

Recognizing the Contribution of Women's in Indian Freedom Movement

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Abstract

Without recognizing the role played by women in the Indian independence fight, the history of the movement would be lacking. The sacrifices made by Indian women will hold the foremost place. There are countless accounts of women's courage, altruism, and sacrifice throughout the history of the independence movement. The majority of people are ignorant that many thousands of women bravely and with real spirit fought alongside their male counterparts. Indian women actively participated in the fight for freedom and the reawakening of the country, breaking away from various constraints and traditional roles. But in a culture where males predominate, women's engagement was remarkable and admirable. However, it is challenging for women to take on the role of warriors in a culture where men predominate. Women made an effort to dispel the stereotype that said women should only be used for household chores. Women battled against these issues in addition to giving their lives as sacrifices. Rani Laxmi Bhai was one such woman who opposed the British influence. She battled against all obstacles. This study might be interpreted as homage to the historical achievements of women who displayed bravery. The entire paper is depends on the historical facts and figure and attempts are made to explore the women contribution in freedom movement of the India.

Key Words: Indian Women, Freedom Movement, Contribution of Women

I. Introduction:

During the pre-independence era, women's status in India was in a state of deprivation. The main reason for this was the dominance of men. Women's primary focus was on household duties and they were not allowed to take part in other tasks and activities. They were not allowed to express their thoughts and opinions anywhere. During this time, a number of systems were introduced which had negative consequences for women. These included child marriages, widow remarriages, female foetal, female infanticides, purdah, sati, polygamy, etc. During the time of East India Company, there were a number of social reformers who worked to change the status of women in the Indian society. There were many women who mastered martial arts during this time. Women participated in India's freedom movement from the very beginning, beginning with the battle of 1817 against the British. Bhima Bai Holkar was one of the women who fought for the independence of

India. Raja Ram Mohan Rai was one of the prominent social reformers during this period. Rani Laxmi Bhai also bravely fought against the Britishers. The first socialist lady in India, Bhikaji Cama battled for her nation's freedom during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Without a question, large numbers of women were instrumental in India's anti-imperial movement.

II. Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the contribution of women in freedom movement of India.
2. To highlight contribution of various women freedom fighters.
3. To evaluate the socio-political participation of the Indian women.
4. To explore the freedom movement of India.
5. To present the scarifies of the women freedom fighters.

III. Research Methodology

Being a historical research the present investigation has gathered the contemporary facts and figures from the various authentic historical books, research papers and journals. Although the study is purely based on secondary data, most reliable material and facts are incorporated in this study and attempts are made to examine the contribution of the women in freedom movement of India.

IV. Review of Literature

Numerous academic works have been written about "the contribution of women in the India's freedom movement." The major books and articles reviewed for the present study, these are as below.

Thaper Suruchi (2006)¹ has done a great deal of work on the freedom movement in India. In her book "Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices (1930–32)". She examined the nationalist involvement of ordinary middle class women in India's freedom movement, particularly in united provinces. She details the contributions of prominent women leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Vijaylaxmi Pandit, Sukhhekar Kiripalani, and Annie Beasant.

The book "Women in India Freedom Struggle" by **Chopra (1975)**² talks about how Indian women played a key role in the freedom movement in India. He talks about how they sacrificed, sacrificed, and fought with courage and spirit. He really emphasizes how important women were in India's freedom movement.

The author of the book "Women's in India Freedom Movement", **Manmohan Kaur(1985)**³, has explored the 90-year history of the women's struggle for freedom in India, beginning with the first attempt at freedom in 1857 and culminating in 1947. This book provides a comprehensive overview of the contributions of women to the freedom movement, as well as an exploration of the cycle of social reforms that occurred during this period.

Ralhan O. P (1995)⁴ in his research book, "Eminent Indian Women in Politics", drew attention to the fact that, despite over six decades of democratic governance, the government and policy makers have not been able to effectively translate de jure rights into defacto rights to bring about change in society. This is due to the fact that women have not

been given a place in the political arena, or even in political parties, as decision-makers. Furthermore, the book also highlighted the social economic condition of Indian women, who have played a vital role in the development of our society, from ancient times to modern times. In conclusion, the author argued that the great contributions of women freedom fighters must be recognized by the current generation.

Agarwal M.G (2008)⁵ in his book "Freedom Fighter of India" has highlighted the role of individuals from all walks of life in the Indian freedom movement. This book seeks to draw upon their memories of the struggle for freedom. Additionally, the author has attempted to incorporate freedom fighters from different regions and explain about the women who were part of the movement and made significant contributions.

Judith Brown (1972)⁶ in his book entitled "Gandhi and the civil disobedience movement" he talks about how women's involvement in the civil disobedience movement. He said that women's involvement in protests, making salt, and picketing foreign cloth and alcohol shops didn't really make a difference in women's social and economic life. A lot of women ended up in jail. Women from urban areas were part of the movement, while those from rural areas were from wealthy peasant families. But this didn't really make any big changes in how women were treated.

Chand Tara (1961)⁷ in his book titled "History of freedom movement in India" tried to look at the social process through the eyes of women, the way they see themselves in the world, the bigger picture of society, the roots, etc. He also lists some of the struggles to overcome these issues.

Women played a vital role in the nationalist movement. It is clear that in many places women organised themselves into many groups. They participated in processions. They faced police firing. They were ready to go to jail. They violated the salt law. They picketed liquor shops and foreign-made clothes. When **Basu Aparna (2018)**⁸ evaluated the response of Gujarat women to Gandhi between 1920 and 1942, she stated that it was an 'impressive record'. In her book entitled "*Women's Struggle: A History of the All India Women's Conference 1927-2016*" remarked as below.

“Women engaged in a wide range of activities, from large-scale popular agitation, to the constructive work of Harijans or Adivasis, to the formal institutionalization of electoral politics. In summary, it is worth noting that the emancipation movement for women in India began in the nineteenth century. The social reformers were initially critics of old-fashioned social practices, and they tried to challenge some of them by applying national and humanitarian standards to the issues. They also placed a lot of emphasis on women's education as a liberalising activity. The nationalist movement attracted large numbers of women to take part in political activities. It also empowered women to organize and fight for their rights, rather than relying on the good men in the society to support them. The formation of the All India Women's Conference in 1927 was crucial in women's march towards equality. (37-38)”

It is therefore appropriate to note here that the door was opened for spreading awareness to eliminate the social handicaps of women and education was provided to them. Certain women organizations were established to represent the interests of middle class women. The percentage of women in politics increased. However, this awareness and enthusiasm did not last very long and soon after independence lapsed. Indian women lapsed into a period of lethargy and laziness. When the noise and dust of the independence struggle subsided, women also began to withdraw into their homes. For twenty years, there was no woman activity in India⁹.

V. Discussion

A) Women in National Movement

Without a doubt, a significant portion of the Indian anti-imperialist movement consisted of women. The list of women leaders in our national struggle is rather lengthy, if we were to recollect their names. Leaders at the provincial level include Annie Mascarene and A.V. Kuttimaluamma in Kerala, Durgabai Deshmukh in Madras Presidency, Rameshwari Nehru and Bi Amman in U.P., Satyawati Devi and Subhadra Joshi in Delhi, Hansa Mehta and Usha Mehta in Bombay, and several others. At the national level, we could start with Sarojini Naidu, Rani Laxmi Bai, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, and Mridula

Sarabhai. Because of the nature of our nationalist movement, it is actually quite difficult to identify leaders at the regional and all-India levels. Numerous women started out locally before rising to prominence in the nationalist core. In addition to the aforementioned Indian women, there were Irish women such as Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins, who imparted their personal understanding of the Irish encounter with British enslavement to India¹⁰.

B) Women Freedom Fighter

It is extremely hard task to explore all women freedom fighters and evenly not easy to separate a few among.

Rani Laxmi Bai: There has never before been a female fighter in Indian history as courageous and strong as Rani Laxmi Bai. She embodies national pride and patriotism in a magnificent way. For many, she is a source of inspiration and admiration. As a result, her name is inscribed in gold letters across Indian history¹¹.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay: In the 1930s, she was an active participant in the salt sityagraha. She was also a patron of the theatre, handloom and handicraft. In 1955, she was awarded the Padma bhushan and in 1987, the Indian government awarded her the Padma vibhushana¹¹.

Sarojini Naidu: In 1917, she became a Nationalist. In 1925, she became the second female president of the Indian National Congress (INC). During the 1905 Bengal Mutiny, she became involved in the national movement. She was among the women who protested at the salt factory in Dharsana during the salt satyagraha. She was arrested after leading the civil disobedience. In 1942, she was arrested amid the Quit India movement. She toured India lecturing on nationalist and women's emancipation issues. She also visited London with the women's voting rights delegation and directly contributed to the establishment of the Women's India Association¹¹.

Annie Basant: Besant was a British Socialist, Theosophist and freemason. She was also an advocate of women's rights, Home Rule, education, and Indian Nationalism. Besant was a strong advocate of Irish and Indian Self-rule. Besant was the first female President of Indian National Congress (INC) in 1917. Besant also entered politics in India, where she joined the Indian National

Congress. When World War I began in 1914, Besant helped found the Home Rule League, which campaigned for democracy in India and for India to become a British province. This resulted in her election as the Indian National Congress' president at the end of 1917. Besant traveled to the United States in the late 1920s with her son Jiddu, whom she claimed to be the new Messiah and the reincarnation of Buddha, but whom Krishnamurti repudiated in 1929. Besant continued to advocate for Indian independence and the causes of Theosophy after the war, until she died in 1933.¹²

Vijayalakshmi Pandit: Pandit was arrested three times in the 1930s, 1940s and '42s for her pro-nationalist activities. She was part of a large group of women who marched and protested against alcohol and foreign cloth shops. She was accompanied by her sister and two young daughters. She's been fighting for women's rights for a long time and has broken down a lot of barriers. Pandit Vijaya was an Indian woman who was a freedom fighter, diplomat, and politician. She was the 8th president of the UN General Assembly from 1953-54, the first woman to hold the post. She also served as the 3rd governor of Maharashtra from 1962-1964.¹²

Durgabai Deshmukh: Durgabai was arrested and jailed for three years for taking part in the 'Salt Satyagraha'. During this time, leaders like Rajaji in the south and T.Prakasam in the south were too busy organising other aspects of the movement. But Durgabai was the one who led a bunch of people to Marina Beach in Madras to break the salt laws. She was also a key player in setting up the 'Andhra mahila Sabha' and 'Hindi balika Patasala' at a young age.¹²

Mridula Sarabai: During the Partition, she put her life on the line to rescue girls who were taken by mobs and to stop refugees, both Hindus and Muslims, from getting hurt or killed. She was elected as a delegate to the All India Congress Committee in 1934 from Gujarat. Mridula was a young kid who was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. As a 10-year-old, she was part of the 'Vanara Sena' of the Congress, a group of kids who worked for Indira Gandhi. She helped organize the 'Youth Conference' at Rajkot, and was mentored by Jyotiram R.N. Singh, who later became her mentor. She was a member of the 'Congress Seva Dal' during the 'Salt Satyagrahas',

and she was involved in the 'Boycott of Foreign cloth and British Goods'. She was even arrested by the British for her part in the salt sityagraha¹².

Basanti Das: During the British Raj in India, she was an activist for India's independence. She was involved in a lot of different political and social causes. She herself was involved in freedom movement and was even arrested during the 'non-cooperation' movement. She was awarded the Padma Shri in 1973.¹²

Kamla Das Gupta: She is one of India's greatest freedom fighters and a member of the militant section of the Indian women's liberation struggle. She was also a prominent member of the Jugantar party. She was arrested in 1942 in the context of the Quit India movement and was imprisoned at the Presidency jail.¹²

Sucheta Kriplani: After joining the civil society in 1932, she shifted her focus to politics in 1939 and joined the Congress party. She offered an individual sityagraha in Faizabad in 1940 and spent two years in jail. She went underground during the Quit India movement and provided invaluable services in secret organization of anti-British struggle.¹²

Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddy: She was also the first Indian woman to be nominated by the Madras legislative assembly for her social service and medical services in 1926. She resigned her posts as a protest against the torturing of women and the use of violence against women agitators in the context of salt sityagrahas and non-cooperation movement.¹²

Margaret Cousins: An Irish woman activist, who had been instrumental in the struggle for women's suffrage in Ireland, immigrated to India with her husband to further the cause of Indian women's rights. She collaborated with Annie Besant, Sarojini Nandy, and others in the formation of numerous women's associations, with the aim of awakening the minds of Indian women.¹²

Matangini Hazra: Gandhi Burhi in West Bengal is the freedom fighter and the martyr who will never be forgotten for her act of bravery. She entered the freedom struggle in the year 1932. She was imprisoned during the salt sityagraha. In 1933, she led the black flag demonstration in which the governor of Bengal addressed the police-cordoned

assembly. This time, she was arrested. She was sentenced to 6 months rigorous imprisonment¹².

Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur: She belongs to the Kapurthala dynasty. Inspired by Gandhi, she joined the Congress during the salt satyagraha and was arrested in Mumbai for breaking the Salt law. She went to North West Frontier province to speak for the cause of freedom struggle and was arrested and sentenced on sedition charges. She served as the Chairperson of the All India Women Conference for 7 years¹².

C) Women's Associations

The early twentieth century saw the formation of numerous associations of women from cities and towns. In the wake of the Swedish agitation, a number of women's associations were established, including the Mahila Shiksha Samiti, the Lakshmi Bhandara, and the Hitashini Sabha¹³. In 1907, a women's group held an exhibition showcasing Swadeshi goods. In her autobiography, Kamaladevi Chandrasekhopadhyaya recalls how her mother, Girijabai, established a Mahila Sabha in her hometown of Mangalore in 1911 to enable women to come together and discuss their issues and find solutions. At the same time, Rameshwar Nehru established a women's journal, the 'Stree Darpan', which was immensely popular and featured a wide range of political and international topics. Women's magazines such as the 'Bharat Mahila' were also becoming increasingly popular, and the 'Jyoti Sangh', a prominent women's organization in Gujarat, was established in 1927.¹⁴

D) Indian Women in Gandhian Era:

Gandhi is widely regarded as the most genuine and celebrated embodiment of India's wisdom and culture in modern times. His compatriots refer to him as the Mahatma. He is renowned for his social reformism, economics, political philosophy and search for truth. He transformed the Indian National Congress into a people's Congress and the national movement into a mass movement. Gandhi inspired people to be fearless and courageous, while teaching them the non-violence method for combating injustice. Mahatma Gandhi is widely considered to be the most prominent figure in the Indian freedom struggle, having single-handedly led the movement for independence. His peaceful and non-violence techniques laid the foundation for the

freedom struggle against the British Raj. The Indian Independence movement reached its peak between the years of 1918 and 1922, when the INC launched a series of non-violent campaigns of civil disobedience. The primary objective of the INC was to subvert the British government by non-cooperation¹⁵.

Gandhi states that India's freedom cannot be achieved unless our daughters join the sons in the struggle for freedom, and this necessitates the realization of self-empowerment.

Gandhi galvanized and motivated women by combating caste, prejudice, child marriage and promoting female education. This inspired them to participate in large numbers. The Non-Cooperation movement witnessed unprecedented levels of women's activism, particularly among the educated and middle-class women. Prominent figures of this movement included Amrita Singh, Aruna Agarwal, Sarlo Devi and Laxman Reddy.

Even after Gandhi was arrested, Sarojini Naidu led a nonviolent sit-in at the Dharsana Salt Works during the civil disobedience movement, motivated by the ideas of Gandhi. The protest was directed towards the Salt Law and taxes. She went on to become the Indian National Congress's first female president and played a key role in securing women's voting rights. The Aruna Asaf Ali-led underground activists were instrumental in maintaining the momentum of the Quit India campaign. In 1920, the majority of women were active in politics. Many of the women got up. Thus, Indian women have cleared the path for women's empowerment in an independent India by shattering the boundaries of social and economic injustice¹⁶.

VI. Conclusions

Women have a long history of brave decisions taken in the legislature, in jail, and on the streets throughout the freedom movement. On August 15, 1947, India became an independent nation following years of struggle. Numerous Indian women sacrificed their lives in order to secure their nation's freedom. Not only did women accompany the nonviolent campaign that led to India's independence, but it also relied heavily on their active participation. For the first and only time in human history, the moral fortitude of a people armed solely with peace, wisdom, and bravery overcame the might of a strong

worldwide empire whose sun never sets. The women's movement has expanded and matured during the last fifty years in unison with other progressive groups, including labour unions, environmental organisations, and other movements that oppose oppression, injustice, and degradation in all its forms.

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