



# Women at the Midnight Hour 2018



**Parliament House, New Delhi**

**Cover Image:**

This rare photograph is of 11 out of the 15 women members of the Constituent Assembly. Despite our best efforts, we were unable to identify two of them.

Back row: L to R – 2<sup>nd</sup> from L. Sucheta Kripalani, 3<sup>rd</sup> from L. Durgabai Deshmukh, 4<sup>th</sup> from L. Begum Aizaz Rasul, 6<sup>th</sup> from L. Dakshayani Velayudhan

Front row: L to R – Renuka Ray, Hansa Mehta, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Annie Mascarane, Ammu Swaminathan

**Acknowledgments:**

We are deeply grateful to Meera Velayudhan, Manjari Mehta and Nayantara Sahgal for generously sharing precious family photographs and helping us with the writing of captions.

Cover image and photos 1 to 6: Meera Velayudhan

Photos 7,8,10,11 and 12: Manjari Mehta

Photo 9: Nayantara Sahgal

We would like to thank our life member and staunch friend Aparna Basu for writing the introduction - and that too in record time.



Curator: Malavika Karlekar  
Design: Sundaresh and Malavika Karlekar



# Women at the Midnight Hour

The celebration of 70 years of India's independence is an appropriate occasion to remember women members of the Constituent Assembly formed in 1946 to debate and draft a constitution for a soon-to-be independent India. Among the 299 members, 15 were women. They were: Ammu Swaminathan, Annie Mascarane, Begum Aizaz Rasul, Dakshayani Velayudhan, Durgabai Deshmukh, Hansa Mehta, Kamla Chaudhri, Leela Roy, Malati Choudhury, Purnima Banerji, Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Renuka Ray, Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kripalani and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. For CWDS' 2018 calendar, we have selected to focus on two members who came from completely different backgrounds, Dakshayani Velayudhan and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.

Dakshayani belonged to the Pulaya community of agrestic slaves in Kerala whose women were not even allowed to wear an upper cloth (upper-body cloth). She came from a family that spearheaded many reforms and was one of the first Pulaya girls to defy the custom of not being allowed to wear an upper cloth. She fought for women's equality, their education and security at the work place and the abolition of caste slavery. Dakshayani was the first Dalit woman from Kerala to graduate from Madras University. In 1945, she was nominated to the Cochin Legislative Council that elected her to the Constituent Assembly where she played a very active role. She spoke for making untouchability illegal and hoped “that *Harijans* will be safe in a Republican State of the Indian Union. I visualize that the underdogs will be the rulers of the Indian Republic.”

Dakshayani held that the Assembly should offer the people “a new framework of life” and work towards an independent India where no barriers based on caste or community should exist; she strongly opposed any kind of reservation or separate electorates. She believed that “Communalism, whether Harijan, Christian, Muslim or Sikh, is opposed to nationalism. What we want is not all kinds of safeguards. It is the moral safeguard that gives real protection to the underdogs in this country.” She appealed to Ambedkar to join the nationalist forces of the country as the “only leader of the *Harijan* community...”

Never afraid of voicing her views, Dakshayani Velayudhan criticized the Draft Constitution presented by Ambedkar as “barren of ideas and principles” and debunked Churchill's claim that the British government had done a great deal for the *Harijans*.

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was from an aristocratic, affluent Kashmiri Brahmin family of Allahabad. Her father, Motilal Nehru was a distinguished barrister who joined the freedom movement under Mahatma Gandhi. The younger sister of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Vijaya Lakshmi had no formal education but was taught by governesses at home.

Mrs. Pandit – as she was popularly known - was the first Indian woman to hold a cabinet post in pre-Independence India. In 1937, she was elected to the United Provinces Legislative Assembly and became Minister for Local Self Government and Public Health. A decade before Independence, she moved a resolution in the Assembly demanding a Constituent Assembly to draw up a constitution for an independent India. She was elected to the Constituent Assembly from U.P. Soon after Independence, she became India's Ambassador to the Soviet Union. Subsequently, she was made India's Ambassador to USA and later, High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. From 1946 to 1968 Mrs. Pandit headed the Indian delegation to the United Nations. In 1953, she became the first woman President of the UN General Assembly. In the Constituent Assembly, among other issues, she spoke on the 'Centrality of New Asia in Post-Raj World-Order'.

Our calendar highlights various aspects of these two women's lives, drawing attention to the fact that it was the courage and enthusiasm displayed by them and others in the freedom struggle that provided women a political space in post-independence India.

*Aparna Basu*



Dakshayani as a student at Maharaja's College, Ernakulam. She graduated with a B.Sc degree in Chemistry and was the only woman science student in her class and in the college.

c. 1930s

*Courtesy: Meera Velayudhan*

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

# January 2018

December							February						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
31					1	2					1	2	3
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	25	26	27	28			





Marriage of Dakshayani and R. Velayudhan held on 6th September, 1940 at Gandhi Ashram, Wardha, in the presence of Kasturba and Gandhiji. A leper who was treated at the Ashram, officiated as the priest. The wedding was held during an afternoon break of the meeting of the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress that Gandhiji was attending at Wardha.

*Courtesy: Meera Velayudhan*

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	●	7	○	10
11	12	13	14	15	●	16
18	19	20	21	22	●	23
25	26	27	28			

Swami Dayananda  
Saraswati Jayanti

Maha Shivaratri

Shivaji Jayanti

January

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

March

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

February 2018





Members of the Constituent Assembly, with B.R. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Vallabhbhai Patel, Govind Ballabh Pant, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and others seated in the front row.

Dakshayani is standing in the third row with Durgabai Deshmukh, Ammu Swaminathan and Begum Aizaz Rasul.

1947

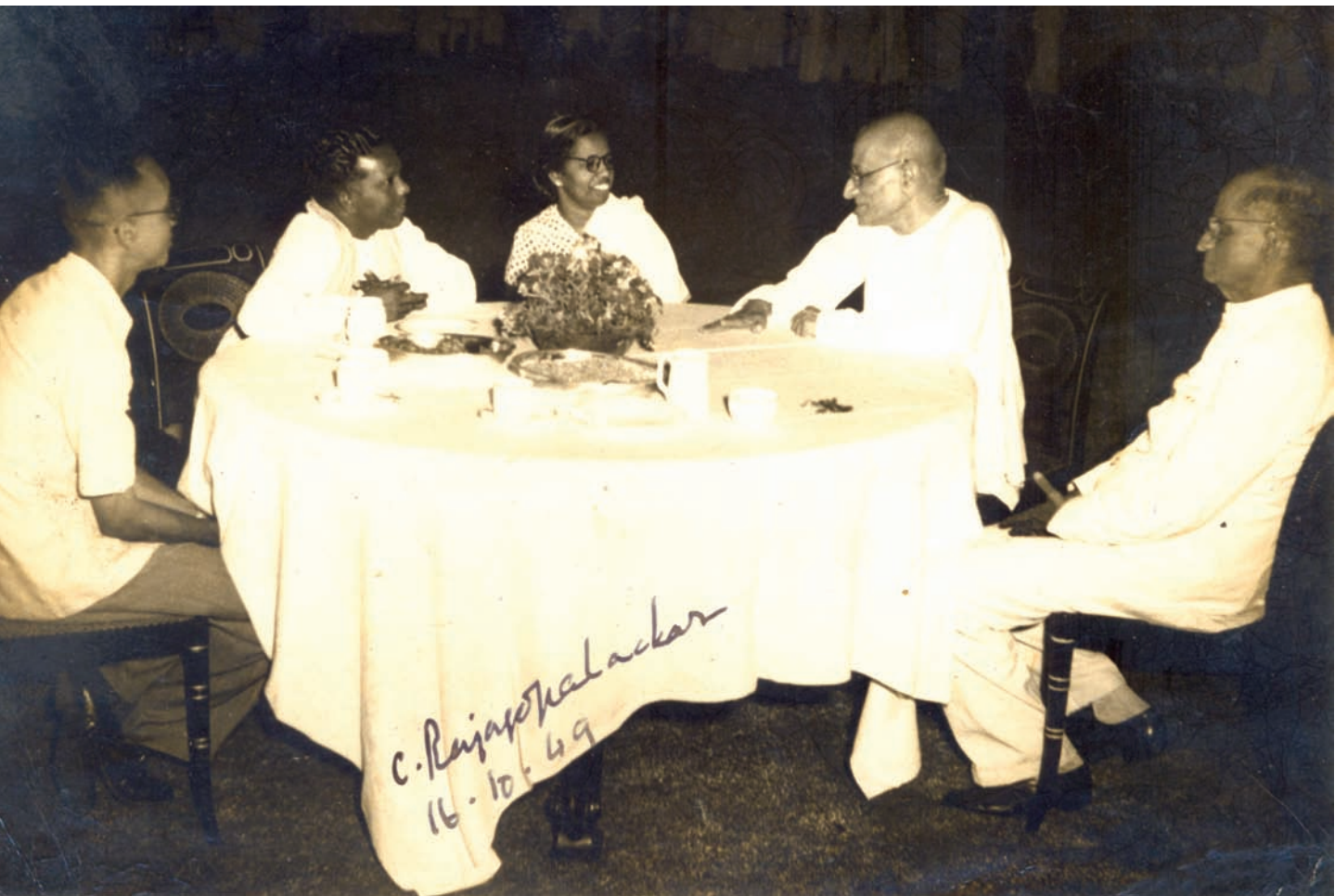
*Courtesy: Meera Velayudhan*



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 <i>Holika Dahan/ Dolyatra</i>	○ 2 <b>Holi</b>	3
4	5	6	7	8	● 9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	● 17
18 <i>Chaitra Sukladi/ Gudi Padava/ Ugadi/ Cheti Chand</i>	19	20	21	22	23	● 24
25 <i>Ram Navami</i>	26	27	28	29 <b>Mahavir Jayanti</b>	30 <b>Good Friday</b>	○ 31

# March 2018

February							April						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2	3						
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
25	26	27	28				22	23	24	25	26	27	28
							29	30					



Dakshayani at a function with C Rajagopalachari, Governor General of India, to her left. Next to him is N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar, a senior member of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution.

1949

*Courtesy: Meera Velayudhan*

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1  Easter Sunday Hazarat Ali's Birthday	2	3	4	5	6	7
☾ 8	9	10	11	12	13	14  Vaisakhi/ Vishu / Mesadi
15  Vaisakhadi(Bengal)/ Bahag Bihu (Assam)	● 16	17	18	19	20	21
22 ☾	23	24	25	26	27	28
29  Buddha Purnima	○ 30					

# April 2018

March							May						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3			1	2	3	4	5
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	27	28	29	30	31		





Dakshayani with her close friend and colleague, Durgabai Deshmukh at a function at Teen Murti House, New Delhi.

1953

*Courtesy: Meera Velayudhan*

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	●	8 <i>Guru Rabindranath's Birthday</i>	10	11	12
13	14	●	16	17	18	19
20	21	●	23	24	25	26
27	28	○	30	31		

April

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

June

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

May 2018



Dakshayani and R. Velayudhan outside Parliament House. They were the first and only Dalit parliamentarian couple in the Provisional Parliament. Dakshayani was with the Indian National Congress, while Velayudhan crossed over to the Praja Socialist Party headed by Ram Manohar Lohia.

1953

*Courtesy: Meera Velayudhan*



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	☾	7	8
10	11	12	13	●	14	15
17	18	19	☾	20	21	22
24	25	26	27	○	28	29
						30

June 2018

May							July						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
27	28	29	30	31			29	30	31				



In this formal family portrait Sarup (later Vijaya Lakshmi), the older daughter of eminent lawyer Motilal Nehru, stands close to her brother – Jawaharlal, her much-loved Bhai. He was eleven years older than Sarup. Younger sister Krishna is in her mother Swarup Rani's lap.

1908

*Courtesy: Manjari Mehta*

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	●	6
8	9	10	11	12	●	13
15	16	17	18	19	●	20
22	23	24	25	26	27	○
29	30	31				

July 2018

June							August						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2			1	2	3	4	
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	26	27	28	29	30	31	





A formal studio portrait of Sarup.

Posing for formal portraits was very common among the westernized elite. These were framed elaborately, arranged and displayed on mantelpieces or teapoys and round tables kept specially for this purpose.

1909

*Courtesy: Manjari Mehta*

*London Photo Co.*

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	
Raksha Bandhan						

August 2018

July							September						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	30						1
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
29	30	31					23	24	25	26	27	28	29



With husband Ranjit Sitaram Pandit (1889-1944). After her marriage in 1921, in keeping with a popular – though patriarchal tradition – Sarup's name was changed to Vijaya Lakshmi. Pandit was a successful barrister from Kathiawad as well as a classical scholar, well-versed in Sanskrit. He was actively involved in the freedom movement and fell mortally ill in Bareilly Jail, where he received no treatment. When he was finally released, it was too late and he died at Lucknow in 1944.

Vijaya Lakshmi and Ranjit Pandit had three daughters, Chandralekha (Mehta), Nayantara (Sahgal) and Rita (Dar).

c. mid-to late-1920s

*Courtesy: Nayantara Sahgal*



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
30						1
2	● 3	4	5	6	7	8
	Janmashtami					
● 9	10	11	12	13	14	15
				Vinayaka Chaturthi/ Ganesh Chaturthi		
16	● 17	18	19	20	21	22
					Muharram	
23	24	○ 25	26	27	28	29

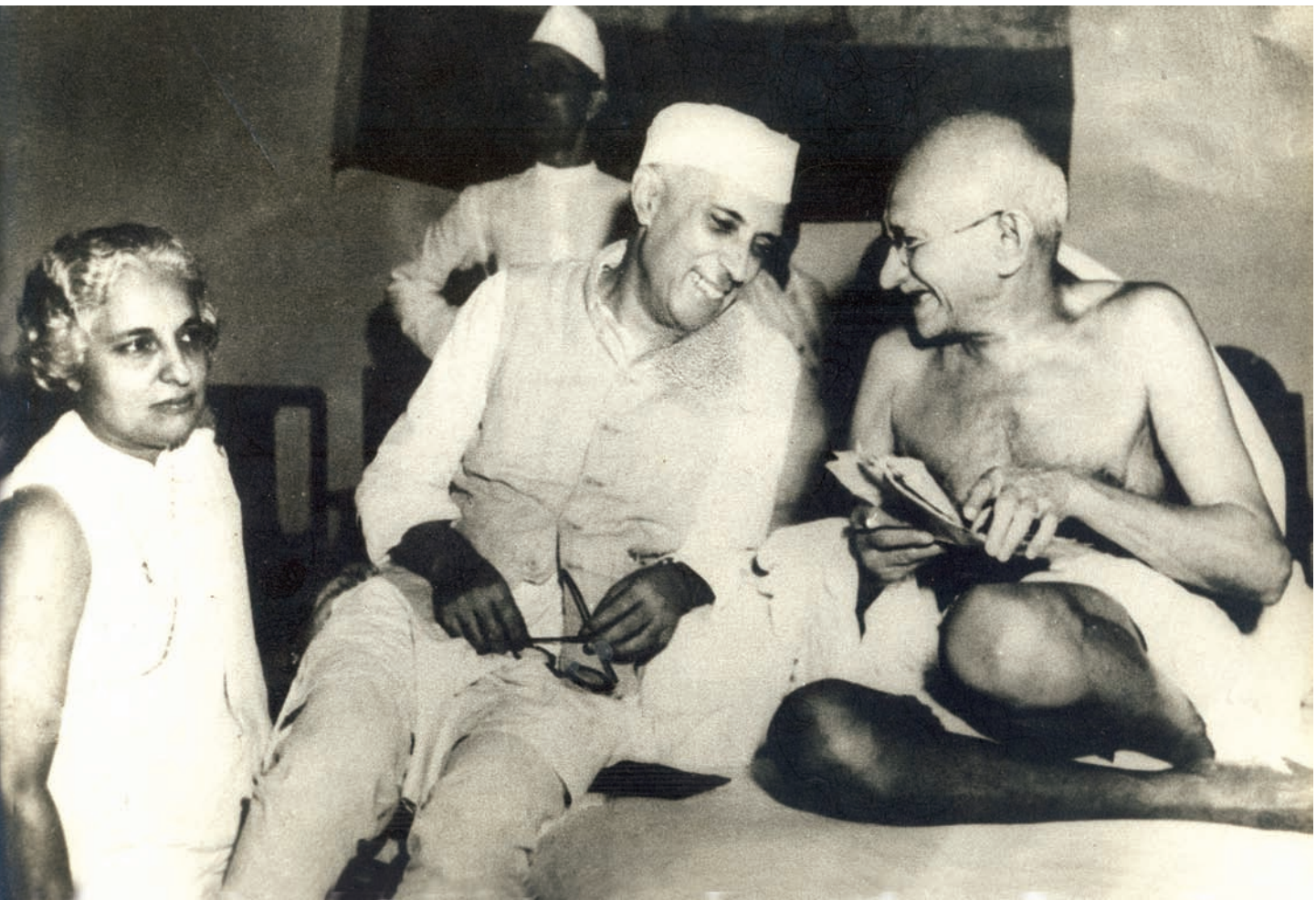
# September 2018

August

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

October

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			



With Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. A cropped version of this iconic photograph showing only the two leaders became very popular shortly after Independence

1946

*Courtesy: Manjari Mehta*

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

# October 2018

September							November						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
30						1					1	2	3
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	25	26	27	28	29	30	



At the marriage of her daughter  
Rita to Avtar Krishna Dar, a  
member of the Indian Foreign  
Service

c. 1953

*Courtesy: Manjari Mehta*



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	● 7	8	9	10
			Diwali (Deepavali)			
11	12	13	14	☾ 15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	○ 23	24
			Milad-Un-Nabi or Id-E-Milad (Birthday of Prophet Mohammad)		Guru Nanak's Birthday	
25	26	27	28	29	● 30	

# November 2018

October							December						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6	30	31					1
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
28	29	30	31				23	24	25	26	27	28	29



Between 1946 and 1968, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit headed the Indian delegation to the United Nations. In 1953, she became the first woman President of the United Nations General Assembly. Here she is addressing the General Assembly.

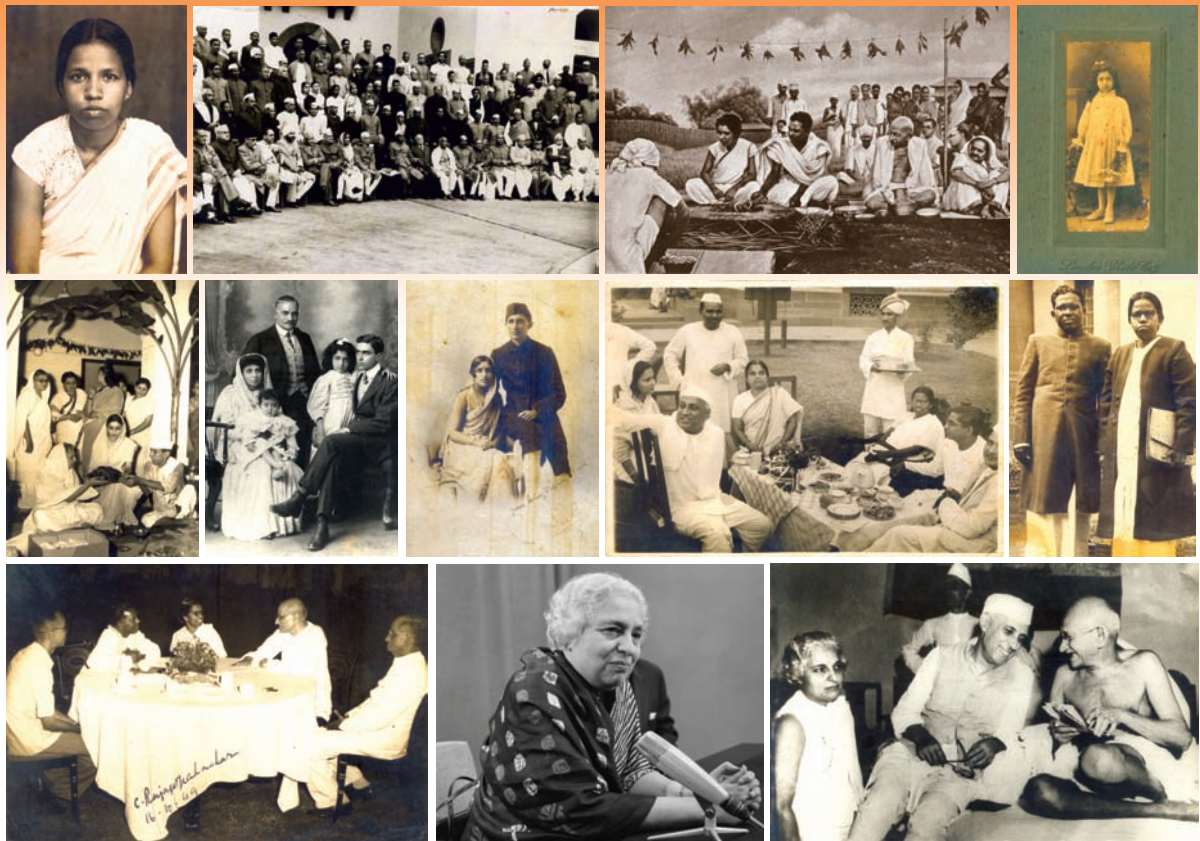
c. late 1960s

*Courtesy: Manjari Mehta*

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
30	31					1
2	3	4	5	6	●	7
9	10	11	12	13	14	☉ 15
16	17	18	19	20	21	☉ 22
23	24	25	26	27	28	☉ 29
	Christmas Eve	Christmas Day				

December 2018

November							January						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2	3				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
25	26	27	28	29	30		27	28	29	30	31		



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