

Women's Activism and Contributions to Social Reforms During the Freedom Movement

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Abstract: Any history of the Indian freedom struggle would be incomplete without discussing the contribution of women to the cause. For their sacrifices, the women of India's newline will always be honored. Stories of women's bravery, commitment, and selflessness abound throughout the history of the freedom struggle. Many of us are unaware that hundreds of women participated in this warfare as fighters alongside men. They fought with a sincere heart and unshakable courage. Indian women transcended traditional roles and household responsibilities and broke free from a multitude of restrictions. Therefore, it is amazing and commendable that women participated in the National Awakening and the independence campaign. But it is not easy for women to fight as warriors in a society where men are the dominant gender. Even Nevertheless, women have made an effort to challenge the stereotype held by these traditionalists, who feel that women are only meant for household tasks. Furthermore, women not only sacrifice their lives in combat but also triumph over these challenges. This article strives to highlight the battling spirit of women throughout history in order to highlight their legacy. Among these women who fought against the British role by removing all obstacles was Rani Laxmi Bai.

Keywords: Indian, Women, Freedom movement, Role

I. INTRODUCTION

Women in the country were disadvantaged before to independence. The primary cause of this was the prevalence of masculine supremacy. The women's principal responsibilities were taking care of the household; they were not allowed to participate in other occupations or activities or express their views. During this period, several laws that discriminated against women were put into effect. These include sati, polygamy, female infanticide, female foeticide, child marriages, the purdah system, and prohibitions against widows being married again. During the East India Company period, a number of social reformers, including Jyotiba Phule, Ishwar Chander Vidya Sagar, and Raja Ram Mohan Rai, encountered several challenges in their attempts to elevate the status of women in Indian culture. At this period, many women were proficient in martial arts. Rani Laxmi Bai fought for the freedom of the country. The Indian women's freedom movement began with Bhima Bai Holkar's 1817 fight against the British. During the 1857 revolt, Madam Bhikaji Cama—the first Indian woman socialist—fought for her nation's freedom. There is no question that a large number of Indian women took part in the anti-imperialist campaign.

Objective of My Paper

- To do broad study on the Indian liberation movement.
- To look at the part that female freedom warriors played in the fight for Indian independence.
- To bring attention to different women who fought for independence.
- To illustrate the economic and social independence of Indian women.
- To highlight the suffering and sacrifices endured by Indian women.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data employed in this study was mostly centered on a textual approach. For the study's framework, scholarly books, articles, and papers from a range of national and international periodicals were taken into account. This is why secondary data were used in the writing of the study.

Review of Literature: Numerous academic works have been written on "The role of women in the freedom movement." Some of the most significant books and articles are included below:

Manmohan Kaur (1985)

This book covers the ninety-year era (1857–1947) when Indian women participated in the independence fight. The first effort at independence was undertaken in 1857, and it ends in 1947.

P.N Chopra (1975):

This book highlights the remarkable role played by Indian women in the nation's struggle for independence while also describing their bravery, selflessness, and sacrifice. They fought with a sincere heart and unshakable courage.

Suruchi Thaper (2006)

She has made a significant contribution to the independence of India. The main emphasis of this book is the nationalist role that Indian women from the middle class played throughout the country's independence movement, especially in the united provinces. The author highlights prominent women leaders like as Sucheta Kiripalani, Annie Beasant, Sarojini Naidu, and Vijaylaxmi Pandit.

O.P Ralhan (1995):

The social and economic conditions that Indian women, who have played a significant role in forming our society, endure are covered in this book. The author also highlights the achievements that Indian women have done throughout history. It is important to let the next generation know about the important contributions made by these women.

M.G Agarwal:

The significance of the freedom warriors in the struggle for independence is revealed by this multivolume series. The book places a strong emphasis on the contribution that people from all socioeconomic groups made to the liberation movement that resulted in India's independence. Attempting to profit from their recollections of the freedom struggle is what this is. Many hours have been spent gathering information on women who took part in the war and made important contributions in a range of ways, as well as researching liberation fighters from around the nation.

Judith Brown (1972):

Women's participation in the movement is described in the book as a political nuisance.

Tarachand: It examines a variety of topics, including how women see themselves, the greater societal context, and their role in it. He tries to work through these problems as well.

Milestones in India's Freedom Struggle

The first American Revolution (1857-58)

Bengal's partition and the Swadeshi movement (1905)

Massacre at Jallianwala Bagh (1919)

A non-cooperative action (1920)

The Congress's Poorna Swaraj proclamation and the Meerut conspiracy case (1929)

Opposition to the law: The Dandi March (1930)

The Movement to Quit India (1942)

Women Leaders of the National Movement

There is no question that women made up a significant section of the Indian anti-imperialist struggle. If we were to remember their names, there are a lot of women who have led our country's battle. Provincial leaders include Satyawati Devi and Subhadra Joshi in Delhi, Hansa Mehta and Usha Mehta in Bombay, Annie Mascarene and A.V. Kuttimaluamma in Kerala, Durgabai Deshmukh in the Madras Presidency, Rameshwari Nehru and Bi Amman in U.P., and several more. We may begin at the national level with Sarojini Naidu, Mridula Sarabhai, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Rani Laxmi Bai, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. It is really rather difficult to designate leaders at the regional and all-India levels due to the character of our nationalist movement. Many of the women who became prominent figures in the nationalist center began their careers locally. Apart from the Indian women, there were also Irish women, like Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins, who were exploited by the British and shared their experiences with India.

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Women freedom fighter of India:

Enumerating every female freedom warrior is a very challenging endeavor, and identifying just a select handful amongst them is much more challenging.

Sarojini Naidu: In 1917, she rose to prominence as a Nationalist. She served as the second INC president to be a woman in 1925. She joined the national movement during the protests against the Bengali division in 1905. During the Salt Satyagraha, she was one of the female demonstrators at the Dharsana salt mill. After taking the lead in civil disobedience, she was put in jail. In 1942, she was arrested as part of the "Quit India movement." She spoke on women's liberation and nationalist themes while touring India. She was also a direct participant in the founding of the Women's India Association and accompanied the delegation advocating for women's voting rights to London.

Rani Laxmi Bai: In Indian history, no female combatant has ever shown such bravery and strength as Rani Laxmi Bai. She is a wonderful example of national pride and patriotism. She is a source of admiration and inspiration for many. Her name is therefore written in gold letters throughout Indian history.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay: In the 1930s, she participated in the Salt Satyagraha. She was an advocate of handlooms, theater, and handicrafts. The Indian government bestowed upon her the Padma Bhushan in 1955 and the Padma Vibhushan in 1987.

Annie Basant: She was chosen to serve as the first president of the Indian National Congress in 1917. Her companion Margaret Cousins drafted the law allowing Indian women to vote and created the "Women's Indian Association".

Vijayalakshmi Pandit: Because of her patriotic deeds, Mrs. Pandit endured three jail sentences (1932, 1940, and 1942). During the Salt Satyagraha, she organized processions and picketed liquor and foreign apparel shops with her sister and her young kids. She has taken part in several wars and removed a great deal of the barriers faced by Indian women.

Durgabai Deshmukh: She was given a three-year prison term for her involvement in the Salt Satyagraha. During this Satyagraha, Durgabai led a group of individuals who were disobeying the salt rule to Madras' Marina Beach, while leaders like Rajaji and T. Prakasam in the south were busy planning the campaign's other elements. She was instrumental in the creation of the Hindi Balika Patasala and the Andhra Mahila Sabha at a very young age.

Mridula Sarabai: She bravely battled during Partition to rescue females kidnapped by rioters and to save Muslim and Hindu refugees from being murdered or injured. She was chosen as a representative from Gujarat to the All Indian Congress Committee in 1934.

Basanti Das: She battled for India's freedom during the British colonial period. She took an active role in many political and social events. She was arrested during the fight against coercion and actively engaged in freedom movements. She received the Padma Vibhushan in 1973.

Sucheta Kriplani: In 1932, she started her career as a social worker in the public sector. The following year, in 1939, she joined the Indian National Congress and went into politics. She was imprisoned for two years after taking part in a one-on-one satyagraha in 1940 in Faizabad. During the Quit India Movement, she went into hiding and performed an excellent job of surreptitiously organizing anti-British resistance.

Kamla Das Gupta: One of the most notable Indian women who battled for their freedom was Hers. She belonged to the militant faction of the "Jugantar Party" and was an active member. As part of the Quit-India movement, she was arrested in 1942 and brought to the President's mansion.

Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddy: Because of her brilliance and contributions to the social services and health sectors, she was the first Indian woman to be nominated to the Madras Legislative Assembly in 1926. In protest against the torture of women and the use of harsh methods against female agitators during the Salt Satyagraha and Non-cooperation Movement, she resigned from her jobs and joined the liberation struggle..

Margaret Cousins: An Irish woman crusader, after fighting for the voting right for women in Ireland, arrived in India along with her husband and advocate the same causes for Indian women. She joined hand with Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu and helped in the founding of many women association to bring about an awakening among them.

Raj kumari Amrit Kaur: She is a member of the current Kapurthala dynasty. She joined the Congress during the Salt Satyagraha, motivated by Gandhi. When she traveled to the North West Frontier Province to support the independence movement, she violated the Salt Law and was arrested and found guilty of sedition in Bombay for her actions. For seven years, she presided over the All India Women Conference.

Matangini Hazra: Gandhi Burhi, or the Gandhian elderly ladies, are the martyred liberation fighters of West Bengal who will always be honored for their valiant deed. In 1932, she joined the liberation movement. She went into prison during the Salt Satyagraha. She effectively spearheaded a black flag protest in 1933 while the governor of Bengal was addressing a police-cordoned crowd. This time, she was taken into custody and given a severe six-month jail term.

Indira Gandhi: A very remarkable lady in modern India. She became a member of the Indian National Congress in 1938. A new era in her public life began with India's independence in 1947. She took the duty for managing the Prime Minister's mansion. She worked very hard to promote the social and economic advancement of minorities. She envisioned a modern economy that was robust and self-sufficient. She was a fierce and outspoken opponent of communalism, revivalism, and religious radicalism in all its manifestations. She became an indestructible symbol of India's confidence.

Mahila-Samitis (Women's Association)

The early 20th century also witnessed the emergence of many city and town-based women associations:

In reaction to the Swadeshi movement, women's organizations like as the Mahila Shilpa Samiti and Lakshmir Bhandar were founded by the nieces of Rabindranath

Tagore and Sarla Devi. In 1907 the women's association Hitashini Sabha arranged an exhibition of Swadeshi items.

In her book Inner recesses, outward spaces, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya describes how, in 1911, her mother Girijabai established a mahila sabha in Mangalore, the place where she was born, to bring women together to discuss issues and find solutions.

Around this same period, Rameshwari Nehru started the very successful women's publication Stree Darpan.

It included a fascinating blend of political reporting from both domestic and foreign sources. When it came to women's problems, women's magazines like the Bharat Mahila were also becoming more and more popular.

The Jyoti Sangh Women's Conference (AIWC), a notable women's organization in Gujarat, was established in 1927.

Mobilization of Women in Gandhi an Phase:

Gandhi is without a doubt the most genuine and well-known incarnation of Indian knowledge and culture in our day. His fellow citizens respectfully refer to him as the Mahatma. In addition to being an economist and political philosopher, he was a social reformer and a truth-seeker. He transformed the national movement into a mass movement and the Indian National Congress into a people's congress. He taught people how to oppose injustice without using violence and instilled courage and fearlessness in them. Mahatma Gandhi is regarded as having played the most important role in the Indian freedom fight since he led the drive for Indian independence all by himself. Gandhi's nonviolent and peaceful methods served as the cornerstone of the independence movement against the British. Between 1918 and 1922, the Indian independence movement reached its pinnacle. Under Gandhi's direction, the INC started a number of nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns. The primary goal was to undermine the British administration by refusing to cooperate.

According to Gandhi, India cannot achieve complete independence unless its girls fight with its males, which calls on them to acknowledge their own strength.

Women Under Gandhi an Leadership:

Women have been strengthened and inspired by Gandhi's battle against child marriage, caste, discrimination, and the lack of access to education for women.

They encourage the women to participate quite a bit. The non-cooperation movement is seeing unprecedented levels of female engagement, especially among educated and middle-class women.

Notable leaders included Aruna Asaf, Sarla Devi, Amrit Kaur, and Muthul Laxmi Reddy. Inspired by Gandhi's ideals, Sarojini Naidu continued the civil disobedience movement at Dharsana Salt Works by organising a peaceful protest against the salt laws and prices even after Gandhi was imprisoned.

She led a campaign for voting rights and was elected as the first Indian woman president of the Indian National Congress. Aruna Asaf Ali and Usha Mehta's covert labor was crucial to the Quit India campaign's survival. Women constituted the majority of political participants in 1920.

During this period, a sizable number of women came out. Consequently, Indian women have banded together to acknowledge the potential of group action and have broken down the barriers of socioeconomic inequality to enable women's empowerment in an independent India.

III. CONCLUSION

The story of women's engagement in India's freedom struggle is one of daring choices, of finding themselves in jail, on the streets, and in the legislature. After much labor, India gained independence on August 15, 1947. Countless Indian women sacrificed their lives to ensure their nation's freedom. The active participation of women was essential to the nonviolent campaign that led to India's independence, as well as to bringing women along. The moral force of a people armed solely with peace, values, and valor had challenged and vanquished the might of a great empire on which the sun never set—possibly for the first and only time in history.

In the end, it can be said that throughout the course of the last fifty years, the women's movement has grown and deepened its ties to progressive organizations, labor unions, and environmental groups that fight injustice, oppression, and degradation in all of its forms.

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