

WOMEN ROLE IN FREEDOM STRUGGLE MOVEMENT IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The history of the Indian freedom movement would not be completed without any reference of the women contribution in various movement. The sacrifice made by the newline Indian women will remain in the forefront. The history of the women struggle for freedom movement is full of the proverbial devotion, self sacrifice, courage of women. People are still unaware about the women courage and their spirit of truth and bravery. Indian women broke with various restrictions and came out of their roles and responsibilities typically performed at home. Therefore, women struggle in the freedom movement and the national uprising is astonishing and commendable. However, it is not easy for women to fight like heroes in a male dominated society. Women are trying to improve the thinking of those men who felt that women are only meant to do household chores. Moreover, women have sacrificed their life for the freedom struggle and also learned to tackle the problems. One amongst the women who was fighting with the Britishers against their oppressive rule was Rani Laxmi Bai, which is why this paper highlighted the legacy that women have shown in history by showing their violence. The purpose of this paper is to study the freedom struggle movement in India as a whole; to explore the role played by women freedom fighters in the freedom struggle in India; awareness of women fighting for freedom and demonstrating the social and economic freedom of Indian women.

Keywords: freedom, women, struggle, role, fighting, society

1. INTRODUCTION

In the period preceding independence, the condition of women in the country was characterized by significant turmoil. This disarray primarily stemmed from the pervasive influence of male dominance. Women's roles were largely confined to domestic responsibilities, and they were systematically excluded from participating in broader societal activities, which prevented them from voicing their opinions and perspectives. During this era, various programs were implemented that had detrimental effects on women, including child marriage, prohibitions on widow remarriage, female infanticide, foeticide, the purdah system, sati, divorce, and polygamy. Under British colonial rule, numerous social reformers, such as Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Ishwar Chander Vidya Sagar, and Jyotiba Phule, encountered significant obstacles in their efforts to improve the status of women in Indian society. Notably, several women were skilled in martial arts; Rani Laxmi Bai emerged as a prominent figure in the fight for independence. The involvement of women in India's freedom struggle can be traced back to 1817, when Bhima Bai Holkar bravely opposed British forces. Madam Bhikaji Cama is recognized as the first Indian woman to actively participate in the independence movement following the 1857 uprising. It is undeniable that women played a crucial role in the struggle against imperialism, and their contributions are essential to understanding the history of India's freedom movement. The sacrifices made by Indian women will always be remembered. While many freedom fighters were imprisoned, women stepped forward to take the lead in the struggle. The participation of women in the freedom movement began in 1817, exemplified by Bhima Bai Holkar's successful guerrilla warfare against Colonel Malcolm. Numerous women, including Rani Channama of Kittur and Rani Begam Hazrat Mahal of Awadh, also resisted British rule in the 19th century, well before the "First War of Independence" in 1857. The significant role of women during the 1857 Great Revolt is commendable and has garnered admiration from even the leaders of the uprising. Ramgarh's Rani, Rani Jindan Kaur, Rani Tace Bai, Baiza Bai, Chahan Rani, Tapasvini Maharani bravely led their troops on the battlefield. Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi with great courage and excellent leadership set an excellent example of patriotism. The Indian women who joined the national organization were from educated and liberal families, as well as rural and all walks of life, all peoples, religions and communities. Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Vijayalakmi Pundit and Annie Bezan in the 20th century are still remembered today for their role in unity and political warfare. Let us highlight the participation of Indian women against the Britishers in freedom movement and made significant and rich contributions in various ways

Women Participation in Nationalist Movement.

Women in India constitute 48% of the population, yet they are excluded in the workforce as well as political participation. The central theme of empowerment revolves around the concept of power. Scholars have attached that women's empowerment should include participation indecision making in all spheres of life and must not be limited only to one part of society. Decision making power is the most significant aspect of women's empowerment. It includes the power to take decisions in the household, be allowed access to credit, knowledge, freedom of mobility and economic

participation. However, the highest decision making power comes from political empowerment. Without women's participation in the political sphere, women's empowerment remains incomplete. Any society which has a high degree of political participation of women, can definitely progress faster than others. Women have the capacity to take part in the decision of policy making bodies and make laws and rules for themselves. Therefore inclusion of women in the political sphere is one of the most important tools of women's empowerment.

In the next phase, "the women's question began to get increasingly inter-woven with the trends within the sphere of nationalist movement. Few women involved themselves in revolutionary activities and challenged those leaders who denied their participation in freedom movement. As the movement increasingly took a turn towards mass mobilisation, women's participation in increasing numbers became visible and raised basic questions, there is so little investigation of the reasons behind the transformation of what was till then an issue of social reform into a political issue of women's right to equality. In Bengal, Bombay, Tamil Nadu, U.P and many other parts of the country women have participated in various social reforms movement. These women were Satyawanti, Kalpana Joshi, Sarojini Naidu, Durga Behen Sar Preetilata, Kasturba Gandhi, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali, Satyawanti, Achhamamba, Lakshmi Sehgal, Manukuntala Sen, Asoka Gupta; like Madame Bhikaji Cama, Kamila Tyabji, the Begum of Bhopal, Mahadevi Verma, Balamani Amma, Sarala Debi Ghoshal, Anandibai Joshi, Sister Nivedita, Mirabeen, Annie Besant etc who rebelled against living their lives as is normally prescribed for women - that is as daughters, wives, mothers, and sisters". In the late 1930s, a sub-committee on women, drew on radical modernist idea

The women came forward in large numbers to take part in struggle when many freedom fighters were in jail. The list of great women whose names have gone down in history for their dedication and undying devotion to the service of India is a long one.

Participation of women in freedom struggle began as early as in 1817. Bhima Bai Holkar fought bravely against the British colonel Malcolm and defeated him in guerrilla warfare. Many women including Rani Channama of Kittur, Rani Begam Hazrat Mahal of Avadh fought against British East India company in the 19th century; 30 years before the "First War of Independence 1857"

The role played by women in the War of Independence (the Great Revolt) of 1857 was creditable and invited the admiration even leaders of the Revolt. Rani of Ramgarh, Rani Jindan Kaur, Rani Tace Bai, Baiza Bai, Chauhan Rani, Tapasvini Maharani daringly led their troops into the battlefield.

The role of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi laid an outstanding example of real patriotism. Indian women who joined the national movement belonged to educated and liberal families, as well as those from the rural areas and from all walks of life, all castes, religions and communities.

The women of 20th century like Kasturba Gandhi, Vijayalakshmi Pundit Sarojini Naidu, and Annie Besant are still remembered for their singular contribution both in battlefield and in political field.

Let us enumerate Indian women struggle against the British rule who participated in the freedom struggle and made great and rich contributions in various ways.

The First War of Independence (1857-58)

The First War of Independence (1857-58) It was the first general agitation against the rule of the British East India Company. The Doctrine of Lapse, issue of cartridges greased with cow and pig fat to Indian soldiers at Meerut 'triggered the fire'. Further, the introduction of British system of education and a number of social reforms had infuriated a very wide section of the Indian people, soon became a widespread agitation and posed a grave challenge to the British rule.

As a result of this agitation the East India Company was brought under the direct rule of the British Crown. Even though the British succeeded in crushing it within a year, it was certainly a popular revolt in which the Indian rulers, the masses and the militia participated so enthusiastically that it came to be regarded as the First War of Indian Independence. Rani Lakshmi Bai was the great heroine of the First war of India Freedom. She showed the embodiment of patriotism, self-respect and heroism. She was the queen of a small state, but the empress of a limitless empire of glory.

Jalianwalabagh massacre (1919)

General Dyer's Jalianwala Bagh massacre followed the strike wave, when an unarmed crowd of 10,000 Baisakhi celebrators was mercilessly attacked with over 1600 rounds of ammunition. Yet, Gandhi continued to advocate cooperation with the British in December 1919, even as the resistance of ordinary Indians continued. The first six months of 1920 saw an even greater level of mass resistance, with no less than 200 strikes taking place involving 1.5 million workers. It was in response to this rising mass revolutionary tide that the leadership of the Congress was forced to confront its conservatism and give a somewhat more militant face to its program.

The "non-violent non-cooperation" movement was thus launched under the stewardship of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Lajpat Rai and Motilal Nehru.

Non-cooperation movement launched (1920)

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1915 and took up the demand for self-rule and non-cooperation movement. Sarla Devi, Muthulaxmi Reddy, Susheela Nair, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sucheta Kripalani and Aruna Asaf Ali are some the women who participated in the non-violent movement. Kasturba Gandhi, the wife of Mahatma Gandhi, and the women of the Nehru family, Kamla Nehru, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Swarup Rani, also participated in the National Movement. Women also led the movement in Lahore under the leadership of Lado Rani Zutshi and her daughters Manmohini, Shyama and Janak

Civil Disobedience the Dandi Salt March (1930)

The Civil Disobedience Movement was inaugurated by Gandhiji by conducting the historic Dandi Salt March by breaking the Salt Laws imposed by the British Government. Followed by an entourage of seventy nine ashram inmates, Gandhi embarked on his march from his Sabarmati Ashram on a 200 mile trek to the remote village Dandi that is located on the shores of the Arabian Sea. On 6th April 1930, Gandhi with the accompaniment of seventy nine satyagrahis, violated the Salt Law by picking up a fistful of salt lying on the sea shore. This Movement was an important milestone in the history of Indian Independence. In order to disobey the British government rules this Civil Disobedience Movement was started. Meetings were held at every corner of the country on 26th January 1930 and the Congress tri-colour flag was hoisted. The British Government tried to crush the movement and indulge in brutal firing, killing hundreds of people. Thousands were arrested along with Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru. But the movement spread to all the four corners of the country.

The Quit India Movement (1942)

The Quit India Movement of 1942 represented a more urgent phase in the independence struggle. Launched during World War II, it came in response to Britain's failure to grant independence despite India's support in the war effort. Gandhi's famous "Do or Die" speech captured the movement's intensity – there would be no more gradual approaches to independence. The demand was clear and immediate: British rule in India must end.

What made the Quit India Movement particularly remarkable was its broad-based participation. Students left educational institutions, workers organized strikes, peasants refused to pay taxes, and government workers resigned from their positions. The movement saw the emergence of underground networks that maintained resistance despite severe repression. One of the most inspiring examples was Usha Mehta's "Voice of Freedom" radio, which broadcast nationalist messages and news of protests despite constant police searches.

Women's participation in both movements marked a significant social transformation. They stepped out of traditional domestic roles to participate in protests, face arrest, and maintain communication networks. The freedom struggle became intertwined with women's emancipation as they moved from private to public spaces, challenging both colonial power and patriarchal restrictions. Women like Usha Mehta demonstrated extraordinary courage in supporting the independence movement, often at great personal risk.

The British response to the Quit India Movement was severe. Leaders were arrested immediately, press censorship was imposed, public gatherings were banned, and military force was used against demonstrations. Thousands were imprisoned, yet the movement persisted through underground networks and continued resistance. This widespread defiance proved that maintaining colonial rule was becoming increasingly costly and difficult for the British.

The legacy of these movements extends far beyond India's independence in 1947. They established a model for non-violent resistance that influenced civil rights movements worldwide. The successful combination of moral authority with mass participation proved that peaceful protest could overcome military might. The movements also accelerated social change within India, particularly in terms of women's empowerment and national unity across religious and caste lines.

2. CONCLUSION

The remarkable journey of women's participation in India's independence movement stands as a testament to the transformative power of courage, determination, and collective action. What began as a bold step by thousands of Indian women to join the freedom struggle evolved into a comprehensive movement that challenged not only British colonial rule but also deeply entrenched social barriers. These brave women, who found themselves on the streets, in prisons, and in legislative chambers, demonstrated that the path to national independence was inseparable from the quest for women's emancipation. Their sacrifices and contributions proved instrumental in achieving India's independence on August 15, 1947, marking a unique moment in world history where a mighty empire was overcome not by force but by the moral strength of peaceful resistance.

The legacy of this movement continues to reverberate through contemporary India and beyond. Over the past seven decades, the women's movement has grown exponentially, forging powerful alliances with trade unions, environmental

groups, and various social justice organizations. This interconnected network of activism demonstrates how the spirit of the freedom struggle has evolved to address modern challenges of oppression, injustice, and environmental degradation. The movement's enduring impact is evident in the increasing participation of women in political leadership, economic activities, and social reform initiatives. Perhaps most significantly, it has shown that lasting change is possible through peaceful means when backed by unwavering conviction and organized collective action.

Today, as we reflect on this extraordinary chapter in history, we see that the women's movement in India has not just preserved its revolutionary spirit but has adapted and grown to meet contemporary challenges. The principles of non-violent resistance, moral courage, and inclusive progress that characterized the independence movement continue to guide modern struggles for justice and equality. As India moves forward, the legacy of these pioneering women serves as both an inspiration and a reminder that the fight for genuine freedom and equality is an ongoing journey, requiring the same dedication, courage, and unity that marked their historic struggle for independence. Their story remains a powerful testament to the fact that real social transformation is achieved not just through political change, but through the persistent efforts of ordinary people committed to extraordinary causes.

3. REFERENCES

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