

PRINT: ISSN 0971-8923 ONLINE: ISSN 2456-6756

JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Interdisciplinary Reflection of Contemporary Society

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PRINT: ISSN 0971-8923 ONLINE: ISSN 2456-6756

J Soc Sci, 25(1-2-3): 71-80 (2010)

DOI: 10.31901/24566756.2010/25.1-3.07

Rethinking Gender and Agency in the Satyagraha Movement of 1913

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KEYWORDS Gender. Agency. Resistance. Natal

ABSTRACT The paper is an assessment of women's agency in the Satyagraha movement of 1913 in Natal, South Africa, through the biographical accounts of three Indian women.¹ The campaign was fought against discriminatory measures that challenged the status of Indian wives in South Africa and imposed a £3 poll tax on ex-indentured laborers. Well over 20 000 men and women participated in this struggle. By profiling the lives of Mrs Bai Fatima Sheikh Mehtab, Miss Valliamma Munuswami Mudliar and Mrs Kasturba Gandhi, my purpose here is not only to illuminate the multiple personal and physical challenges women endured in the struggle, but simultaneously reflect some Indian women's contribution to decision-making and public participation.