when women occupied a public visual space. In this family photograph taken at the Baroda home of barrister Abbas Tyabji who was to later become an ardent Gandhian, the photographic establishment re-created a theatrical set, the central characters being Abbas (seated in the middle without head gear), and wife Ameena who is next to him. What is particularly interesting is that nobody engages with the camera: not one of the 17 people looks straight at it and yet there is a certain dynamism in the visual. Generations and genders are mixed, clothes, postures, demeanours are carefully chosen if not dictated and arranged to give the photograph a certain dramatic quality.

Courtesy: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
30	31					1 <i>New Year's Day</i>
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14 <i>Makar Sankranti</i>	15 <i>Pongal</i>
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26 <i>Republic Day</i>	27	28 <i>Basanta Panchami/ Sri Panchami</i>	29

December

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February

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January 2012



Pandita Ramabai in disguise, 1896

Pandita Ramabai, among India's first women social reformers, was probably one of the most controversial women of her times. In 1886, Ramabai went to the USA, speaking, holding meetings and writing as she went about her mission of collecting money for a widows' home. She publicized the plight of these women through *The High Caste Hindu Woman* (1887) where she dealt with issues such as discrimination against the girl child, the custom of early marriage, and the treatment of widows in Hindu society. An early public figure and certainly the first woman to campaign abroad for funds to set up an institution in India, Ramabai came home with enough in the coffers to start Sharda Sadan in 1889, the first residential school for widows in Bombay.

When Ramabai learned of the trafficking of widows in Brindavan, she disguised herself as a poor pilgrim and travelled to the town; she found hundreds of widows from Bengal and planned the escape of six or seven of them. This photograph of her disguised as a low caste Mahar woman was probably taken in a studio.

From Helen S. Dyer, Pandita Ramabai: The Story of Her Life, London: Morgan and Scott.

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
		1	2	3	4	5 Milad-Un-Nabi (Id-E-Milad) (Birthday of Prophet Mohammed)
6	7 Guru Ravidas' Birthday	○ 8	9	10	11	12
13	● 14	15	16	17	18	19
20 Maha Shivaratri	21	● 22	23	24	25	26
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February 2012

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March						
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Bhikaiji Cama, 1907

From a well-known Parsi merchant family, Bhikaiji received a good English education, but became a rebel and fervent nationalist early in life. In 1902 she went to London to recover from the plague, which she caught while tending victims of the disease. Going on to Europe, Bhikaiji gathered anti-imperialist revolutionaries around her in Paris, and in 1907 unfurled the 'Flag of Indian Independence' for the first time in Stuttgart at the International Socialist Congress. She is photographed here holding the flag that has, in the middle, the words *Vande Mataram*, the slogan of the Indian National Congress. After 1909 she edited two revolutionary periodicals from Geneva *Talwar* and *Vande Mataram* making the Indian cause known in Europe and America. The British wanted her extradition from France but were refused. When World War I broke out, however, she was interned. She died on her return to India in 1936.

The original flag raised by Cama in Stuttgart is now on display at the Maratha and Kesari Library in Pune.

Courtesy: National Gandhi Museum, New Delhi

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
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12	13	<i>Holika Dahan</i>	Holi	16	17	18
19	20	21	● 22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	<i>Chaitra Sukladi/ Gudi Padava/ Ugadi/ Cheti Chand</i>	30	31

March 2012

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Dwarkanbai Kamlakar at Madras Medical College, 1907

Dwarkanbai and her sister Krishnabai were sent to the Huzurpaga School in Poona (Pune). When Dwarkanbai matriculated in 1890, she was the first student of the school to do so, and her sister, Krishnabai the first woman graduate of Fergusson College. After her marriage, she moved to Madras and joined the Madras Medical College, the first medical college in India to admit women, from where she did her Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery. As this photograph shows, she was the only woman in her class.

Dwarkanbai joined the Women's Medical Service (WMS), which took her to various parts of the country including Vizagapatam (Vishakhapatnam) and Gauhati (Guwahati). In 1934 she took charge of Dufferin Hospital in Benares (Varanasi) and later moved to Nagpur. Dwarkanbai had the strength to walk out of an unsatisfactory marriage and brought up three children on her own.

Courtesy: Aalochana, Awati-Aalochana Collection, Pune

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
30						1 <i>Ram Navmi</i>
2	3	4	5 <i>Mahavir Jayanti</i>	6 <i>Good Friday</i>	○ 7	8 <i>Easter Sunday</i>
9	10	11	12	● 13 <i>Vaisakhi/ Vishu</i>	14 <i>Mesadi Vaisakhadi (Bengal)/ Bahag Bihu (Assam)</i>	15
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April 2012

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Cycling at the Hingne Stree Shikshan Sanstha, Poona (Pune), 1915

Wearing Parsi-border saris, students bicycle at the Women's College of the Hingne Stree Shikshan Sanstha (HSSS), Poona. The college was run by the HSSS set up by Annasaheb Karve (better known as Maharshi D.K. Karve) in 1907 for the education of young women. Later, in 1920, with a grant from the Thackerseys, it was renamed the SNTD or Shree Nathibai Damodar Thackersey Women's University. This photograph forms part of the Gangutai Patwardhan collection and was presumably taken when she was a student at the institution; Karve had offered a scholarship to girls who had pledged not to marry till their twelfth year - and Gangutai took advantage of this. Later, she became a successful school teacher who believed that sports and personality development were vital; Gangutai was an important figure in the Girl Guide movement in Baroda.

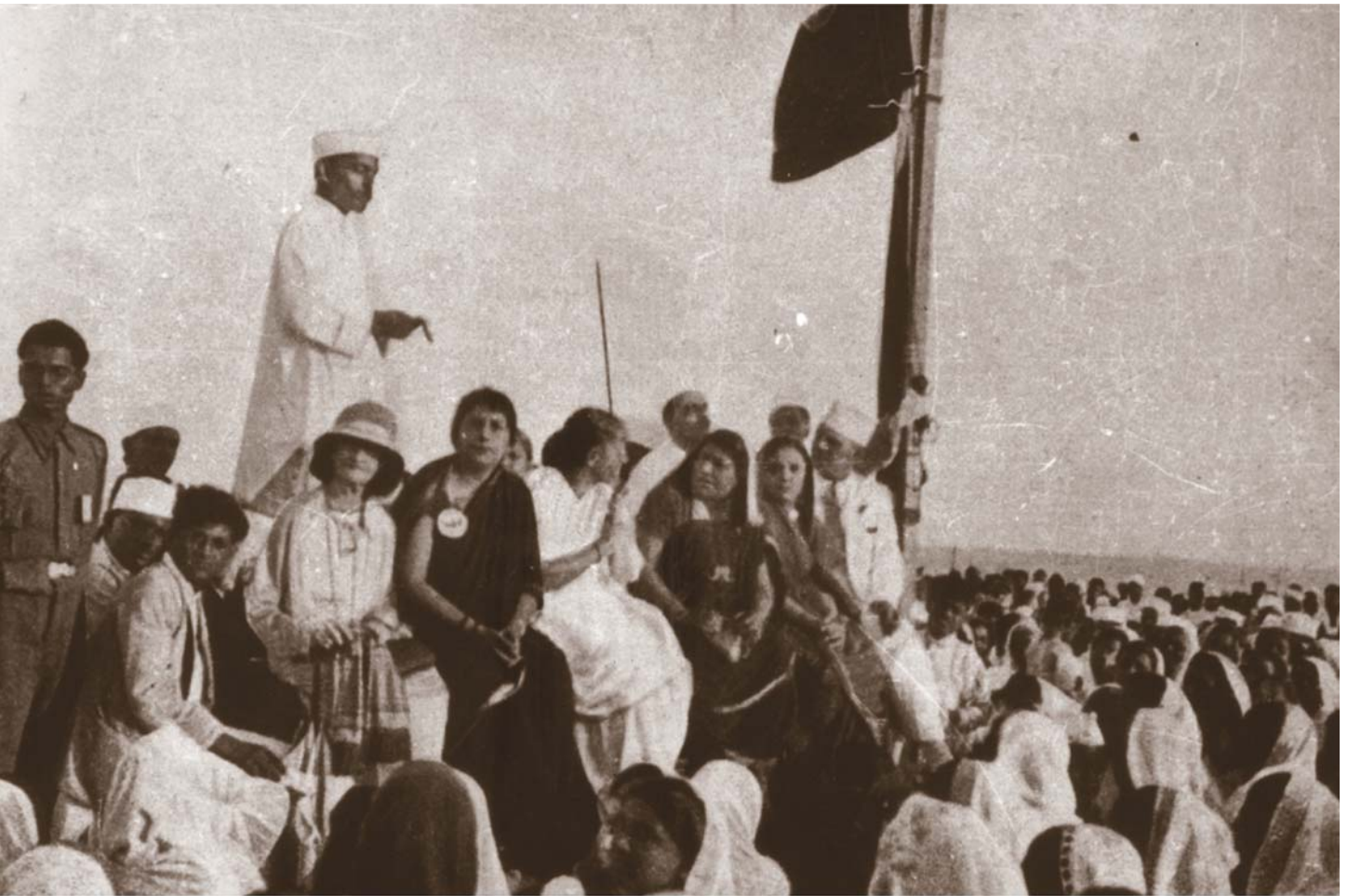
Courtesy: Aalochana, Gangutai Patwardhan collection, Pune

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
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7	8 Guru Rabindranath's Birthday	9	10	11	12	 13
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May 2012

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Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and others auctioning salt at Chaupati, Bombay (Mumbai), 1930

As part of Civil Disobedience Mahatma Gandhi chose to break the Salt Laws as a mode of protest. Since salt is in common use by all including the poor of the land, he campaigned against the tax on salt and led a march on 12th March 1930 to Dandi on the Gujarat sea coast. The aim was to manufacture salt unlawfully. In the initial stages of the *satyagraha*, women were not allowed to participate but when women leaders protested vehemently Gandhi had to give in. He nominated Sarojini Naidu to initiate the raid on the Dharasana salt works. Thousands of women joined the movement by manufacturing salt, selling 'illegal' salt, picketing shops selling foreign cloth and liquor. They faced *lathi* (police baton) charges, were arrested and imprisoned.

Courtesy: Vidya Munshi, Kolkata

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
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<i>Hazarat Ali's Birthday</i>						
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		<i>Rath Yatra</i>				
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May

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July

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June 2012



Dalit women activists marching in protest against the Poona Pact of 1932

Following the first Round Table Conference (1930-1), Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was in favour of the British Government's move to provide separate electorate for the Dalits. Strongly opposed to this decision which he felt would divide Indian society, Mahatma Gandhi went on an indefinite hunger strike from September 20, 1932. Following a mass upsurge in the country, Ambedkar went to Yerawada jail where Gandhi was imprisoned to negotiate a compromise. The result was the Poona Pact which resolved that "henceforth, amongst Hindus no one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth and they will have the same rights in all the social institutions as the other Hindus have".

The principle of joint electorates was accepted, and understandably, as is evident from this photograph, the Dalit community felt aggrieved.

Courtesy: Anand Teltumbde, Images of the Movement in E - compendium on Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
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July 2012

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August						
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Sant Tukaram, 1936

Made in Marathi, *Sant Tukaram* is an outstanding achievement of the early sound period of Indian cinema. The film has qualities that set it apart from the genre of devotional films. The relationship between Tukaram and his wife Jijai are portrayed most convincingly. With her down-to-earth convictions, Jijai commands Tukaram to leave his meditation and get down to hard labour to save the family from starvation. As far as she is concerned, a husband must provide for the family; yet her devotion to Tukaram is in no way less than those who regard him a saint. Her devotion is that of a wife, not a devotee.

Gauri (above) plays the role of Jijai with such natural flair that it becomes hard to believe she had joined the Prabhat Film Company as a mere menial. Another major contribution to this film is Keshav Rao Bhole's outstanding music. *Sant Tukaram* smashed all box office records, particularly in Maharashtra, and went on to become the first Indian film to win an award at the Venice Film Festival in 1937.

Courtesy: Cinemaya, New Delhi

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
		1	○ 2	3	4	5
			Raksha Bandhan			
6	7	8	9	● 10	11	12
				Janamashtami (Vaisnava)		
13	14	15	16	● 17	18	19
		Independence Day		Jamat-Ul-Vida	Parsi New Year's Day	
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Idu'l Fitr	Vinayaka Chaturthi					
27	28	29	30	○ 31		
		Onam				

August 2012

July						
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30	31					

September						
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Three generations of women graduates, 1940

Vidyagauri (R), her daughter Sarojini (L) and Sarojini's daughter, Vatsala

Vidyagauri Nilkanth came from a family of social reformers. Married at the age of 13, she continued to study after her marriage and was a role model for generations of Gujarati women. When she graduated in 1901 from Gujarat College in Ahmedabad, she became the first woman to do so. Her daughter Sarojini graduated from the same college in the 1920s and her daughter, Vatsala graduated around 1940. Both Sarojini and Vatsala passed the MA examination after they were married.

Courtesy: Sohan Nilkanth, Ahmedabad

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24	25	<i>Ganesh Chaturthi</i>	27	28	29	○ 30

September 2012

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27	28	29	30	31			29	30	31				



Babasaheb Ambedkar with women activists, 2nd July 1942

This photograph was taken after Dr Ambedkar was elected to the Viceroy's Executive Council. From left Kamal Kamble, Draupade Khilare, Shantabai Vadvalkar, Shantabai Pagare, Mirabai Dangle, Sakhubai Mohite, Shrimati Donde and other women activists.

Following Dr Ambedkar's speech at Mahad (1927) a cadre of women leaders and *mahila mandals* (women's groups) emerged. There were many extraordinary women involved in the Ambedkar movement - Tulsabai Bansode worked at the hand press with her husband, Shantabai Dani was the sole woman to travel along with men activists and Shantabai Sarode who was a wrestler and arbitrated in disputes around the area where she lived. In 1930, Savitribai Borade and Ambubai Gaikwad were appointed as members of the executive committee of the periodical *Janata*. A few years later, in 1938, as Dalit women felt marginalised by mainstream national women's organizations, they formed the Srimati Ramabai Ambedkar Sangh.

Courtesy: Vishvasrao Prakash, Dr. Ambedkar , Lokvagmay Gruh, Mumbai

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
1	2 Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday	3	4	5	6	7
☾ 8	9	10	11	12	13	14
● 15	16	17	18	19	20	21
☾ 22 Dussehra (Maha Ashtami)	23 Dussehra (Maha Navmi)	24 Dussehra (Vijaya Dashami)	25	26	27 Idu'l Zuha (Bakrid)	28 Maha Saptami
29 Maharishi Valmiki's Birthday	○ 30	31				

October 2012

September

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November

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Quit India Movement, 1942

In August 1942, Mahatma Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement with the slogan 'Do or Die'. Together with members of the Congress Working Committee, he was arrested. As soon as news of the arrest spread, there were *hartals* (strikes) in Bombay, Poona and Ahmedabad. Women took out processions and held demonstrations. Bombay Presidency was the first province to be affected by the political upsurge. Usha Mehta went 'underground' and kept the struggle going through the secret radio. Women in Bombay, Ahmedabad and other towns of the province organised meetings, hoisted the national flag and courted arrest. In this telling image, a woman demonstrator appears to be arguing with a police official, while young men volunteers look on and one of them even smiles!

Courtesy: National Gandhi Museum, New Delhi

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
			1	2	3	4
				Karaka Chaturthi (Karva Chouth)		
5	6	☾ 7	8	9	10	11
12	13	● 14	15	16	17	18
Naraka Chaturdasi	Diwali (Deepavali) Deepawali (South India)	Govardhan Puja	Bhai Duj			
19	☾ 20	21	22	23	24	25
Pratihara Sashthi / Surya Sashthi (Chhat Puja)					Guru Teg Bahadur's Martyrdom Day	Muharram
26	27	○ 28	29	30		
		Guru Nanak's Birthday				

October

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December

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November 2012



**Mridula Sarabhai with
Mahatma Gandhi in Bihar,
1946**

A nationalist from childhood, Mridula was a passionate freedom fighter who went to prison, helped revolutionaries when they went underground and fought for women's equality in society and specifically, within the Congress Party.

Mridula joined Mahatma Gandhi's peace marches in riot-hit areas in 1946 and 1947 and continued to work among women refugees after Independence to rehabilitate them on both sides of the border.

Courtesy: Sarabhai Foundation, Ahmedabad

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
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10	11	12	●	13	14	15
17	18	19	☾	20	21	22
24	25	26	27	○	28	29
Christmas Eve	Christmas Day					30

December 2012

November							January						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
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26	27	28	29	30			28	29	30	31			



A family photograph c 1880s



Pandita Ramabai in disguise, 1896



Bhikaiji Cama, 1907



Dwarkabai Kamlakar at Madras Medical College, 1907



Cycling at the Hingne Stree Shikshan Sanstha, Poona (Pune), 1915



Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and others auctioning salt at Chaupati, Bombay (Mumbai), 1930



Dalit women activists marching in Protest against the Poona Pact of 1932



Sant Tukaram, 1936



Three generations of women graduates, 1940
Vidyagauri (R), her daughter Sarojini (L)
and Sarojini's daughter, Vatsala



Babasaheb Ambedkar with women Activists, 2nd July 1942



Quit India Movement, 1942



Mridula Sarabhai with Mahatma Gandhi In Bihar, 1946



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