3 Excavating hidden histories

Indian women in the early history of the United Nations

Khushi Singh Rathore

Introduction

As part of my ongoing doctoral research, I have often encountered instances where I have had to justify the need to study the life and experiences of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit as the first woman diplomat of independent India. The one question that is repeatedly asked of my work is, “why study Nehru’s sister?” Questions like this have made me realize that if a woman as powerful and prominent as Pandit could be sidelined in historical accounts of Indian foreign policy then who else has been forgotten? It is with this thought that I embarked upon the search for hidden histories of women envoys of India.

While there have been recent writings that have covered the history of women in international politics, the attention to the intellectual thoughts of women in international relations remains a new and relatively under-explored field of study.¹ These lacunae get further deepened when we shift the focus to the intellectual thought of women of colour in the making of world politics. This erasure is witnessed in the herculean task of locating women of colour in international history. Most historical accounts of the field are written to celebrate outcomes of deliberations and the end results. It is only when we turn our attention to the processes that entail the making of resolutions and the declarations that we find a clear picture of those who have been marginalized in the writings of international history. Hence, this chapter studies the deliberations in the first few years of the UN, where women representatives from India were amongst the main actors, to locate the contributions of Indian women in the early history of the UN.

Patricia Owens, writing on the history of women in international thought, succinctly argues against the usual impression in the history of IR and in disciplinary canons that women did not think seriously about international politics.² She counters this exclusion of women from the field of international politics by finding evidence against it in her study and analyses of texts of historical IR and disciplinary history. She chalks out a new research agenda for developing the history of women’s international thought by employing the tools of feminist historiography and archival research work to prove that women thought deeply about international politics. However, their thoughts and contributions have been repeatedly left out from the disciplinary writings amounting to their erasure from the field of study. It is because of this constant erasure that when asked “where are the women?,” the answer is more often than not an awkward silence.³

This chapter expands on the research agenda outlined by Owens to locate Indian women envoys in the early history of the UN. The women figures studied here are amongst the earliest envoys of an independent India. These women with astute political acumen were prominent nationalist leaders and were active participants in transnational women's and anti-colonial networks. The UN was not their first appearance internationally. However, until 1947, when they spoke internationally, it was against the colonizers and for the cause of Indian independence. Then they became diplomatic representatives of the first government of an independent India.

In the following sections of the chapter, we will revisit the international thought of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Hansa Mehta, Begum Shareefah Hamid Ali, and Lakshmi Menon by employing a close study of their inaugural appearances at the UN. I hope to impress upon the readers that though these women were spokespersons of their governments, they were nonetheless speaking their own minds. They believed in the causes they were chosen to represent and were personally invested in these issues. This interest was not a mere instance of chance but was a product of years of political experience. Thus, when these women envoys represented India at the UN, they were not merely taking orders from New Delhi. Rather, they were actively informing and influencing the Indian government with their knowledge and conversations at the UN. These individuals were no ordinary envoys. They had a special role in history. While they were implementing and influencing the making of the early Indian foreign policy, they were also significantly transforming international diplomacy itself, as writes Swapna Kona Nayudu in her work on Indian diplomatic history.⁴ The experiences of Pandit, Mehta, Ali, and Menon are discussed broadly around their work on issues of race, human rights, and women's rights. The archival study of primary sources include newspaper archives, autobiographies, and private papers of these women to briefly outline their world view and their hopes for the UN by bringing these figures of history to life.

The most remembered: Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit

We are the trustees of the future, architects of the new world. — Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.⁵

Pandit was informed that she was to lead the first delegation of an independent India to the UN shortly after her return to India from her lecture tour in the US and the successful advocacy of Indian independence outside the gates of the UN conference in San Francisco, where she was leading the unofficial delegation representing India before it had won its independence.⁶

The key issue to be raised by India at the General Assembly was of the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act, also called the "Ghetto Act," passed by the Union of South Africa. The legislation divided Natal into two areas, the controlled and the uncontrolled, disallowing the Indian residents to own property in the controlled "white areas" of Natal. To soften the blow of these restrictions, the South African government offered the Indian population a superficial appeasement in the form of "political representation." This was a hollow promise as the representatives to the Assembly and the Senate had to be white. The Natal

Indian Congress took strong objection to this racially discriminatory policy and approached both the Indian Government and also the newly constituted United Nations.⁷

The Indian interim government wanted to send a strong delegation to the UN where India was to register on the UN agenda its protest against the treatment of Indians in South Africa. Pandit was a suitable choice to lead this mission. Before she departed for the US, she had a private meeting with Gandhi, the Indian nationalist leader. He told Pandit why it was important for India to take up the South African issue at the UN. He told her that the task entrusted upon her delegation was not merely to come back victorious, but they had upon them the responsibility to set an example.⁸ Pandit too shared this vision of possibilities for a new world order that the UN could provide. In her own writings and various public addresses, she spoke of the hope of what the UN could be and how the great powers had to be careful with the conduct of their business because if the wrongs of the past are not corrected, the UN would be met with the same fate as its predecessor, the League of Nations.⁹

The Indian opposition to the South African legislation had put the question of racial discrimination right in front of the world assembly. It was a test for the great powers to prove their talks of a more equal world were not mere hollow promises. In Pandit's own words, "The disposal of this issue will be watched closely by the non-European peoples of the world who are an overwhelming majority of the human race."¹⁰ Pandit's close association with the African American leadership in the past and with organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) added to the already high levels of excitement across "coloured" networks. When Pandit announced the Indian intention to appeal against the South African legislation, she prefaced it with India's belief that, "the independence of all colonial peoples in the world is the vital concern of freedom loving peoples everywhere."¹¹ She warned that peace and freedom are indivisible and denial of freedom anywhere in the world undermines peace. The most likely outcomes in such an unjust scenario would be war and conflict. She clearly stated that India fiercely disapproved of the "Nazi doctrine of racialism wheresoever and in whatsoever form it may be practiced."¹² She told the assembly that the South African legislation was not just racially discriminatory but was also an absolute and "continuing outrage against the principles enshrined in the UN Charter."¹³ Thus, Pandit internationalized the issue by invoking the moral promises the Member States had made to the UN. James Reston of the New York Times reported that as these words were spoken:

[S]ome American delegates turned pale or bright red at the thought that the UN might have the power to discuss the plight of an oppressed minority anywhere in the world, say the Negroes [*sic*] in the US for instance.¹⁴

The debate on the South African issue was an important one as it was essentially rooted in the contradictions within the UN Charter.¹⁵ The conflict arose in the invocation of Article 1(3) by India, calling upon the members of the UN to preserve the spirit of the Charter. Article 1(3) states that the purpose of the UN is to:

[A]chieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.¹⁶

It was this spirit of the UN that Pandit invoked as she held South Africa and the UN accountable to the promises made in the Charter. The escape from accountability sought by South Africa lay in the Charter clause pertaining to state sovereignty. Article 2 (7) states that:

Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.¹⁷

The South African delegation selectively took shelter under the first part of the above-mentioned clause, thus making the claim of domestic jurisdiction rather unsatisfactory. However, both South Africa and Britain realized the powerful impact that Pandit's advocacy had on the audience, inside and outside the UN. They proposed that the matter be taken to the International Court of Justice to decide whether the South African legislation violated Article 2(7). This was unacceptable to India as Pandit called on the UN to censure the South African Government.¹⁸ Both Nehru and Gandhi had asked Pandit to be true to the spirit of the world assembly and the vision of a better future it stood for. Nehru had outlined the guidelines for their conduct in the international forum and emphasized upon India's total acceptance of the UN Charter and its utmost determination to make it a reality. The Charter was almost India's pledge to the world. These were not mere words for Pandit.¹⁹ Responding to South Africa, she insisted that India's concern on the issue raised was not on the question of legality. Rather, it was a matter of "dignity" and "self-respect." She fiercely articulated, "What the world needs is not more charters, not more committees to define and courts of justice to interpret, but a more willing implementation of the principles of the Charter by all governments."²⁰

Pandit called upon the "collective conscience" of the world which she believed was represented in the UN Assembly. She did not treat the issue as a mere bilateral disagreement but reminded the Member States of the commitment to solidarity on grounds of humanity and a shared responsibility to work towards a better and more humane world; hers was "an appeal of conscience."²¹ In her final response to the South African defense, Pandit spoke with passion emanating from the hope for a new and better future:

I want to carry the Assembly with me in these matters which, I submit, are common ground. If I do, as I must, unless the 54 nations assembled here place on the Charter a meaning and a significance far below what its words convey, what its spirit demands, and indeed what we have asked the world to

accept (...) then the Issue (...) rests with us, the nations of the world assembled, who have taken upon themselves the defense of the law of ethics and morality (...) We are the trustees of the future, architects of the new world (...) and it is only on the foundation of justice that we can erect a new world order (...) Mine is an appeal to conscience, to the conscience of the world which this Assembly is. I will say no more.²²

She was received with a thunderous applause and ovations from the audience.²³ It was no surprise that when the UN General Assembly went to vote at 2 a.m., the Indian Resolution was passed with two-third majority. This marked the first official victory of Pandit in the world of international diplomacy and more importantly, a victory of the spirit of the UN and of the coloured peoples across the world. Pandit called this an “Asian Victory.” When asked by the press how she felt, Pandit responded by expressing India’s gratefulness to its Asian and African friends through whose help this feat was made possible. She said that this was a success “shared by us all.”²⁴ For India, Pandit’s effective leadership had delivered the first victory of the Indian vision and idea of internationalism, rooted in anti-imperialism and in building a peaceful and more equal world. For the UN, it was a litmus test that was just passed. As an American newspaper reported, the Indian resolution would determine whether “the new organization will, in fact defend the rights of all racial groups and dependent peoples.”²⁵ This victory created ground for the world community to put principles to action and expand and codify human rights, which was also the next major discussion in the UN, where a crucial role was played by another woman envoy of India, Hansa Mehta.²⁶

The most remembered: Hansa Mehta

The Bill of Human Rights is the corner-stone of the United Nations, and we shall be poor builders indeed if we set it at naught. — Hansa Mehta.²⁷

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted in the year 1948. The declaration was a product of prolonged discussions and debates spanning over multiple meetings of the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). Mehta was a key voice in the conception of the declaration. She was also the only other woman member, along with Eleanor Roosevelt, and it was she who had nominated the latter for the chair-ship of the commission which was unanimously approved. After Pandit, Mehta is probably the most well-known early Indian woman representative to the UN. In 1947, she was appointed as the Indian delegate to the UNCHR. In her capacity as one of the drafters of the human rights declaration, through the various sessions of the commission and discussions and debates, Mehta worked relentlessly to make the Bill of Rights inclusive and potent. An ardent believer of an equal access to justice, in February, 1947, Mehta submitted a draft resolution on human rights that incorporated:

[R]ight to access the United Nations without risk of reprisal whenever there is an actual or theoretical infringement of human rights (...) the right to

equality without distinction of (...) nationality or political belief (...) right to education (...) right to property.²⁸

She viewed the declaration of human rights not as mere lip service but as a promise that the UN would do everything at its end to live up-to. Throughout her work in the UNCHR, Mehta insisted that the commission should not promise what it cannot deliver and the bill of rights should not be a mere declaration with no accountability on part of its signatories.²⁹ She wanted enforcement and not mere supervision of maintenance of basic standards of human rights by the Member States of the UN.³⁰ Mehta was aware of the need to look beyond the paradigm of state sovereignty. Not to say that she undermined it, but she was wary of the restrictiveness of a state-centered approach when it came to addressing human rights violations and the lack of an “implementation machinery” to enforce the Bill of Rights.³¹

Reporting to the Indian Government on the 1947 meeting of the Human Rights Commission in New York, Mehta expresses her disillusionment with the workings of the commission. She writes, “the impression I received (...) was that members evaded main issues and they talked round and round the subject without coming to a definite point.”³² She was also concerned about equal representation amongst the members of the commission and was wary of the representation on the sub committees, a process that she found arbitrary, a concern she says that was shared by some other members as well. She observed that “while some members were on more than one subcommittee, there were others who were not on a single committee.”³³ It was due to a concern that the same procedure might get duplicated in the subcommittee to draft the Bill of Rights, that Mehta and her advisors, Dr. Lankan Sundaram and Mr. Natarajan, submitted a resolution that proposed composition of a drafting subcommittee of 11 members to be formally moved by the Indian delegation in appropriate time. These members were to be, “US Chairman, ex-officio; China; Egypt; France; India; Iran; Lebanon; Panama; Philippines Republic; UK; USSR and Uruguay.”³⁴ Soon after, pending the discussion on the Bill of Rights the following day, Mehta also proposed a draft resolution to the General Assembly which was aimed at discussing “definite issues as raised in the draft resolution.” These were, “(1) The form the Bill of Rights should take; (2) its contents, i.e., categorising rights; (3) its application and most important of all (4) its implementation.”³⁵ Though Mehta had moved the resolution as a basis for further discussion, she was disappointed that the main points were lost in discussion on general issues, enunciating high principles and discussing social theories.³⁶ While the value of the aforementioned is not to be undermined, such observations of Mehta reflect her more direct and “practical” approach towards international negotiation. Her frustration was not so much with the discussions on values but on the delay that prolonged discussions without tangible outcomes caused in the advancement of proposed resolutions. Thus, reflecting a frustration with bureaucratic procedures that even Pandit alludes to in the recollections of her first interactions at the UN in her memoir.³⁷

Mehta’s main contention was concerning the effectiveness of the Bill of Rights. When Mrs. Roosevelt suggested that the Bill should be a “resolution in the form

of a general discussion,” Mehta disagreed stating that mere declaration would be unsatisfactory and meaningless unless there was an obligation on the Member States to adhere to it.³⁸ The absence of sanctions backing the resolution would fail to pursue the states in keeping their end of the promise even if they agreed to the resolution.³⁹ The solution to this problem, writes Mehta, lay in two parts, i.e., supervision and enforcement. Mehta repeatedly stressed upon the need for a machinery that would supervise the adherence of human rights and monitor instances of violation to hold the offending parties accountable.⁴⁰ Mehta saw a moral reason for India to take a stand in this matter. She wrote back home, asking the government to consider what attitude it wished to take upon the issue of the bill. She coaxed the Indian government further and as she acknowledged the complications of the question of implementation and the issue of national sovereignty, she signed off by subtly reminding the Indian government that it had recently raised the South African issue in the matter and now it was time for India to lead on this issue too.⁴¹

Mehta’s speech at the UN Commission on Human Rights further illustrates her vision of human rights. She impressed upon the members of the commission that the bill had to be a simple and forthright document that could be easily understood, accompanied by an adequate machinery ensuring its enforcement in the member countries.⁴² Mehta continued emphasizing on the need for a practical approach towards the issue, as was also witnessed in her insistence upon simple language.⁴³ The bill had to be comprehensible with a “precise legal and practical language” defining ‘minority’ and what counted as discrimination.⁴⁴ She insisted the proposed bill required “a proper and unequivocal definition of the relationships (...) to subsist inter-se the individual, the community, the state and international organization, is not attempted” by the commission and eventually by the UN.⁴⁵ She suggested the commission and the sub-commission to build a “comprehensive list of every country in the world, of legal and administrative measures which subtract from the right of human beings as guaranteed within the purview of the charter.”⁴⁶

Mehta continued her insistence upon implementation when the Drafting committee reconvened in Geneva (1947) to discuss the form of the Bill of Rights, whether it was to become a declaration only or convention only or both.⁴⁷ She told the committee that the form of the bill could be decided once the mechanism of implementation was agreed upon.⁴⁸ The bill, she said, should be both a declaration as well as a convention. It should be “an expression of faith; and also a programme of action to be carried out. It becomes a declaration as an expression of faith; it becomes a convention as a programme of action. Therefore, there should be no confusion.”⁴⁹ Agreeing with the Australian delegate, she further brought to the committee’s attention that the declaration should make no promises it did not intend to implement.⁵⁰ It is for this purpose of clarity and to avoid giving false hopes, the declaration would outline the general principles, whereas the convention would precisely define the rights guaranteed. It had to speak to every member of the public and should be comprehensible to all. At the third meeting of the commission, she continued to press upon the above concerns and proposed amendments to make the declaration concise and lucid while not being merely

reduced to its skeleton form. She said that it was imperative for the declaration to have a human appeal.⁵¹ Mehta also spoke favorably for continuing the provision of the League of Nations that would allow the UN to receive representations from individuals or groups in certain cases.⁵² She said that she understood the difficulties in dealing with representation from individuals as there is always the concern of reliability with such petitions. However, she said that it would not be difficult to weed out the unreliable pleas. The right to petition to the UN, Mehta asserted, should not be denied to the people in individual capacity as that would protect their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms.⁵³

When it came to implementation, the question was not merely of giving the declaration teeth in the form of a covenant but to also bring member countries on board. Being true to her place as representative of a third world country, Mehta cautioned the commission about the unsuitability of a singular covenant for the implementation of the declaration. The rationale, she wrote, was the inability of a single covenant to understand the ground realities and limitations of all member countries. It was for this reason that she proposed that the first covenant should not include economic and social rights within its ambit as for countries in dirt of resources, it would be impossible to meet the expenditure of guaranteeing these rights and that would keep them from signing the covenant.⁵⁴ Thus, she advised for the first covenant to be restricted to “a few important rights, i.e. rights to equality and liberty, so that it may be possible to get the largest measure of agreement.”⁵⁵

What one finds visible in Mehta’s iterations in the course of the discussion on the UDHR is her conception of the role of an international organization, such as the UN and of human rights and the need for those making decisions at the UN to look beyond the state and concerns of national sovereignty. The latter most importantly highlights her commitment to serving the people of the member countries and not the governments that were being representative. Mehta understood the pitfalls of blind faith in the State as she cautioned that sometimes it would be the State itself that would have to be fought to safeguard the rights of its people. It can be viewed as a result of her experience as a nationalist leader that she was not satisfied with anything short of precise definition and robust mechanisms to uphold human rights. This spirit is in cognizance with the idealism enshrined in the Indian vision of the UN in its formative years.

The forgotten envoys: Begum Shareefah Hamid Ali and Lakshmi Menon

Equal Rights for Women are Not Enough. — Begum Shareefah Hamid Ali.⁵⁶

Ali and Menon are the lesser known women envoys of India. Both were prominent Indian nationalist leaders. At the UN, Ali was a founding member of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 1947. While discussing the aim of the commission with other members, Ali brought along her beliefs on the issue of women’s rights that were situated in her experiences as an active leader of the Indian suffragette movement. Ali highlighted the need to define the meaning

of women's rights by insisting that women should not halt at merely asking for rights "equal" to those of men.⁵⁷ She asserted that the realization of women's rights as conceived within such a framework of equality would be inadequate as "there were still countries in the world where men had negligible rights."⁵⁸ Ali was supported in her injunctions by the American representative to the commission, Dorothy Kenyon. The many weaknesses of the term "equality" were discussed upon as all "enslaved men" would be perfectly equal under slavery. Thus, making it imperative that the language of women's rights is rooted in the idea of human rights and not merely "equal rights." Ali prodded women to strive for "real rights" instead.⁵⁹ This was an insightful observation by her as it was reflective of the varied realities of women across the world. What 'equality' would mean for one section of women would not be applicable to another. By bringing the question of the substance of these rights to the center of the debate, Ali built ground for conversation between women of various backgrounds.

Ali's advocacy of women's rights was positioned in her prolonged association with the Indian nationalist struggle and suffrage movement. In July 1933, along with Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, also Indian nationalist leaders, Ali represented Indian women before the Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reforms of the British Parliament. The memoranda submitted demanded the recognition of equality of the sexes on the Declaration of Fundamental Rights and made alternative franchise proposals pending the introduction of universal franchise in India.⁶⁰ During her visit, she spoke at a meeting convened by the London Committee of the Women's India Association, openly criticizing the British approach towards women's franchise as "timid, halting and inadequate."⁶¹ Further on, Ali said that women did not seek a competition for power with men. That conceptualization of power and rights, in her view, was limiting in nature. She continuously laid stress upon the idea that women instead want "a voice in social legislation" that allows them to perform their civic duties. She added, "Indian women would continue to agitate as long as the franchise was not enlarged."⁶²

Thereafter, Ali participated in the Third International Conference for India, in Geneva in November, 1933. The only Indian Muslim woman representative, Ali spoke at length about the strength of the women's movement in India. She also emphasized upon the attention that the Indian women's movement laid upon social reforms and its efforts towards securing franchise for women, that would enable them to serve the country.⁶³ Her argument for women's rights was situated in the language of the ability to serve the country. However, it was at the International Women's Conference at Istanbul in 1935 that one sees the fiery internationalist approach of Ali where she warned the Western feminists of committing the mistake of making "arrogant assumption of superiority or patronage on the part of Europe or America" as this would do nothing but alienate the fellow women in Asia and Africa.⁶⁴ The main points of discussion at the conference revolved around questions of political rights, economic and legal rights, equal moral standards and establishment of world peace.⁶⁵ These are a few important insights into Ali's ideas of transnational solidarity that enable us to understand what she brought to the table when she took charge as the Indian delegate at the

UN Commission on Women. Unfortunately, despite her pioneering role in the discussions on women's rights and as the only Muslim woman delegate from India, Ali remains one of the least written about women figures in Indian diplomacy; thus amounting her erasure not just as a woman, but also as a Muslim woman. A more detailed study of her role in the UN could make significant contributions to understanding the place of minority representatives of India and, representatives from the global South, in the making of the UN. This is imperative as the post-colonial states like India were not homogenous blocks and while the idea of a coloured representative at the UN is easier to work around, the exploration of the voice of minorities within the third world countries in the making of the new world warrants deeper consideration.

Lakshmi Menon was a teacher, lawyer, activist, politician, and an Indian envoy to the UN. In 1948, she was appointed as a member of the alternative Indian delegation to the UN. Thereafter, she headed the UN Section on the Status of Women and Children (1949–1950) and in 1952 was appointed as a Deputy Minister in the Ministry of External Affairs of India.

In 1948, while Pandit headed the Indian delegation to the UN General Assembly meeting, Menon was appointed as a member of the alternative delegation. The initial engagements of independent India at the UN were always characterized with strong women envoys. Menon was amongst these important female figures and she left an imprint at her very first appearance at the UN. In 1948, Menon was a noticeable figure in Indian politics and women's movement. She was also the editor of *Roshni*, a quarterly journal of the All India Women's Conference, and her writing and oratorical skills were already established and well known.⁶⁶ As already illustrated in the experiences of Mehta, India played a crucial role within the UN in the discussions and drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Menon too was on the Third committee on the Draft Declaration of Human Rights.⁶⁷ Menon's most remembered contribution in the early years though is her time as the Chief of the Committee on the Status of Women at the UN.

At her inaugural appearance at the UN, Menon was looked at by the delegates and the press with great interest.⁶⁸ While the appointment of a woman to the alternative Indian delegation to the UN came to many as "interesting," the effectiveness of Menon as a capable envoy won much praise as she spoke on the Indian stance on the continued South African debate at the UN and in the discussions on the human rights declaration.⁶⁹ She reminded the committee that, "different countries have different beliefs and political systems. What they share though are the same ideals of social justice and freedom" and this had to be kept in mind while drafting the declaration, thus emphasizing upon the need for mutual understanding in the landscape of international cooperation.⁷⁰

As the Chief of the UN Commission on the Status of women (1949–50), Menon was committed towards the upliftment of women and was very vocal about her passion for the cause.⁷¹ When asked how the status of women would be improved in India and the world, she laid utmost attention upon the value of education in the course of this pursuit. She said in an interview, "When women have a chance to learn, their homes will improve. When their homes will improve, their nations

will improve.”⁷² This emphasis of Menon on education, though restrictive, can be seen in the context of the nationalist struggle and political work as social upliftment. While attending the UN conferences, she also participated in various public meetings discussing advocacy of education and peace and upliftment of the status of women.⁷³ Many of her contemporaries in these discussions were other women envoys to the UN like, Minerva Bernardino (Dominion Republic), Ana Figueroa (Chile), Amalia Castillo Ledón (Mexico), Dorothy Kenyon (US), and Ruth Tomlinson (UK), amongst others.

Menon believed that if “real democracy and freedom was to be attained,” then inequalities had to be removed from the world.⁷⁴ She was also an ardent advocate of the correlation of peace and women’s struggle for equality. Speaking at a public meeting in June, 1950, she said, “When women gain equal status with men in their nations, they will use power to promote peaceful settlements (...), women are eager promoters of peace.”⁷⁵ In this, she presaged the UNSCR on women, peace, and security by half a century. She was not though, it appears, recognized as such by the lobbyists for that resolution. However, she warned that peace should not be the end goal envisaged for the UN. It would provide a fertile ground where the “greater ideals of freedom, justice and love would be realized and that is the final aim of the United Nations.”⁷⁶

Conclusion

Pandit, Mehta, Ali, and Menon are four of the many women representatives who were part of the making of the UN.⁷⁷ A quick glance at their experiences at the UN brings to the forefront lost international thought of these women and their vision for the most important international organization of the twenty-first century. This is a crucial entry point into a larger exploration of the place of women actors in international politics. It is too long overdue to bridge the gap between the transnational women’s networks and third world internationalism in the interwar period and its post-world war successors, allowing for a closer look at how values of suffragette movements and anti-colonial struggle found expression through the women of the third world in the formation of the new world of international politics. This chapter thus, provides a teaser of what lies hidden in the archives and how once the focus is changed from institutions to the people who build that institution, a new history of the UN would come to surface. A history written from the margins but which echoes the aspirations of equality, justice, and peace that the world organization was supposed to stand for. This history will not only reintroduce us to the possibilities of a more united world, but would also outline a new disciplinary inquiry that does not leave the women behind while chronicling the workings of world politics.

Notes

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