



Vol. 850
NOT FOR SALE

MEHERBAI TATA

CHAMPION OF WOMEN'S CAUSES





TITLE

MEHERBAI TATA

CHAMPION OF WOMEN'S CAUSES

**'SHE DIED AS SHE HAD LIVED WORKING NOBLY
FOR THE CAUSE OF WOMEN AND FOR THE COUNTRY
WHICH SHE LOVED AND SERVED SO WELL.'**

(Taken from the epitaph on Lady Meherbai Tata's tombstone at Brookwood Cemetery, England.)

Author

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MEHERBAI TATA

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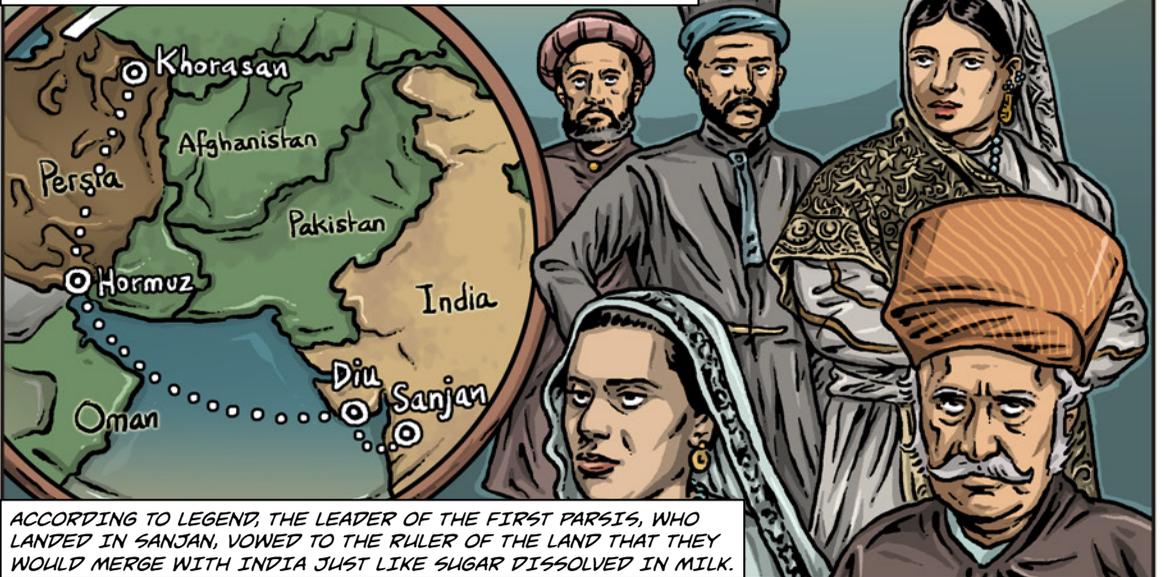


INDIA, IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY, WAS A LAND OF STRUGGLE. WITH BRITISH RULE DRAINING THE COUNTRY'S RESOURCES AND INDIA'S OWN INTERNAL STRIFE, THERE WERE FEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ITS PEOPLE.



HOWEVER, THERE WAS ONE SMALL COMMUNITY THAT MANAGED TO ADAPT AND FASHION A LIFE THAT WAS PROGRESSIVE AND FLOURISHING — THE PARSIS.

MUCH LIKE THEIR ANCESTORS, WHO HAD FLED PERSIA TO SETTLE DOWN IN INDIA AND HAD MINGLED WITH INDIANS LIKE SUGAR IN MILK, THE PARSIS, IN THE LATE 1800S, CONNECTED WITH INDIANS AND BRITISH ALIKE AND LIVED PEACEFULLY WITH BOTH.



ACCORDING TO LEGEND, THE LEADER OF THE FIRST PARSIS, WHO LANDED IN SANJAN, VOWED TO THE RULER OF THE LAND THAT THEY WOULD MERGE WITH INDIA JUST LIKE SUGAR DISSOLVED IN MILK.

THIS MAP IS A GENERALIZED ILLUSTRATION ONLY, AND IS NOT INTENDED TO BE USED FOR REFERENCE PURPOSES. THE REPRESENTATION OF POLITICAL BOUNDARIES AND THE NAMES OF GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE POSITION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES OF RECOGNITION, SOVEREIGNTY, JURISDICTION.

LADY MEHERBAI TATA WAS ONE SUCH PARSII WOMAN WHO LIVED A LIFE OF WEALTH AND PRIVILEGE. BUT INSTEAD OF LIVING IN AN IVORY TOWER, CUT OFF FROM THE REALITY THAT WAS INDIA, SHE USED HER BLESSINGS TO EMPOWER AND UPLIFT PEOPLE. WITH REMARKABLE FORESIGHT, WISDOM AND COMPASSION, SHE WORKED HARD TO GIVE INDIAN WOMEN THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE IN SOCIETY.

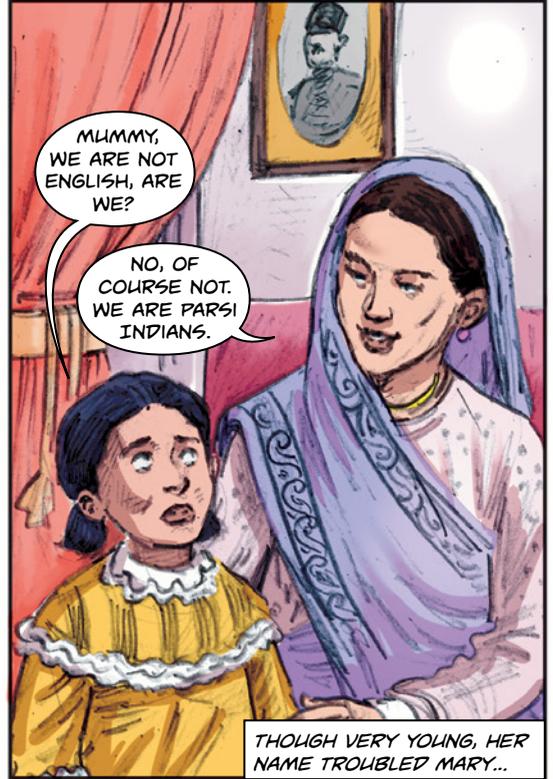


MEHERBAI WAS BORN ON 10 OCTOBER, 1879. HER FATHER, HORMUSJI JEHANGIR BHABHA, WAS EDUCATED IN ENGLAND AND WAS A LIBERAL THINKER AND EDUCATOR WHO WENT ON TO BECOME THE INSPECTOR GENERAL OF EDUCATION OF MYSORE STATE*. HORMUSJI NAMED HIS BABY GIRL, MARY.



*NOW A PART OF PRESENT-DAY KARNATAKA

WHEN MARY WAS THREE, THE FAMILY MOVED TO BANGALORE*. SHE WAS EDUCATED AT HOME IN GUJARATI AND ENGLISH AND THEN SENT TO BISHOP COTTON SCHOOL. WHEN SHE WAS FIVE —



...UNTIL —



*NOW BENGALURU

*MEHRI IS A PERSIAN WORD MEANING KIND AND COMPASSIONATE.



I AM INDIAN, MY NAME SHOULD BE INDIAN TOO.

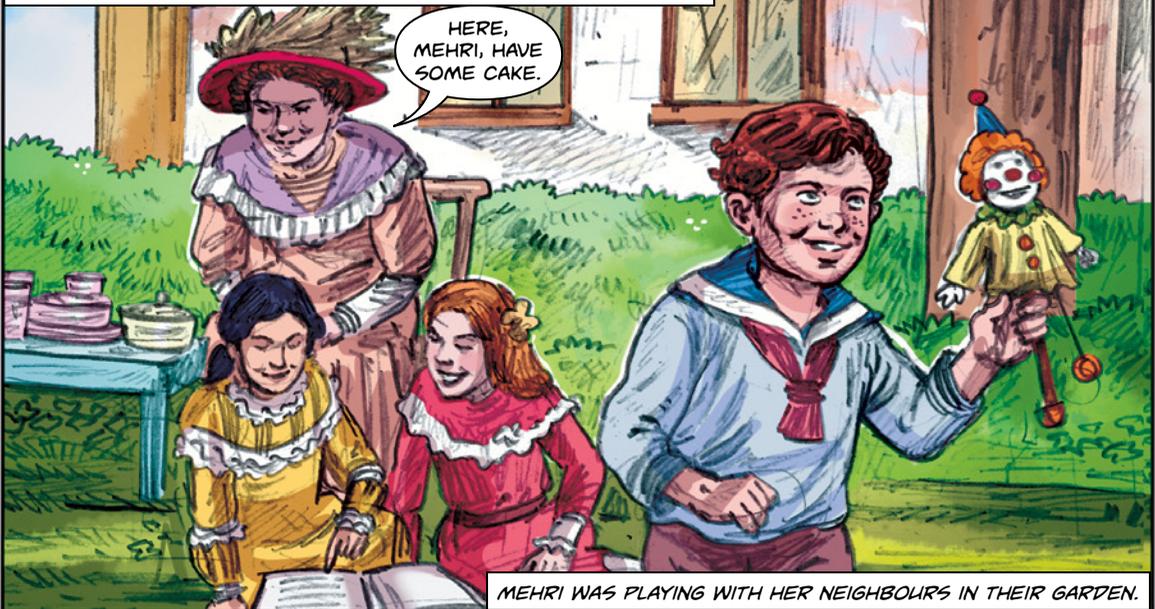
HER FATHER, SECRETLY PROUD, GAVE IN AND A DETERMINED MARY CAME TO BE KNOWN AS MEHRI, OR MEHER BHABHA.



AROUND THIS TIME, THE FAMILY MOVED TO MYSORE*. GROWING UP IN A CHARMED CIRCLE OF EUROPEANS AND INFLUENTIAL INDIANS ASSOCIATED WITH THE ROYAL FAMILY OF MYSORE, MEHRI HAD A CHILDHOOD UNLIKE OTHER GIRLS OF THE TIME.

SHE WAS BEING EDUCATED, ALLOWED TO PLAY GAMES AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, TO THINK FREELY.

MEHRI WAS A SENSITIVE CHILD WHO OBSERVED THINGS AROUND HER AND FORMED HER OPINIONS INDEPENDENTLY. EVEN SEEMINGLY TRIVIAL INCIDENTS HAD A GREAT INFLUENCE ON HER. ONE DAY, WHEN SHE WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD —

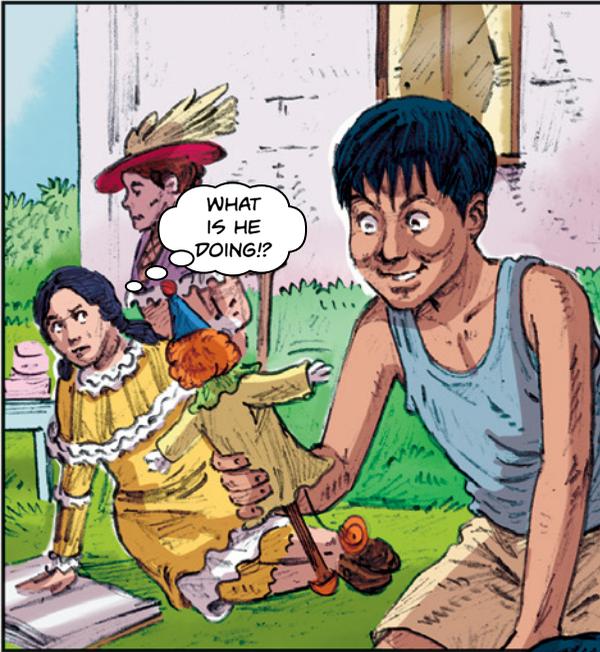


HERE, MEHRI, HAVE SOME CAKE.

MEHRI WAS PLAYING WITH HER NEIGHBOURS IN THEIR GARDEN.

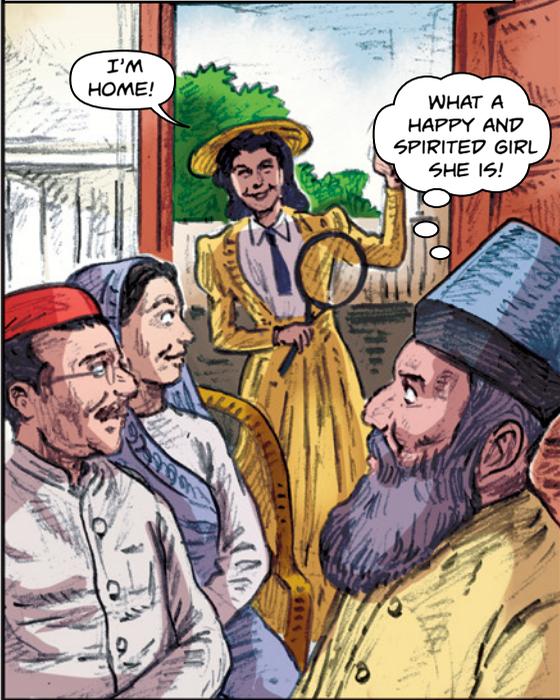
*NOW MYSURU







THE NOTED INDUSTRIALIST, JAMSETJI TATA, WAS A FRIEND OF HER FATHER'S AND HAD BEEN VISITING THEM FROM TIME TO TIME.



AS TIME WENT BY, JAMSETJI'S AFFECTION FOR MEHRI GREW. WHEN SHE WAS ABOUT 18 —



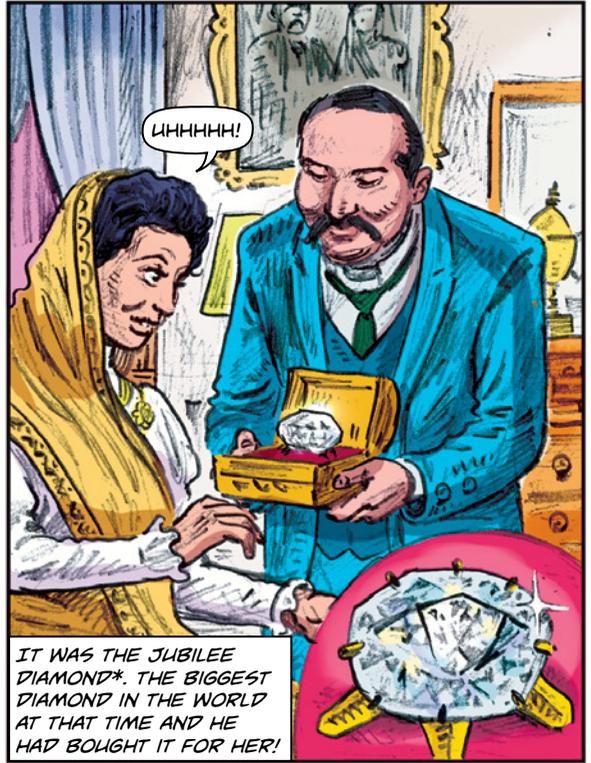
ON 14 FEBRUARY, 1898, 19-YEAR-OLD MEHRI BHABHA WAS MARRIED TO DORABJI TATA, 20 YEARS HER SENIOR.



THE TWENTY-YEAR AGE GAP WAS NOT UNCOMMON FOR THOSE TIMES. FOR MEHRI AND DORAB, IT HARDLY SEEMED TO MATTER, SO COMPLEMENTARY WERE THEY TO EACH OTHER.



THEY WERE BOTH AVID TRAVELLERS, SPORTS PEOPLE AND VERY KIND AT HEART.



*THE 245.35 CARAT DIAMOND WAS SO NAMED TO HONOUR THE 60TH YEAR JUBILEE OF QUEEN VICTORIA'S CORONATION.

MEHRI HAD NEVER FORGOTTEN THE CHILDHOOD INCIDENT WITH MUNUSWAMY, AND NOW SHE SHARED IT WITH DORAB.

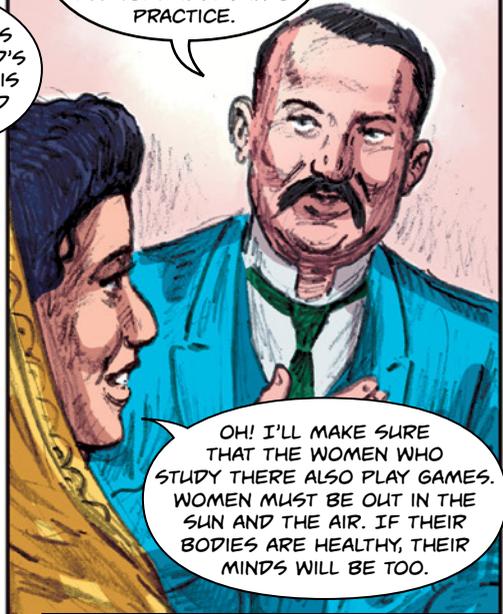


I THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO EDUCATE WOMEN.

AN EDUCATED WOMAN CONTRIBUTES GREATLY TO HER CHILD'S LIFE. WHEN THE SOIL IS PREPARED, THE SEED WILL GROW.

I'M SURE MY TWO CHILDHOOD FRIENDS GREW INTO KIND, REMARKABLE PEOPLE BECAUSE THEY HAD SUCH A WISE MOTHER.

THERE IS A SMALL SCHOOL NEARBY. WHY DON'T YOU TAKE IT OVER AND CONVERT IT INTO A MODEL SCHOOL FOR WOMEN? YOU COULD PUT ALL YOUR IDEAS INTO PRACTICE.



OH! I'LL MAKE SURE THAT THE WOMEN WHO STUDY THERE ALSO PLAY GAMES. WOMEN MUST BE OUT IN THE SUN AND THE AIR. IF THEIR BODIES ARE HEALTHY, THEIR MINDS WILL BE TOO.

THIS WAS A TIME WHEN WOMEN HARDLY EVER LEFT THEIR HOMES. SO WHAT MEHRI WAS SUGGESTING WAS REVOLUTIONARY.

SCHOOLS LEAVE NO SCOPE FOR ACTUAL MENTAL AND PHYSICAL GROWTH.

I DON'T WANT THE SCHOOL TO JUST PREPARE GIRLS FOR EXAMINATIONS. IT MUST BUILD THEIR CHARACTERS, INSTIL IN THEM A SPIRIT OF SERVICE. MAKE THEM THINKERS AND LEADERS INSTEAD OF ROTE LEARNERS.



MEHRI HIRED AN EXPERT FROM ENGLAND TO STUDY THE GROUND REALITY OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN INDIA.

THE SITUATION IS TERRIBLE. NO ONE WANTS TO LET THEIR GIRLS GO OUT OF THE HOUSE. EVEN PRIMARY EDUCATION IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR MOST.



HMM...THAT MEANS THAT THE MEN NEED TO BE EDUCATED FIRST. WE MUST CONVINCE THEM THAT IT IS BENEFICIAL TO THEM IF WOMEN STUDY.

BY EARLY 1904, MEHRI'S FATHER-IN-LAW JAMSETJI WAS FALLING ILL VERY OFTEN.



HERE, HAVE YOUR MEDICINES.

HE LISTENS ONLY TO YOU.

JAMSETJI WAS FINALLY TAKEN TO BAD NAUHEIM IN GERMANY FOR TREATMENT AND REST. BUT BY MAY THAT YEAR, IT WAS CLEAR THAT HE WAS NOT GOING TO SURVIVE.



HE'S LOSING CONSCIOUSNESS. WE MUST SEND FOR HIS FAMILY.

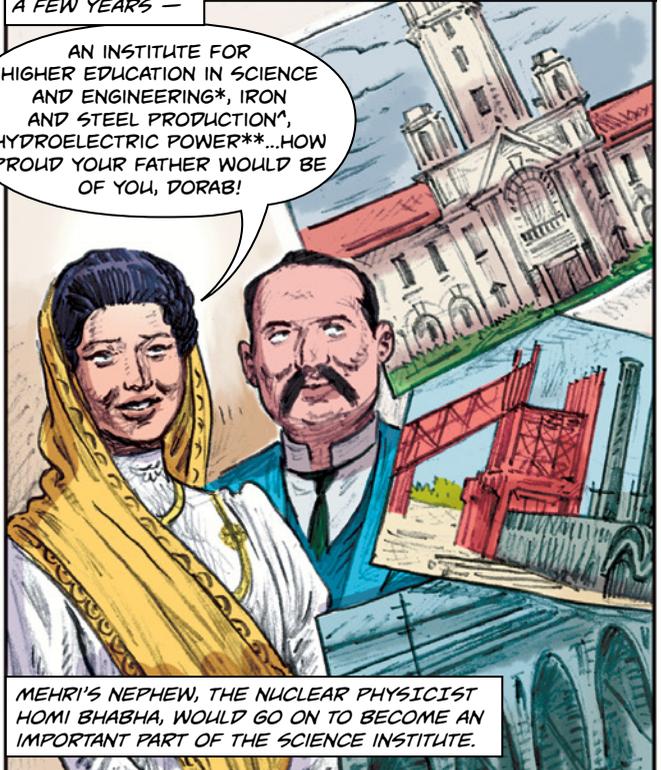
IT TOOK DORAB AND MEHRI A FEW DAYS TO REACH HIM. JAMSETJI KEPT FLITTING IN AND OUT OF CONSCIOUSNESS BUT HE FOUGHT TO STAY ALIVE UNTIL —

WITH JAMSETJI GONE, IT FELL TO HIS SONS TO REALISE ALL HIS DREAMS. DORAB THREW HIMSELF INTO WORK AND WITHIN A FEW YEARS —



OH...WHERE WERE YOU? WHERE WERE YOU?

AN INSTITUTE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING*, IRON AND STEEL PRODUCTION*, HYDROELECTRIC POWER**...HOW PROUD YOUR FATHER WOULD BE OF YOU, DORAB!



MEHRI'S NEPHEW, THE NUCLEAR PHYSICIST HOMI BHABHA, WOULD GO ON TO BECOME AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE SCIENCE INSTITUTE.

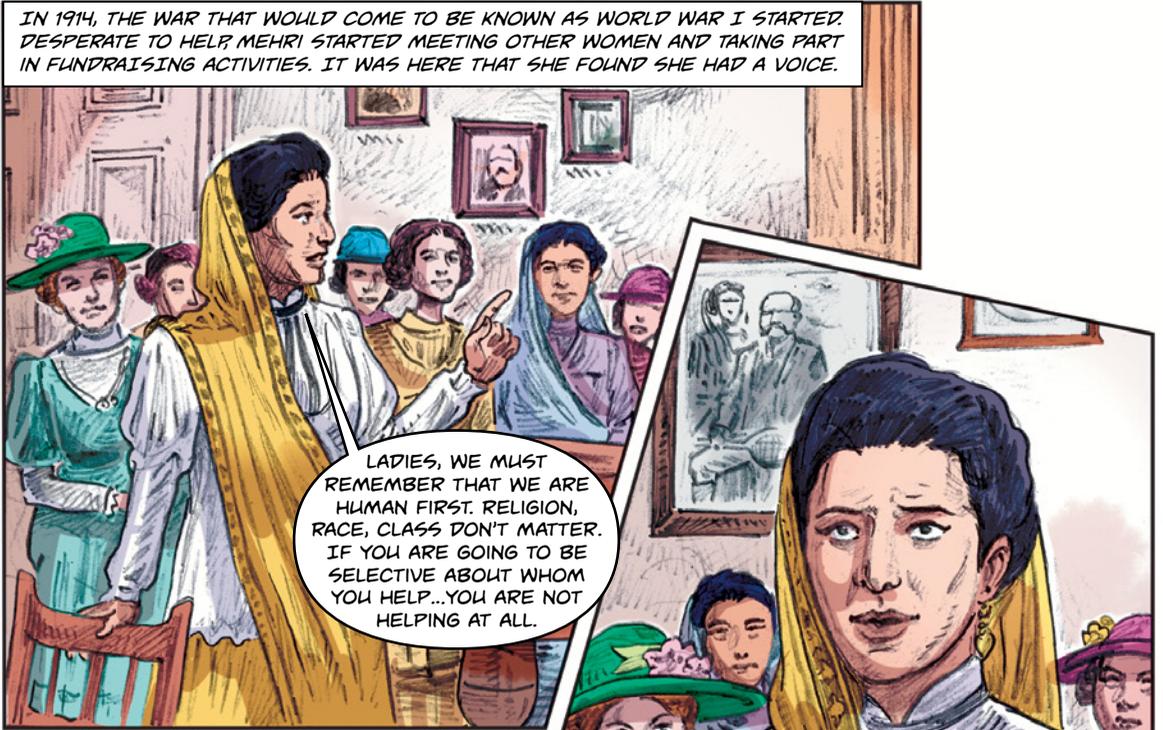
HOMI BHABHA'S BROTHER, JAMSHED, ESTABLISHED THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR PERFORMING ARTS IN BOMBAY**.

THESE WORDS TO MEHRI, FILLED WITH LOVE FOR HER, WERE JAMSETJI'S LAST. HE LOST CONSCIOUSNESS SOON AFTER AND PASSED AWAY THE NEXT MORNING.

*INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE, BENGALURU
*TATA IRON AND STEEL COMPANY, NOW TATA STEEL

**NOW CALLED TATA POWER
**NOW MUMBAI

IN 1914, THE WAR THAT WOULD COME TO BE KNOWN AS WORLD WAR I STARTED. DESPERATE TO HELP MEHRI STARTED MEETING OTHER WOMEN AND TAKING PART IN FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES. IT WAS HERE THAT SHE FOUND SHE HAD A VOICE.



LADIES, WE MUST REMEMBER THAT WE ARE HUMAN FIRST. RELIGION, RACE, CLASS DON'T MATTER. IF YOU ARE GOING TO BE SELECTIVE ABOUT WHOM YOU HELP...YOU ARE NOT HELPING AT ALL.



WHAT IS THE POINT OF OUR EDUCATION, IF WE ARE GOING TO BE NARROW-MINDED? WHAT USE IS OUR PRIVILEGE IF WE CAN'T USE IT FOR GOOD?

BY 1917, MEHRI WAS COMPLETELY INVOLVED IN TRYING TO MAKE LIFE BETTER FOR THE LESS FORTUNATE.



GANDHIJI HAS BEEN TALKING ABOUT THE PLIGHT OF INDIANS WHO ARE GOING TO OTHER COUNTRIES AS INDENTURED LABOUR.

YES, HE HAS GIVEN THE BRITISH AN ULTIMATUM THAT THE PRACTICE MUST STOP.



BY THEN, SLAVERY HAD BEEN ABOLISHED. INSTEAD, POOR INDIANS WERE BEING TAKEN TO FOREIGN LANDS BY THE SHIPLOAD FOR HARD MANUAL LABOUR.



THEY WERE PROMISED MONEY FOR THEIR WORK BUT WERE HARDLY GIVEN ANY AND MADE TO LIVE IN SUB-HUMAN CONDITIONS. MANY DIED AND MOST WERE DENIED A WAY TO COME BACK.



WOMEN SHOULD GET TOGETHER AND PRESSURISE THE BRITISH.

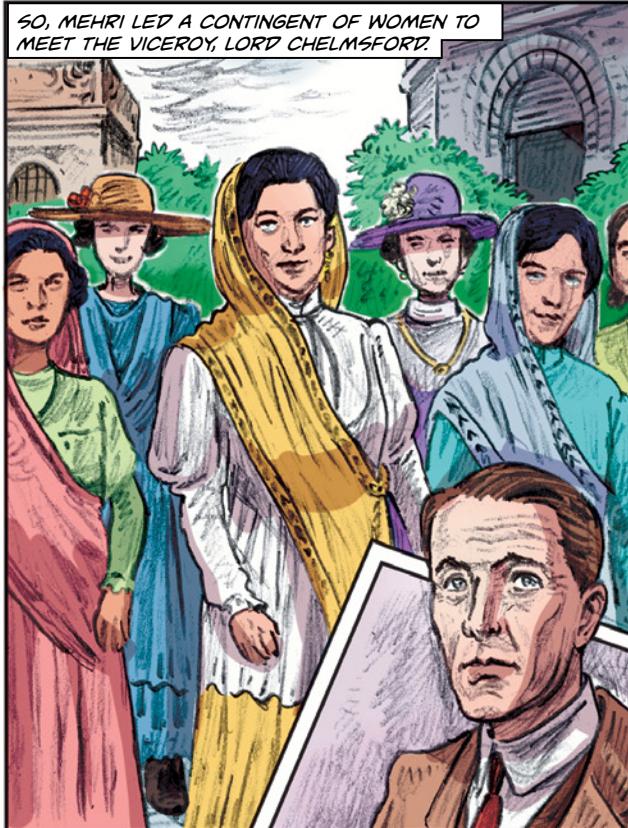
LET'S TAKE A DELEGATION TO THE VICEROY! YOU LEAD IT, MEHERBAI.

I'M SURE YOU CAN CONVINCE HIM.

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT BUT HE CAN'T REFUSE TO HEAR US OUT.

SO, MEHRI LED A CONTINGENT OF WOMEN TO MEET THE VICEROY, LORD CHELMSFORD.

SHE GAVE SUCH A POWERFUL AND MOVING SPEECH THAT THE VICEROY GAVE THEM A POSITIVE RESPONSE.



THE PRACTICE WAS ABOLISHED BY THE JULY 1917 DEADLINE THAT GANDHIJI HAD GIVEN. MEHRI'S DELEGATION WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT INDIAN WOMEN USED THEIR VOICE AS A GROUP.

HER WAR EFFORTS CONTINUED TOO AND IN 1919, A YEAR AFTER THE WAR ENDED —

I HEREBY PRONOUNCE YOU, LADY MEHERBAI TATA, C.B.E.



MEHRI WAS NAMED COMMANDER OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE BY KING GEORGE V.

LATER, THAT SAME YEAR —

YOU KNOW, AFTER THE WAR, IT'S LIKE ALL OF US HAVE GONE BACK TO OUR USUAL LIVES. THEN, THERE WAS SUCH A SPIRIT OF COMMITMENT AND OF DOING GOOD.



YES, ALMOST LIKE A SISTERHOOD.

EXACTLY! WE WERE ALL IN IT TOGETHER AND WE WORKED AS ONE, WITHOUT CONSIDERING OUR DIFFERENCES. WHY SHOULD WE STOP BECAUSE THERE IS NO WAR?



THIS THOUGHT LED THEM TO ESTABLISH THE WOMEN'S COUNCIL OF BOMBAY PRESIDENCY. MEHRI WAS ITS FOUNDER MEMBER AND LATER PRESIDENT.

IT IS TIME THAT THE WOMEN OF BOMBAY COME TOGETHER AS ONE. IT FALLS UPON US, THE FORTUNATE FEW, TO LIFT OUR LESS PRIVILEGED SISTERS OUT OF THEIR MISERY AND GIVE THEM DIGNITY AND RESPECT IN SOCIETY.



HOWEVER, WE MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO STEP ON THE TOES OF OTHERS WHO ARE ALREADY DOING GOOD WORK. THEREFORE, WE MUST WORK WITH A SPIRIT OF COOPERATION RATHER THAN ONE-UPMANSHIP.

BECAUSE OF THIS GUIDING PRINCIPLE, OTHER ORGANISATIONS LIKE THE RED CROSS AND GIRL GUIDES BEGAN COLLABORATING WITH THEM.

ONE OF THEIR FIRST PROJECTS WAS A RESCUE HOME FOR DESTITUTE WOMEN AND CHILDREN.



WHAT A WONDERFUL WAY TO SUPPORT WOMEN!

YES, ANY WOMAN WHO NEEDS HELP CAN SHELTER HERE. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO SHE IS. HERE, THEY ALL LIVE AS ONE.

THE WORK THAT THEY DID, INSPIRED THE SETTING UP OF MANY SUCH WOMEN'S COUNCILS IN OTHER REGIONS OF INDIA.

BY 1923, FORTY COUNCILS HAD BEEN FORMED. THIS GAVE MEHRI ANOTHER IDEA. ONE AFTERNOON IN ENGLAND —



I WAS WONDERING IF WE SHOULD HAVE AN ORGANISATION UNDER WHICH ALL THESE DIFFERENT COUNCILS COULD COME TOGETHER. THEN WE ALL KNOW WHAT THE OTHER IS DOING AND CAN HELP EACH OTHER.

HER CONSTANT TRAVELLING AND EXPOSURE TO THE REST OF THE WORLD HAD MADE MEHRI START THINKING IN INTERNATIONAL TERMS.

AS A NATIONAL WOMEN'S ORGANISATION, WE WILL BE BETTER EQUIPPED TO PRESENT OUR CASE TO THE WORLD.

IN BETWEEN ALL THIS, SHE ALSO FOUND TIME TO CONTINUE WITH HER DUTIES AS HOSTESS FOR THE STEADILY GROWING TATA EMPIRE...



WE ARE A NATION OF 175 MILLION WOMEN. THE WORLD CANNOT IGNORE US ANYMORE, AND NEITHER SHOULD WE IGNORE THE WORLD!

THIS LED TO THE FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN. MEHRI WAS PART OF THE COMMITTEE THAT DRAFTED ITS CONSTITUTION. SHE MADE SURE THAT EVERY RELIGION, CASTE AND CLASS OF INDIA WAS REPRESENTED IN THE COUNCIL.

...AND SHE NEVER GAVE UP HER PASSION FOR ADVENTURE AND SPORT.



IN 1912, WHEN THE ZEPPELIN VIKTORIA LUISE WAS COMMISSIONED, SHE BECAME THE FIRST INDIAN WOMAN TO FLY IN IT!

SHE WAS ALSO AMONG THE FIRST INDIAN WOMEN TO DRIVE HER OWN CAR AND BE PART OF THE OLYMPIC DELEGATION TO PARIS IN 1924!



LADY MEHERBAI TATA WILL CUT AN IMPRESSIVE FIGURE WHEN SHE PLAYS WORLD CLASS TENNIS IN INDIAN GARB.

YES, BUT I AM NOT SURE THE RULES ALLOW THAT ACTUALLY.

THERE WAS SOME DEBATE REGARDING HER DRESS -

RUBBISH! IF IT'S NOT BOTHERING ME, WHY SHOULD IT BOTHER ANYONE ELSE? I LOVE THE SAREE AND I'M PROUD TO BE WEARING IT. DO I HAVE TO GIVE UP BEING AN INDIAN TO PLAY A WESTERN SPORT?



NO ONE KNOWS FOR SURE WHAT HAPPENED BUT MEHRI DID NOT PLAY IN THE OLYMPICS.

SHE DID, HOWEVER, CONTINUE TO PLAY TENNIS, WINNING MATCHES IN BADEN-BADEN AND KISSINGEN, ALL THE WHILE DRESSED IN HER SAREE. SHE ALSO WON THE TRIPLE CROWN THRICE IN THE WESTERN INDIA TENNIS TOURNAMENT.

IN NOVEMBER THAT SAME YEAR, THERE CAME A DISTURBING TELEGRAM -



MEHRI, TISCO* IS IN TROUBLE. THERE IS NO MONEY TO PAY THE EMPLOYEES.

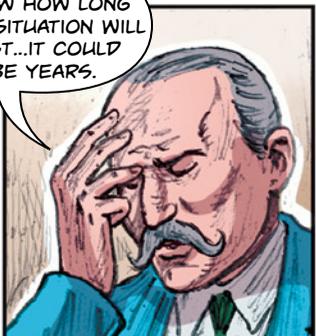
WHAT? HOW CAN THAT BE?



ARE THEY GOING TO LOSE THEIR JOBS? THEY HAVE FAMILIES, HOW WILL THEY SURVIVE?

NO, WE CAN'T LET THEM SUFFER FOR NO FAULT OF THEIRS.

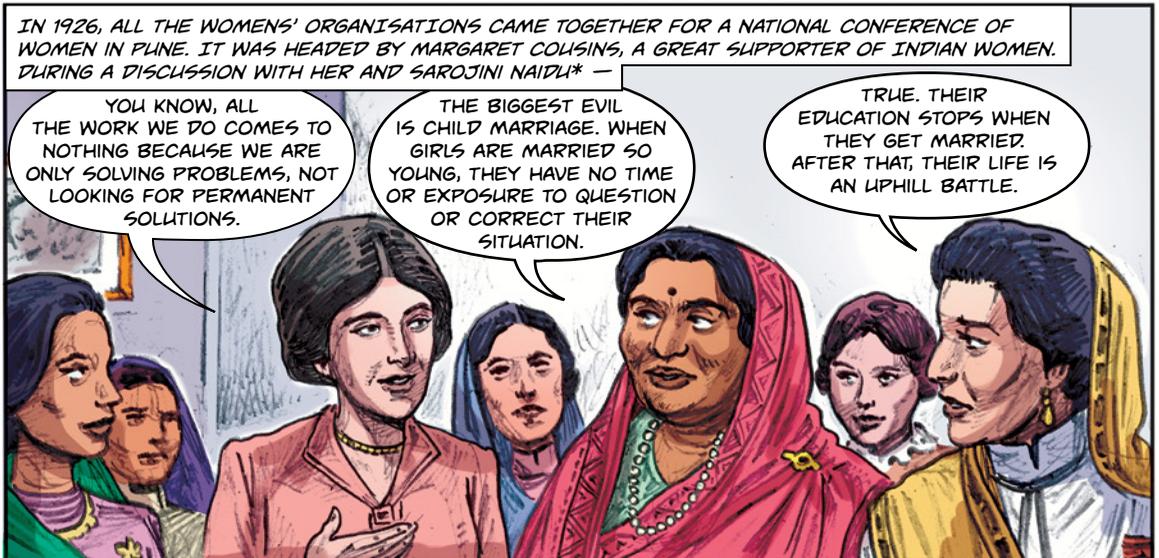
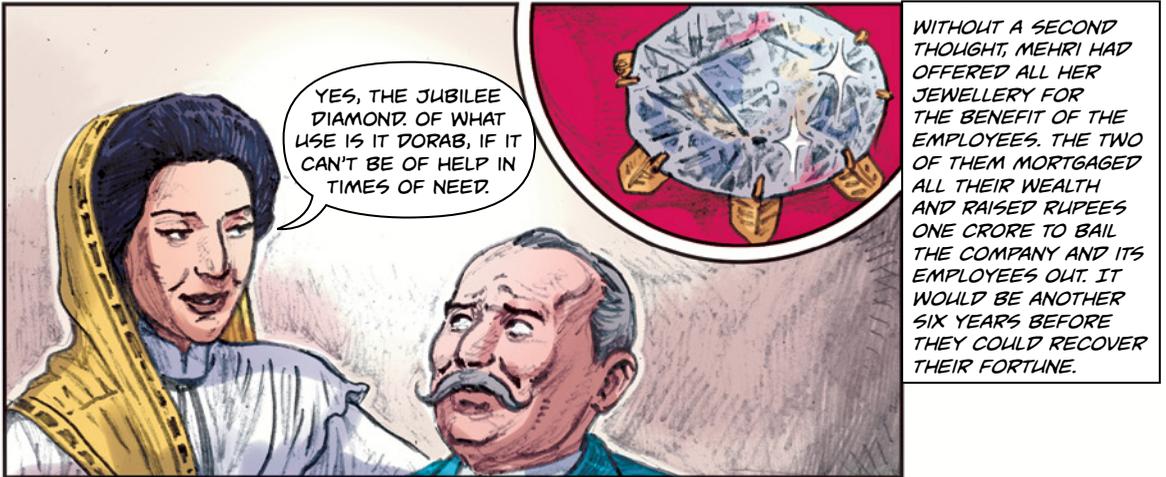
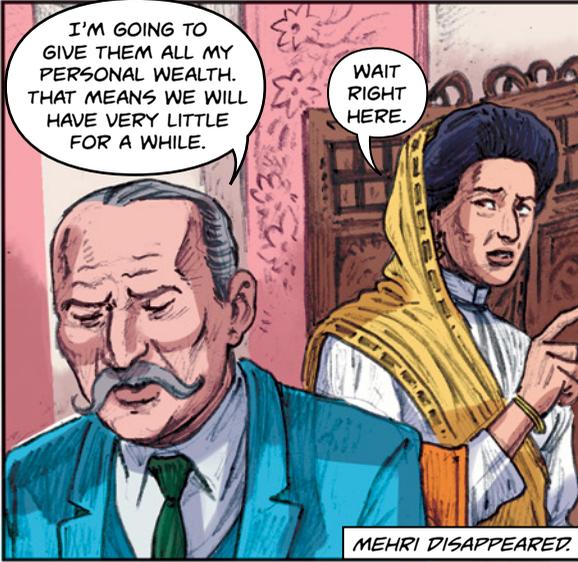
I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG THIS SITUATION WILL LAST...IT COULD BE YEARS.



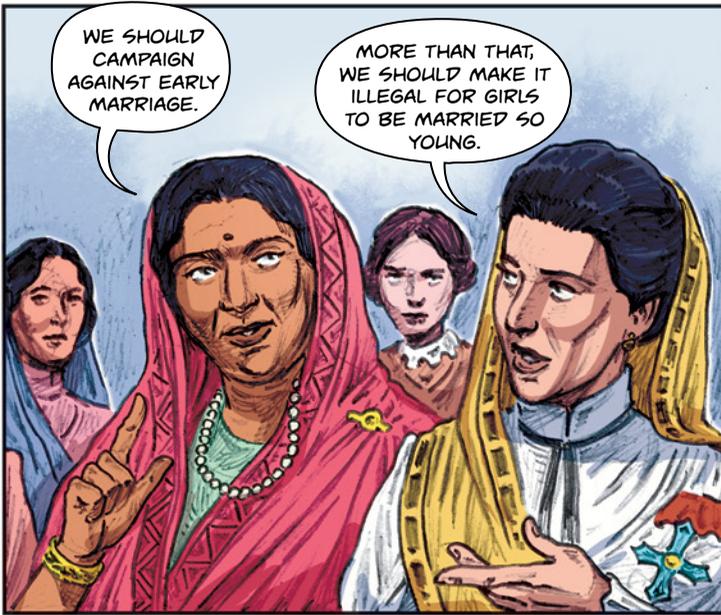
WE MUST DO SOMETHING!

THE HARDSHIPS OF THE WAR, AN EARTHQUAKE IN JAPAN, COUPLED WITH THE RISING PRICES OF IRON AND DORAB'S EXTENSIVE PLANS FOR EXPANSION HAD RESULTED IN EMPTY COFFERS.

*TATA IRON AND STEEL COMPANY (TISCO) IN JAMSHEDPUR, NOW TATA STEEL



*SAROJINI NAIDU WAS A FREEDOM FIGHTER AND ONE OF INDIA'S FIRST WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS.



WE SHOULD CAMPAIGN AGAINST EARLY MARRIAGE.

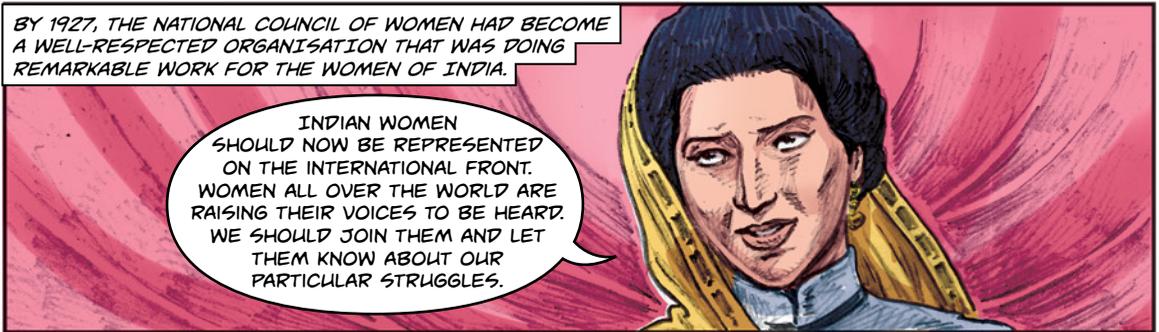
MORE THAN THAT, WE SHOULD MAKE IT ILLEGAL FOR GIRLS TO BE MARRIED SO YOUNG.



YES, THERE SHOULD BE A LAW. THE MINIMUM AGE FOR MARRIAGE MUST BE RAISED BY LAW.

THE CONFERENCE PASSED A RESOLUTION THAT THE MINIMUM AGE MUST BE FIXED BY LEGISLATION. THIS LED TO THE FRAMING OF THE SARDA BILL*.

BY 1927, THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN HAD BECOME A WELL-RESPECTED ORGANISATION THAT WAS DOING REMARKABLE WORK FOR THE WOMEN OF INDIA.



INDIAN WOMEN SHOULD NOW BE REPRESENTED ON THE INTERNATIONAL FRONT. WOMEN ALL OVER THE WORLD ARE RAISING THEIR VOICES TO BE HEARD. WE SHOULD JOIN THEM AND LET THEM KNOW ABOUT OUR PARTICULAR STRUGGLES.

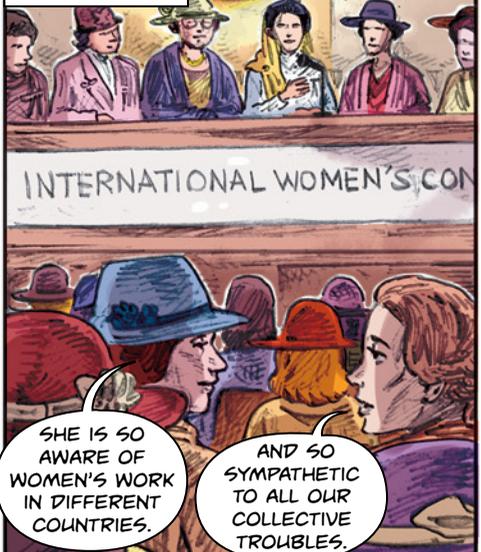
WITH THAT IN MIND, MEHRI LED A CONTINGENT OF INDIAN WOMEN TO THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE IN GENEVA. THERE —



WHO IS THAT WOMAN? SHE IS SO DIGNIFIED AND GRACEFUL.

THAT IS LADY TATA. I HEAR SHE IS AS INTELLIGENT AS SHE IS BEAUTIFUL.

ALL OF MEHRI'S TRAVELLING AND EXPOSURE TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD CAME IN HANDY WHEN SHE REPRESENTED INDIA AT THE CONFERENCE —

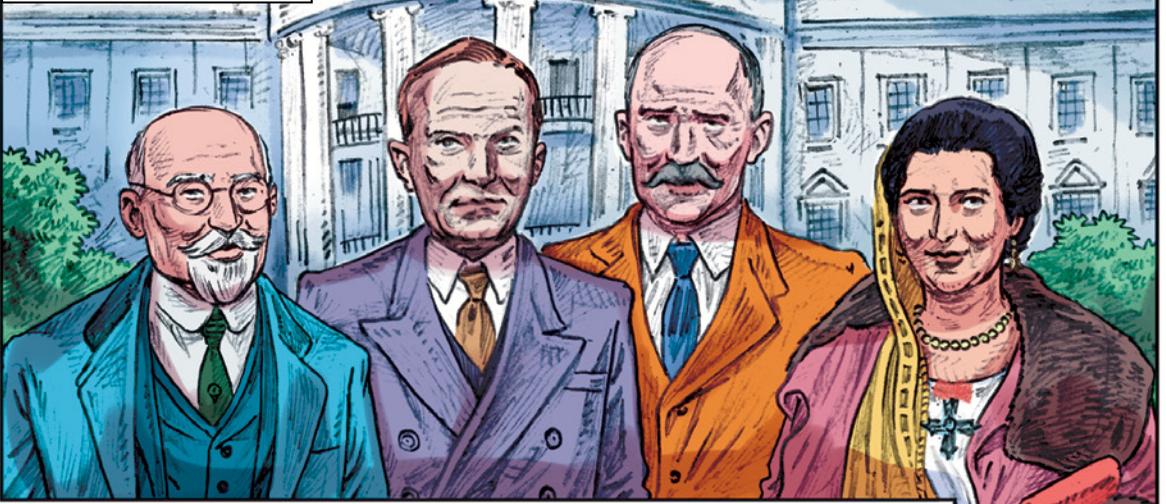


SHE IS SO AWARE OF WOMEN'S WORK IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES.

AND SO SYMPATHETIC TO ALL OUR COLLECTIVE TROUBLES.

*THE SARDA BILL WAS INTRODUCED BY RAI SAHIB HARBILAS SARDA IN 1927. IT WAS ORIGINALLY CALLED THE HINDU CHILD MARRIAGE BILL.

1927 WAS A YEAR OF TRAVEL FOR MEHRI. BESIDES GENEVA, SHE TRAVELLED WITH DORAB TO THE UNITED STATES. THEY WERE HONOURED EVERYWHERE THEY WENT, AND EVEN INVITED TO THE WHITE HOUSE TO MEET PRESIDENT COOLIDGE.



MEHRI WAS ALSO ASKED TO TALK ABOUT INDIA AT BATTLE CREEK COLLEGE*. SHE USED THIS OPPORTUNITY TO TALK ABOUT INDIAN WOMEN AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SARDA BILL.



I HOPE THE WOMEN OF INDIA WILL ONE DAY RECEIVE AS MUCH FREEDOM AND EDUCATION AS YOU. THE TWO GREATEST NEEDS IN INDIA TODAY ARE THE NEED TO EDUCATE MEN ABOUT THE NEED TO EDUCATE WOMEN AND THEN TO EDUCATE BOTH MEN AND WOMEN IN THE SCIENCE OF BRINGING UP CHILDREN PROPERLY AND BUILDING THEIR CHARACTER.

WE ARE FIGHTING THESE DAYS TO CONVERT A BILL INTO A LAW THAT WILL FIX A MINIMUM AGE FOR GIRLS TO GET MARRIED.

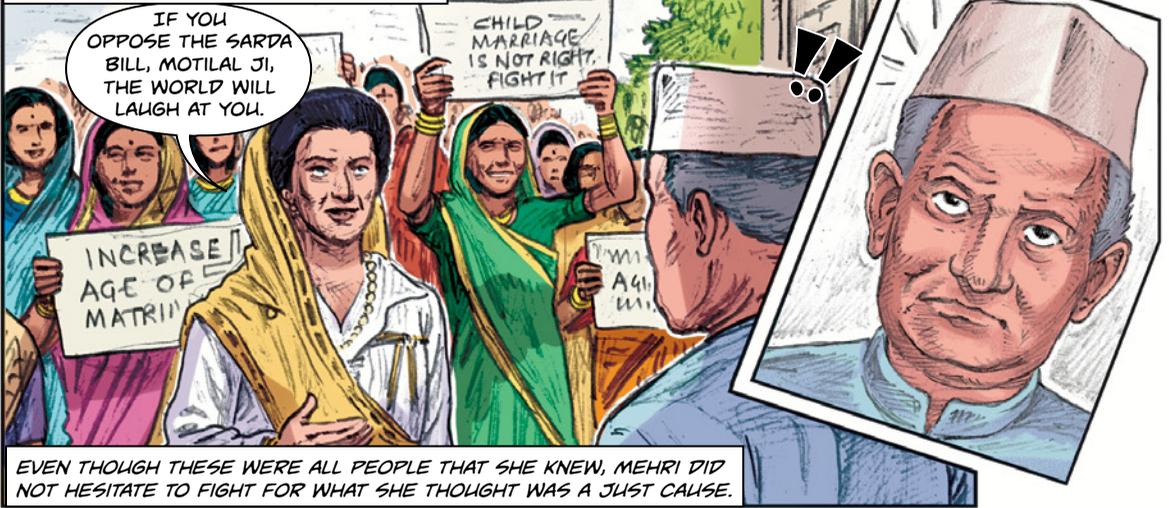
NO COUNTRY EXCEPT INDIA HAS SUCH A POPULATION OF CHILD WIDOWS WHO ARE NOT ALLOWED TO REMARRY. SOME OF THE WIDOWED ARE EVEN BABIES OF 8 TO 10 MONTHS.



IF WOMEN GET MARRIED LATER, THEY WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO GET EDUCATED. THEY WILL HAVE MORE CONTROL OVER THEIR OWN LIVES AND CAN INSTIL THE SAME VALUES IN FUTURE GENERATIONS.

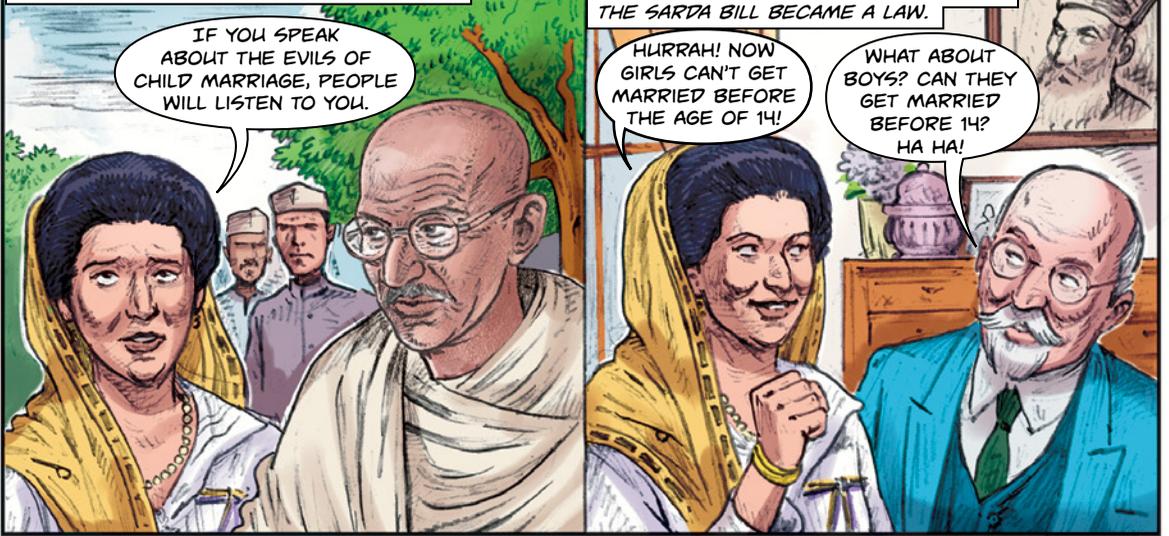
*NOW ANDREWS UNIVERSITY

BACK HOME IN INDIA, MEHRI THREW HERSELF FULLY INTO SUPPORTING THE SARDA BILL*. THEY MET POLITICIANS LIKE MOTILAL NEHRU TO ASK FOR SUPPORT AND STOOD OUTSIDE THEIR OFFICES WITH PLACARDS!

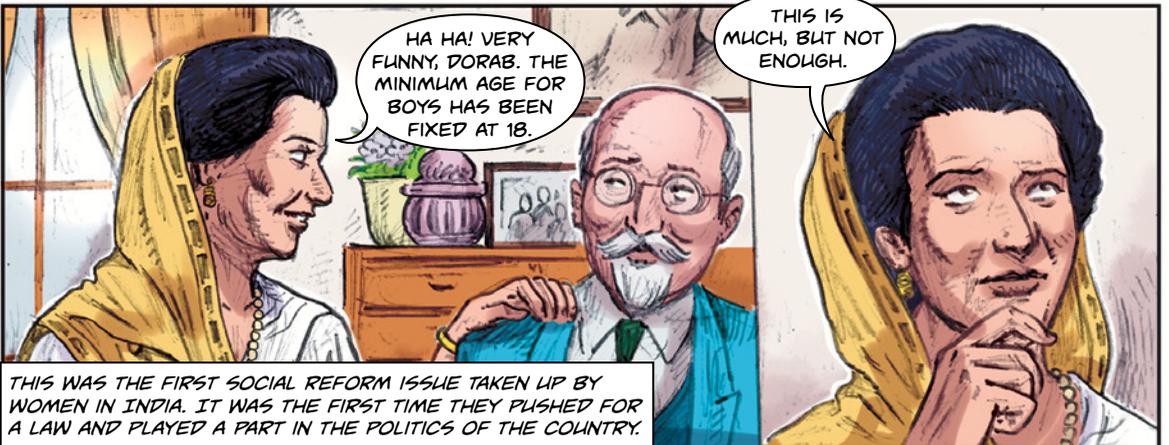


EVEN THOUGH THESE WERE ALL PEOPLE THAT SHE KNEW, MEHRI DID NOT HESITATE TO FIGHT FOR WHAT SHE THOUGHT WAS A JUST CAUSE.

THEY ALSO APPEALED TO MAHATMA GANDHI.



EVENTUALLY, THEY SUCCEEDED. IN 1929, THE SARDA BILL BECAME A LAW.

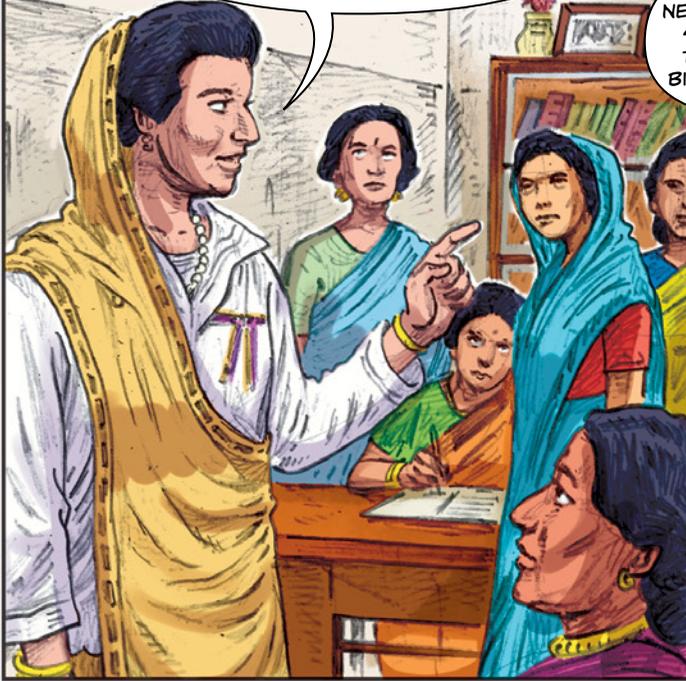


THIS WAS THE FIRST SOCIAL REFORM ISSUE TAKEN UP BY WOMEN IN INDIA. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THEY PUSHED FOR A LAW AND PLAYED A PART IN THE POLITICS OF THE COUNTRY.

*OFFICIALLY KNOWN AS THE CHILD MARRIAGE RESTRAINT ACT

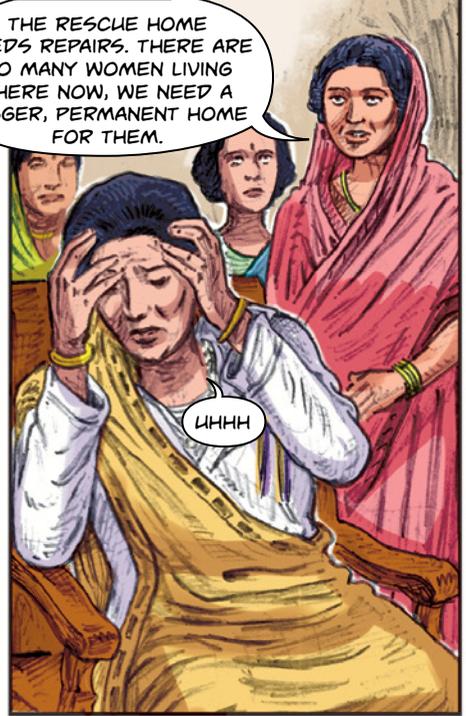
MEHRI WAS ALREADY THINKING AHEAD —

NOW WE SHOULD HAVE MORE SCHOOLS FOR GIRLS SO THAT THEY ALL GET THE EDUCATION THEY DESERVE. WE WILL ALSO NEED WOMEN TEACHERS AND TRAINING COLLEGES FOR WOMEN. LET'S GET TO WORK!



BY 1929, MEHRI WAS THE PRESIDENT OF THE WOMEN'S COUNCIL. FULLY CHARGED AND READY TO DO A MILLION THINGS AT ONCE, HER LIFE SUDDENLY TOOK A STRANGE TURN. SHE BEGAN TO FEEL UNWELL.

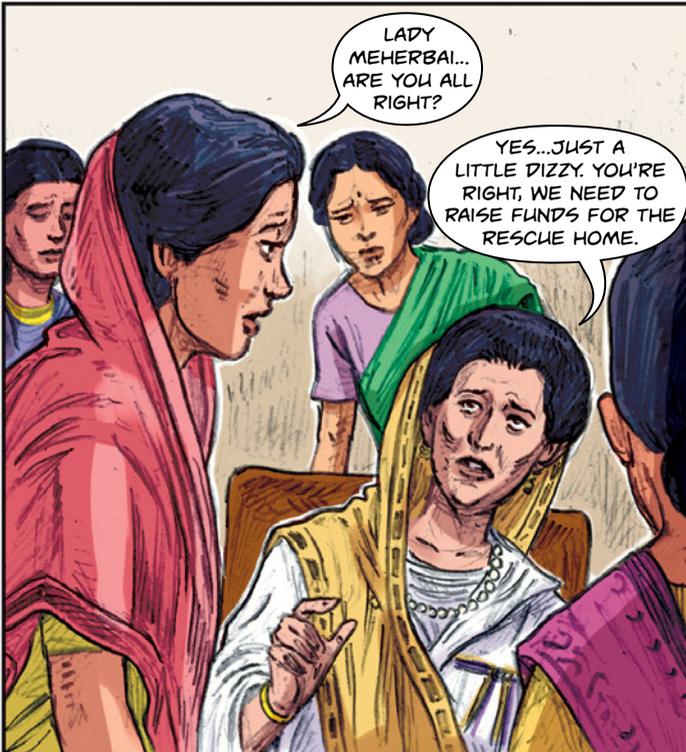
THE RESCUE HOME NEEDS REPAIRS. THERE ARE SO MANY WOMEN LIVING THERE NOW, WE NEED A BIGGER, PERMANENT HOME FOR THEM.



UHHH

LADY MEHERBAI... ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

YES...JUST A LITTLE DIZZY. YOU'RE RIGHT, WE NEED TO RAISE FUNDS FOR THE RESCUE HOME.

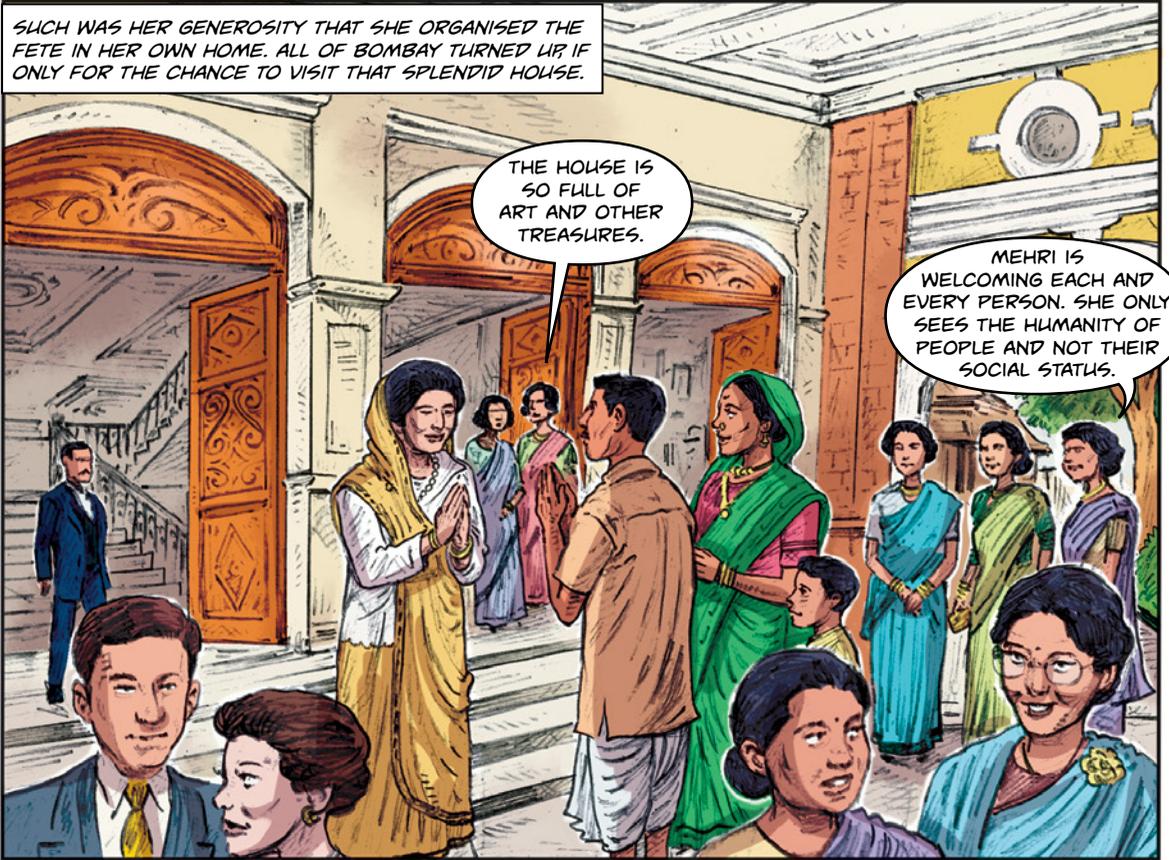


IGNORING THE FACT THAT SHE WAS NOT FEELING WELL, MEHRI PUSHED ON.

I CAN ORGANISE A FETE. I'M SURE PEOPLE WILL SPEND MONEY TO HAVE A GOOD TIME AND WE CAN USE THE MONEY TO REPAIR THE RESCUE HOME.



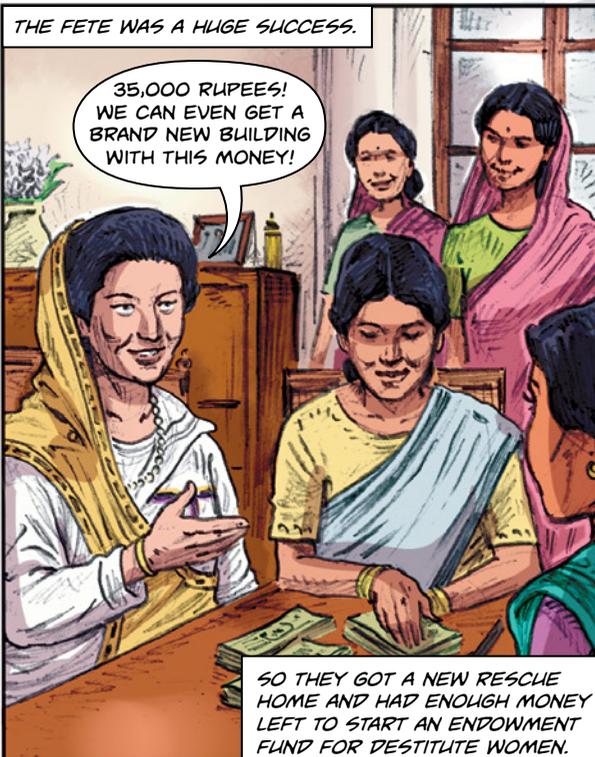
SUCH WAS HER GENEROSITY THAT SHE ORGANISED THE FETE IN HER OWN HOME. ALL OF BOMBAY TURNED UP, IF ONLY FOR THE CHANCE TO VISIT THAT SPLENDID HOUSE.



THE HOUSE IS SO FULL OF ART AND OTHER TREASURES.

MEHRI IS WELCOMING EACH AND EVERY PERSON. SHE ONLY SEES THE HUMANITY OF PEOPLE AND NOT THEIR SOCIAL STATUS.

THE FETE WAS A HUGE SUCCESS.



35,000 RUPEES! WE CAN EVEN GET A BRAND NEW BUILDING WITH THIS MONEY!

SO THEY GOT A NEW RESCUE HOME AND HAD ENOUGH MONEY LEFT TO START AN ENDOWMENT FUND FOR DESTITUTE WOMEN.

THAT SAME YEAR, BOMBAY WAS SHAKEN BY A SERIES OF RIOTS. THE WOMEN'S COUNCIL RUSHED TO HELP



THERE ARE AREAS WHERE NO FOOD IS AVAILABLE. FAMILIES ARE GOING HUNGRY.

IT'S TERRIBLE. THE HOSPITALS ARE FULL, MEDICAL SUPPLIES ARE RUNNING OUT.

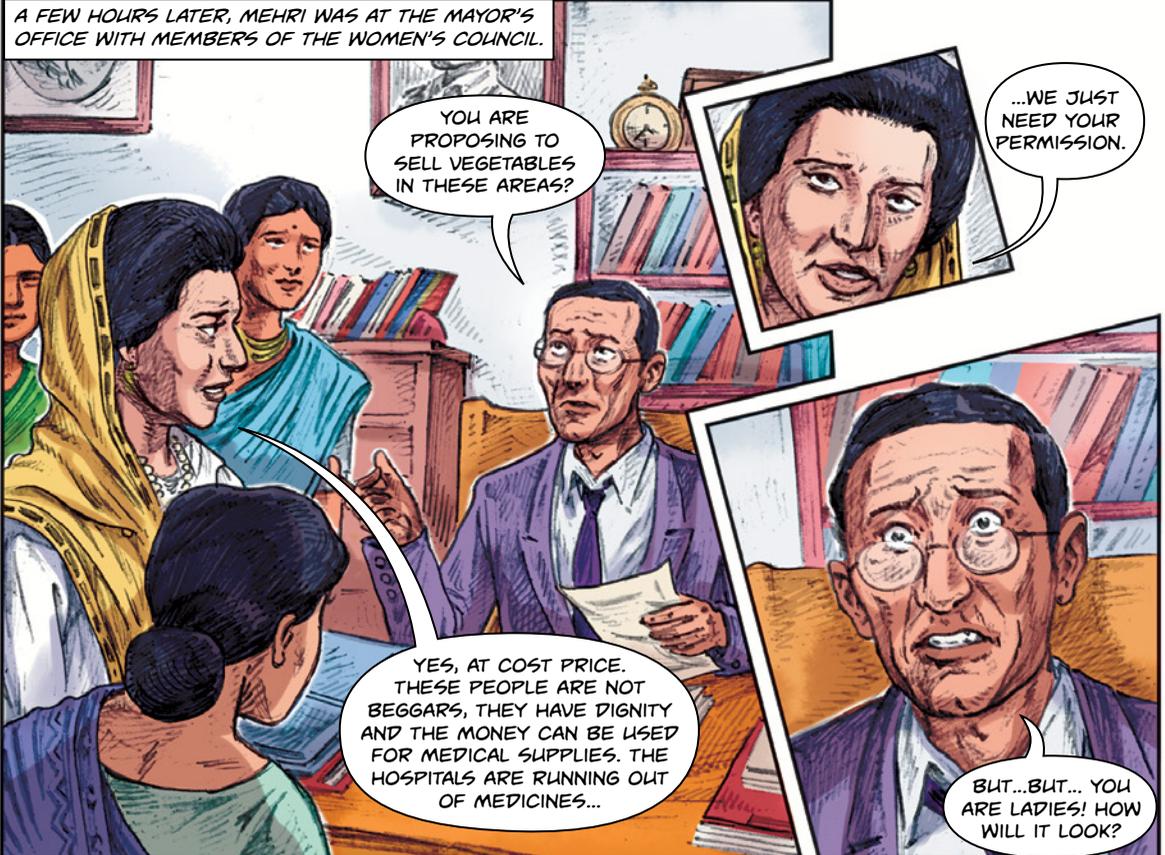


HERE, MEDICINES, TOWELS... WHATEVER I COULD FIND IN MY HOUSE. THE REST WE CAN BUY. I WILL PAY FOR THEM IF NEEDED.



BUT WHAT ABOUT FOOD? HOW DO WE GET THAT TO THE PEOPLE?

A FEW HOURS LATER, MEHRI WAS AT THE MAYOR'S OFFICE WITH MEMBERS OF THE WOMEN'S COUNCIL.

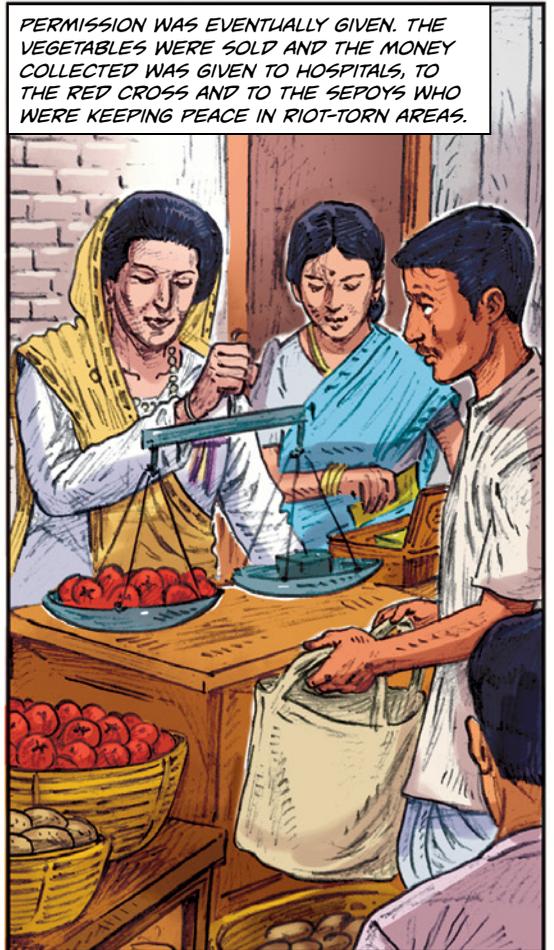
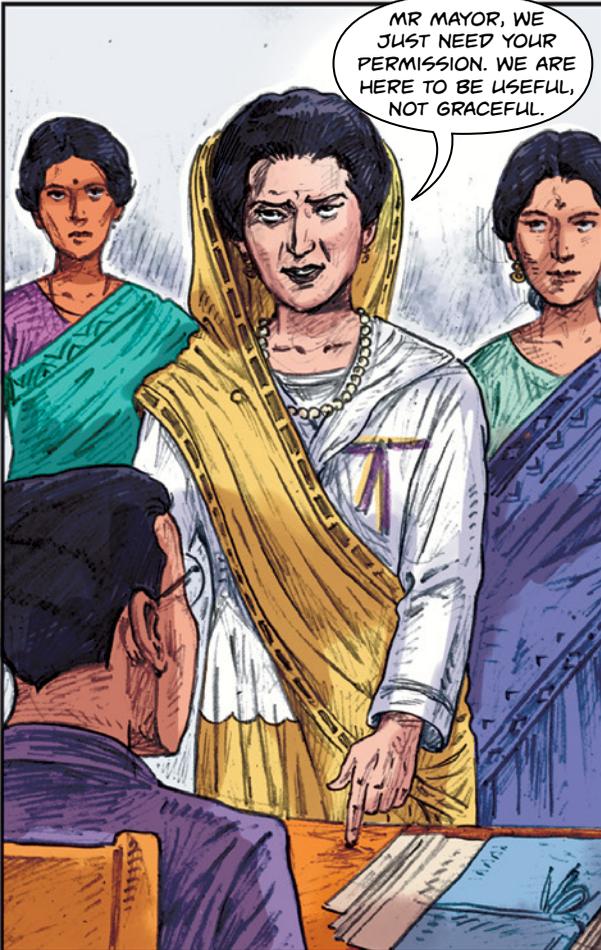


YOU ARE PROPOSING TO SELL VEGETABLES IN THESE AREAS?

...WE JUST NEED YOUR PERMISSION.

YES, AT COST PRICE. THESE PEOPLE ARE NOT BEGGARS, THEY HAVE DIGNITY AND THE MONEY CAN BE USED FOR MEDICAL SUPPLIES. THE HOSPITALS ARE RUNNING OUT OF MEDICINES...

BUT...BUT... YOU ARE LADIES! HOW WILL IT LOOK?



BY 1930, MEHRI WAS BEGINNING TO GET UNWELL VERY OFTEN. DORAB WAS WORRIED —



THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE WHO CAN DO YOUR WORK. YOU NEED TO REST.

I WILL... JUST LET ME DO THIS FIRST.

THE ALL INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE WAS TO BE HELD IN BOMBAY THAT YEAR...

...AND MEHRI WAS THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE RECEPTION COMMITTEE.



I'VE MADE A SCHEDULE OF WHO IS ARRIVING WHEN AND WHO WILL PICK THEM UP...

...NOW WE NEED TO PLAN WHAT THEY WILL DO IN THEIR FREE TIME HERE.

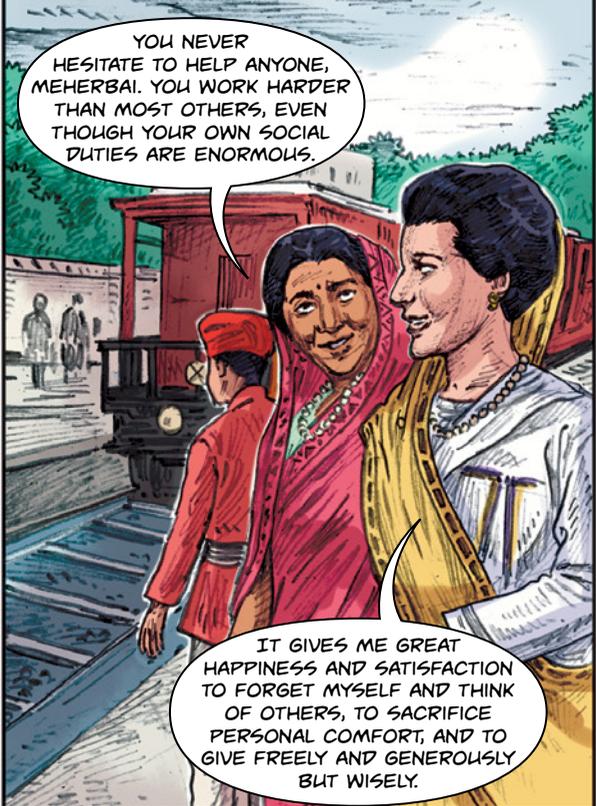
OVER 250 WOMEN DELEGATES WERE ARRIVING IN BOMBAY FOR THE CONFERENCE.

MEHRI MADE SURE EVERY ONE OF THEM WAS TAKEN CARE OF. AFTER THE EVENT —



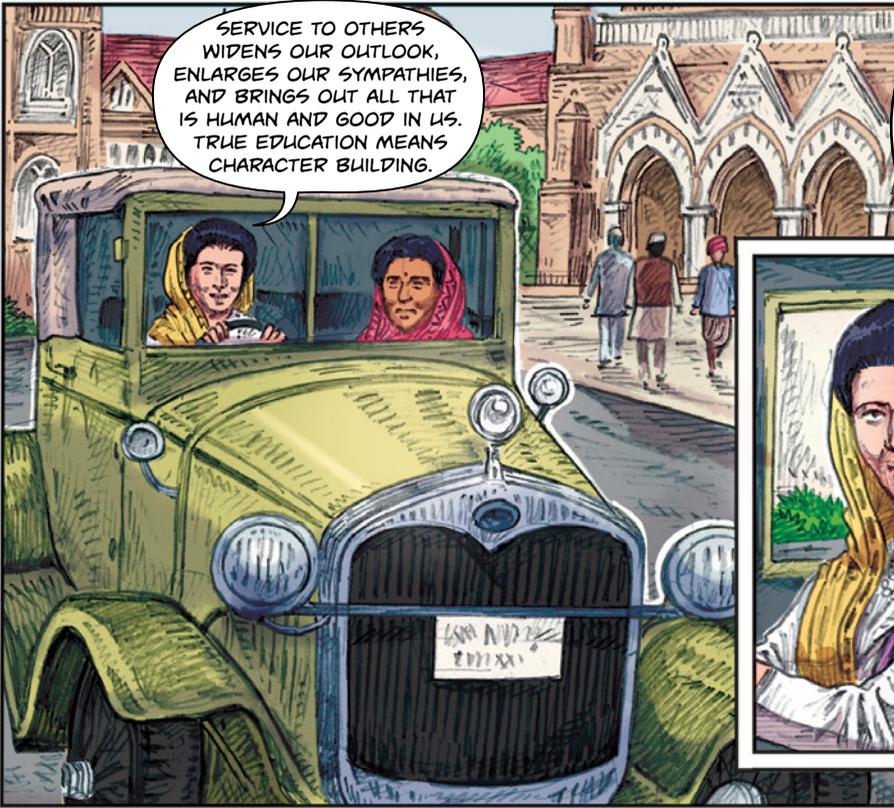
ALL OF THEM HAVE WORKED SO HARD, MRS NAIDU... WE OWE THEM THIS MUCH.

SPLENDID, MEHERBAI! THIS WAS ONE OF OUR MOST SUCCESSFUL CONFERENCES.



YOU NEVER HESITATE TO HELP ANYONE, MEHERBAI. YOU WORK HARDER THAN MOST OTHERS, EVEN THOUGH YOUR OWN SOCIAL DUTIES ARE ENORMOUS.

IT GIVES ME GREAT HAPPINESS AND SATISFACTION TO FORGET MYSELF AND THINK OF OTHERS, TO SACRIFICE PERSONAL COMFORT, AND TO GIVE FREELY AND GENEROUSLY BUT WISELY.



SERVICE TO OTHERS WIDENS OUR OUTLOOK, ENLARGES OUR SYMPATHIES, AND BRINGS OUT ALL THAT IS HUMAN AND GOOD IN US. TRUE EDUCATION MEANS CHARACTER BUILDING.

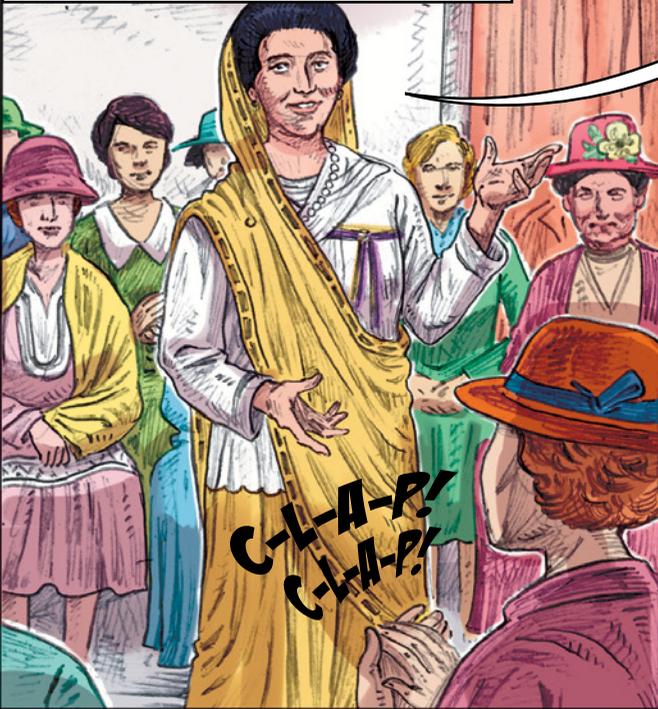
IF WE CAN LEARN THE RIGHT VALUES AND INSTIL THEM IN THE NEXT GENERATION AND THEN THE NEXT, WE CAN GROW INTO A NATION OF HELPFUL PEOPLE FREE OF PREJUDICE, IGNORANCE AND SUPERSTITION.



YOU ARE RIGHT, MEHRBAI.

IN THE SUMMER OF 1930, MEHRBAI LED ANOTHER DELEGATION OF INDIAN WOMEN TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF WOMEN, THIS TIME IN VIENNA. HERE SHE MADE NO BONES ABOUT HER BELIEF IN THE POWER OF WOMEN.

I AM FULLY CONVINCED THAT WOMEN CAN EXERCISE GREAT INFLUENCE IN PUBLIC LIFE, PROVIDED THEY HAVE THE POSITION AND THE RIGHT TO VOTE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS. WHEN WOMEN TAKE THEIR JUST SHARE IN THE AFFAIRS OF THEIR COUNTRY, IT WILL RISE TO BE ONE OF THE GREAT NATIONS OF THE WORLD AND SO IT WILL NOW BE WITH INDIA.



C-L-A-P!
C-L-A-P!



THAT WAS FORCEFUL!

REALLY! I HAD NO IDEA INDIAN WOMEN COULD BE SO ARTICULATE AND CONFIDENT.

WITHOUT INTENDING TO, MEHRI BECAME THE FACE OF INDIAN WOMEN INTERNATIONALLY. PEOPLE FORMED THEIR IMPRESSION OF THE MODERN INDIAN WOMAN FROM HER IMPACTFUL SPEECH AND WISE TOLERANCE.

BY NOW, THERE WAS NO DENYING THAT MEHRI WAS QUITE ILL.

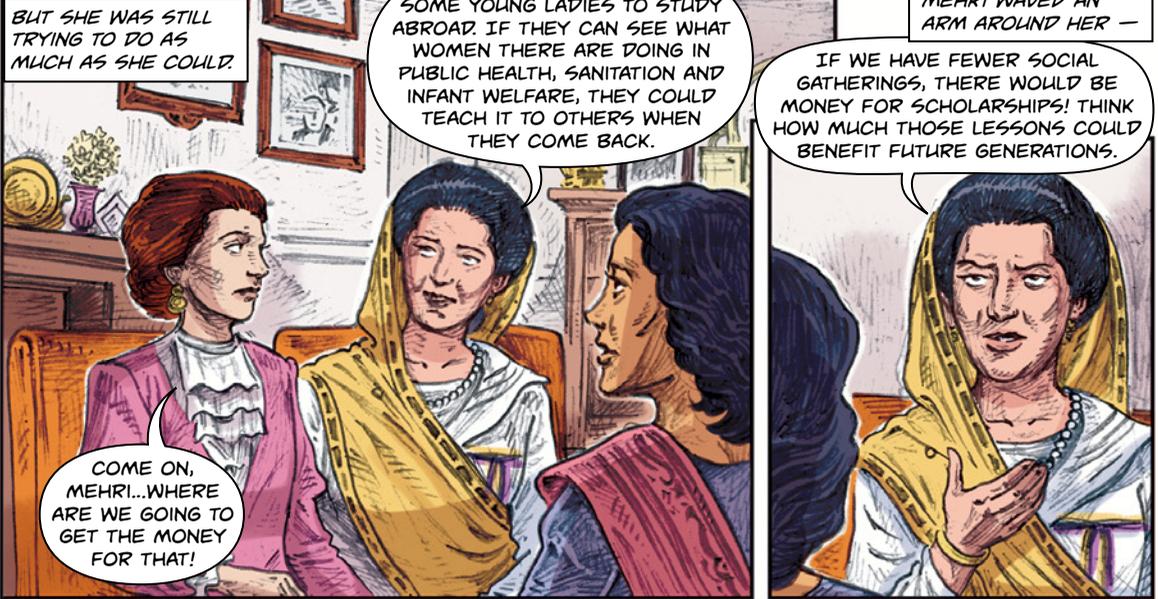


BUT SHE WAS STILL TRYING TO DO AS MUCH AS SHE COULD.

WE SHOULD SEND SOME YOUNG LADIES TO STUDY ABROAD. IF THEY CAN SEE WHAT WOMEN THERE ARE DOING IN PUBLIC HEALTH, SANITATION AND INFANT WELFARE, THEY COULD TEACH IT TO OTHERS WHEN THEY COME BACK.

MEHRI WAVED AN ARM AROUND HER —

IF WE HAVE FEWER SOCIAL GATHERINGS, THERE WOULD BE MONEY FOR SCHOLARSHIPS! THINK HOW MUCH THOSE LESSONS COULD BENEFIT FUTURE GENERATIONS.



COME ON, MEHRI...WHERE ARE WE GOING TO GET THE MONEY FOR THAT!

MEHRI HAD MANY IDEAS TO HELP WOMEN, BUT —



IS THAT LADY MEHERBAI TATA? SHE'S A SHADOW OF HER FORMER SELF.

SHE HAS LEUKAEMIA* BUT SHE WON'T STOP WORKING.

*LEUKAEMIA IS A CANCER OF THE BLOOD CELLS.

IN APRIL 1931, MEHRI WAS TAKEN TO A NURSING HOME IN RUTHIN, NORTH WALES, FOR TREATMENT.



....AND FINALLY, TELL MY SISTERS THAT I WILL BE BACK SOON.

SHE NEVER RETURNED. LADY MEHERBAI TATA DIED ON 18 JUNE, 1931. SHE WAS 52 YEARS OLD.



TILL THE VERY END, SHE WAS MAKING PLANS FOR THE LIBERATION OF INDIAN WOMEN. THOUGH SERIOUSLY ILL, SHE HAD ACCESS TO THE BEST TREATMENT AND DOCTORS, SO NOBODY REALLY ANTICIPATED HER DEATH.

WOMEN IN INDIA AND ABROAD WERE IN SHOCK. ACROSS THE WORLD, COUNTLESS MEMORIAL MEETINGS WERE HELD, WHERE HER DEATH WAS MOURNED BUT SHE WAS CELEBRATED.



SHE WAS A WELL OF HOPE AND COURAGE. SHE RESTORED ONE'S FAITH IN LIFE AND HUMANITY.

SHE HAD GREAT FORCE OF CHARACTER COMBINED WITH REAL KINDNESS AND SINGULAR GRACIOUSNESS OF MANNER.

SHE WAS ADMIRABLY FITTED TO PLAY THE PART OF INDIA'S REPRESENTATIVE TO WOMEN OF OTHER COUNTRIES.

SHE WAS ROBUST, DIRECT, STEADY AND RESOLUTE OF PURPOSE.

HER GUIDING PRINCIPLE WAS A LOVE FOR WHAT WAS RIGHT AND SHE NEVER SWERVED FROM IT.

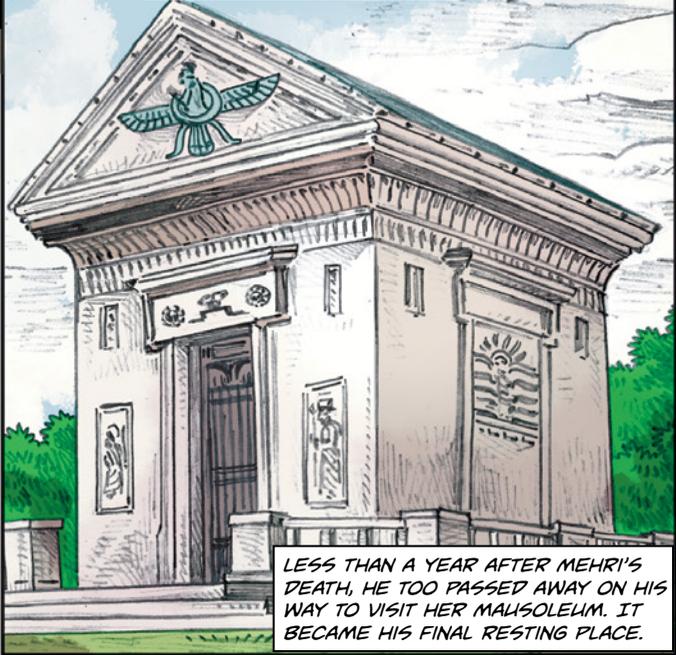
SHE HAD THE OUTLOOK OF A GOOD TENNIS PLAYER—A DIRECTNESS OF AIM AND FAIR PLAY.

SHE WAS THE SPOKESWOMAN FOR INDIAN WOMEN INTERNATIONALLY.

MEHRI'S ASHES WERE PLACED NEXT TO HER FATHER-IN-LAW AT BROOKWOOD CEMETERY IN ENGLAND. A BEAUTIFUL MAUSOLEUM IN THE OLD PERSIAN STYLE WAS ESPECIALLY BUILT FOR HER WITH AN EPITAPH THAT TRIED TO ENCAPSULATE HER LIFE.

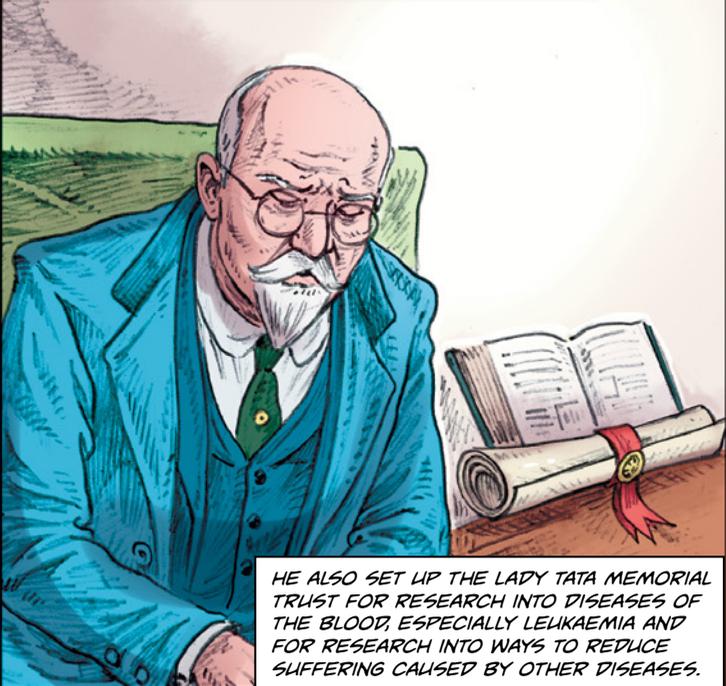


HER LOVING HUSBAND DORAB WAS DEVASTATED. HE HAD GIVEN HER EVERY ENCOURAGEMENT AND OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE USE OF ALL HER GIFTS OF MIND AND HEART AND WEALTH.



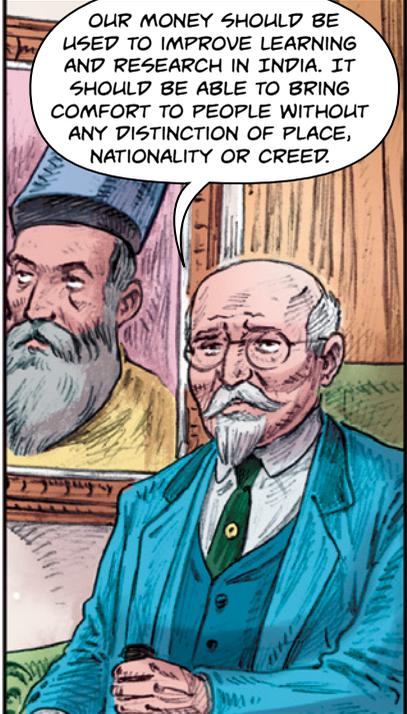
LESS THAN A YEAR AFTER MEHRI'S DEATH, HE TOO PASSED AWAY ON HIS WAY TO VISIT HER MAUSOLEUM. IT BECAME HIS FINAL RESTING PLACE.

BUT BEFORE HIS DEATH, DORAB MADE SURE THAT MEHRI'S LIFE'S WORK WOULD CONTINUE. IN 1932, HE SET UP THE LADY MEHERBAI D TATA EDUCATION TRUST FOR TRAINING WOMEN IN HYGIENE, HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELFARE. IT ALSO GAVE SCHOLARSHIPS TO YOUNG INDIAN WOMEN WHO WANTED TO STUDY ABROAD.



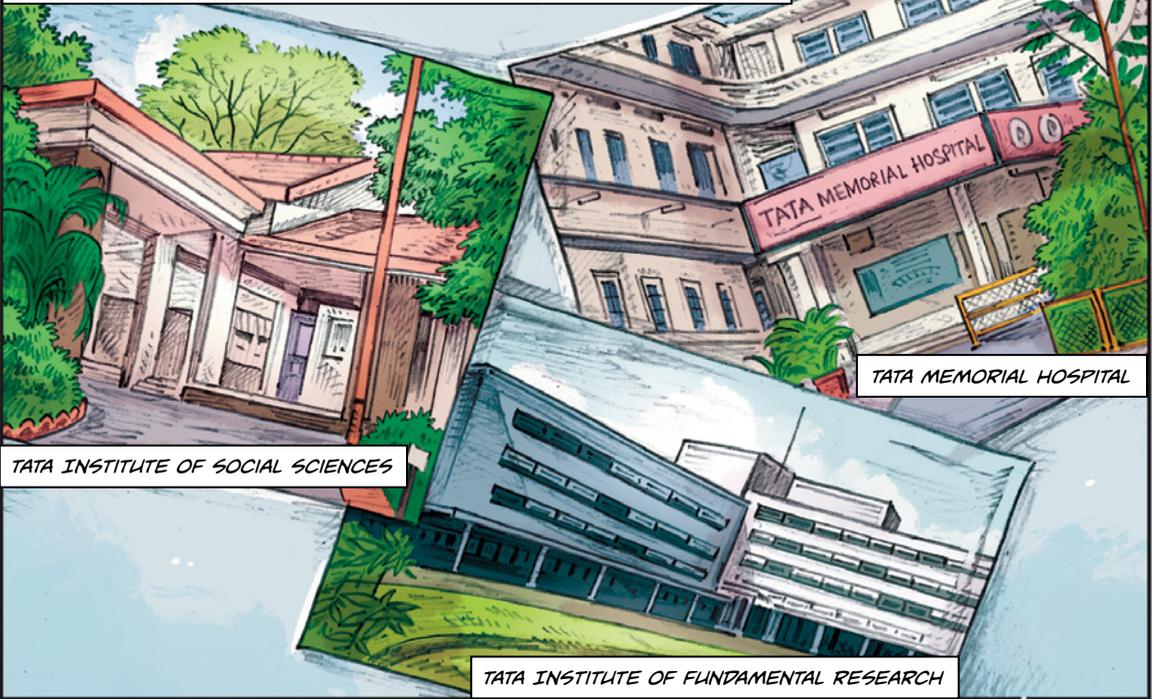
HE ALSO SET UP THE LADY TATA MEMORIAL TRUST FOR RESEARCH INTO DISEASES OF THE BLOOD, ESPECIALLY LEUKAEMIA AND FOR RESEARCH INTO WAYS TO REDUCE SUFFERING CAUSED BY OTHER DISEASES.

BUT MOST SIGNIFICANTLY, DORAB GAVE UP ALL THEIR WEALTH—EVERYTHING, INCLUDING LAND, PROPERTY AND THE JUBILEE DIAMOND—AND PUT IT INTO A TRUST.



OUR MONEY SHOULD BE USED TO IMPROVE LEARNING AND RESEARCH IN INDIA. IT SHOULD BE ABLE TO BRING COMFORT TO PEOPLE WITHOUT ANY DISTINCTION OF PLACE, NATIONALITY OR CREED.

THE TRUST CAME TO BE KNOWN AS THE SIR DORABJI TATA TRUST. WITH RUPEES ONE CRORE RAISED IN 1932, IT WAS POSSIBLY THE LARGEST ENDOWMENT EVER. FOCUSING ON SCHOOLS, EDUCATION, HOSPITALS AND RESEARCH, SOME OF THE DIRECT RESULTS OF THE TRUST FUND ARE —



TATA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

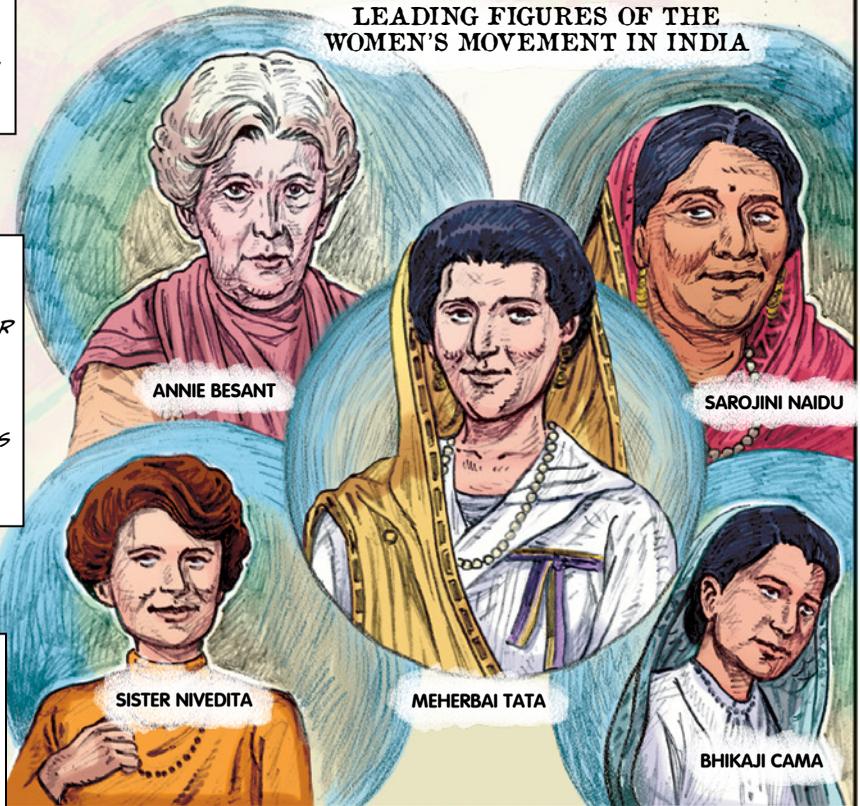
TATA MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

TATA INSTITUTE OF FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDIA SUFFERED A GRAVE LOSS FOR THERE WAS NO ONE LIKE MEHRI WHO COULD BE DIRECT OF SPEECH BUT GRACIOUS OF SPIRIT.

LEADING FIGURES OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDIA

A SHORT-LIVED BUT SPIRITED VOICE SEEKING CHANGE, MEHRI INSPIRED WOMEN TO VALUE THEMSELVES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY. LATER, INDIAN WOMEN PROGRESSED SUBSTANTIALLY. THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT, ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND VOTING RIGHTS GAVE THEM A VOICE AND AN IDENTITY.



ANNIE BESANT

SAROJINI NAIDU

SISTER NIVEDITA

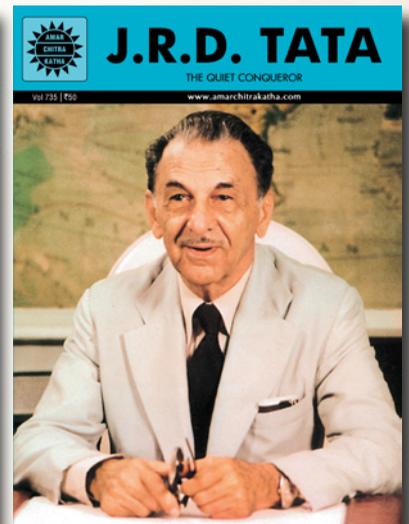
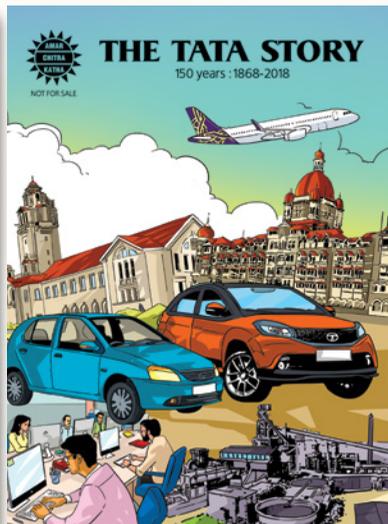
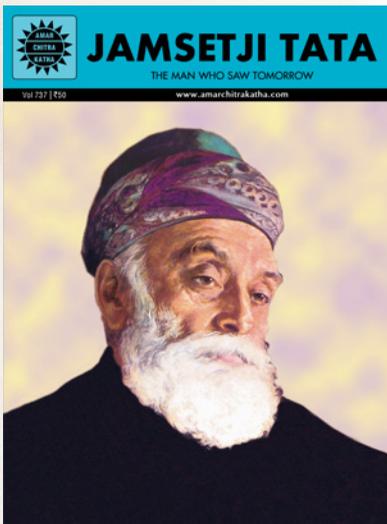
MEHERBAI TATA

BHIKAJI CAMA

WHILE THERE ARE HOSPITALS AND RESEARCH CENTRES IN HER NAME, IT IS PERHAPS THE MODERN INDIAN WOMAN WHO IS THE LIVING MEMORIAL TO THE LIFE AND WORK OF LADY MEHERBAI TATA.



OTHER SIMILAR TITLES



For more information visit - tata.com



MEHERBAI TATA

“A woman has the power to shape her family’s future. She has the power to instil the right values and mould entire generations, building a nation of people free of ignorance, superstition and prejudice.”

Lady Meherbai Tata strongly believed that women could do this and more. For that they needed education and a voice and she was determined to provide both.

Tirelessly campaigning for women’s education and using her own voice to raise awareness, Meherbai’s wisdom and courage made her the international face of the modern Indian woman. Her bird’s eye view of society led her to challenge child marriage in the early 20th century and create avenues for women to study, gain experience and themselves become instruments of change. Generous, practical, kind, and inclusive, her empathy and understanding helped her bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. Women from all sections of society trusted her to advocate for them.

Married into the wealthy and influential Tata family, she used her resources to instil a sense of value and self-worth in women. She, successfully, carved a path that helped Indian women discover themselves and establish their identity and place in society.

