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ROLE OF WOMEN IN INDIAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Tazammal Hussain Choudhury

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Ghanakanta Baruah College, Morigaon , Assam

ABSTRACT

Women play a very significant role in the freedom movement in India. India's struggle for independence from British rule was marked by the courage and sacrifice of numerous women freedom fighters who played pivotal roles in the movement. These women defied societal norms and risked their lives fight for India's freedom, leaving an indelible mark on the nation's history. When most of the men freedom fighters were in prison, the women came forward and took charge of the struggle. The entire history of the freedom movement is replete with the saga of bravery, sacrifice and political sagacity of hundreds and thousands of women of our country. However, without female freedom movement achieving Independent India would remain a dream. The Indian women broke free from a number of limitations and their conventional duties and obligations that were focused on the home. Women who participated freedom struggle movement in India were Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay, Basanti Devi, *Kalpana Dutta*, Sucheta Kriplani, Matangini Hazra etc. Their participation in freedom struggle is significant and respectful.

KEYWORDS: Women, Freedom, Participation, Sagacity, Sacrifice, Indian,

INTRODUCTION

Before 1947, the status of women in India was deprived. The main reason for this was the dominance of men over women. Men believed that women's main responsibility was to do household chores and were not allowed to participate in other activities. There were several practices that had a negative impact on feminism. These included the prohibition of child marriage, widow remarriage, female foeticide, the practice of purdah, sati and polygamy. In the 19th century, many social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Jyotirao Phule brought about dramatic changes in women's in Indian society, but faced various challenges. They utilized their education and resources to mobilize support and create awareness about the freedom movement. Some of them participated in mass movement, such as the Non Cooperation movement, Civil Disobedience movement, Quit India movement. The history of Indian Struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of women. There is no doubt that women actively participated in the freedom movement of Indian.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are number of ancient work on "Contribution of Women to the Freedom movement of Indian " some of the important books and articles are under as under:

Manmohan Kaur in his book *Women in India freedom struggle*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1985. This book covers women of India in freedom struggle from 1857 to 1947 a period of 90 years. It begins with 1857 when the first attempt of freedom was made and end with 1947.1

P.N Chopra in his book *Women in India freedom struggle*, Published by Ministry of Education and social welfare, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1975. This book highlights the heroic role played by Indian women in India struggle for freedom and also explain their saga of sacrifice, selflessness, bravery. They fought with true spirit and undismayed courage.2

Suruchi Thaper book *Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen faces and unheard voices,* 1930-42, B Jorkert, 2006. She has done excellent work on freedom movement in India. This book significantly focuses on the nationalist participation of ordinary middle-class women in India's freedom movement, especially in the united provinces. The author highlights the prominent women leaders such as Sarojini Naidu, Vijaylaxmi Pandit, Sucheta kiripalani and Annie Beasant.3

Judith Brown book *Gandhi and the Civil disobedience movement*, Cambridge University Press, 1972.The book describes the participation of women in the movement as a political nuisance.4

Tara chand book *History of the freedom movement in India Vol IV*, New Delhi 1983 pp 369-375.It tries to examine role of women in the social process, perception of their own lives, the broader social reality, the roots etc. He also enlists some efforts to overcome such problems.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology followed in the preparation of this study is historical and analytical. Research methodology deals with the activity of recognizing, using and interpreting the sources of history towards a careful investigation for increasing the sum of historical knowledge. The historical sources of data collection can be divided in two categories (i) Primary and (ii) secondary. The primary data collected from various public and private records, biographical works and autobiographies, personal letters and diaries, National archive, Gazetteer of India etc. Secondary sources of information such as published books, articles, working papers, Thesis, Journals, Periodical, library, News Papers etc., are also used in his research work.

Objectives of the study:

Following are the objectives of the study:-

1. Women participated in various activities such as meetings, procession, picketing, salt production and sale.
2. Women participated in protests, spread the message of the movement and endured arrest and imprisonment.
3. They took on the responsibility of keeping the movement alive after the arrest to male leaders
4. Women played an important role in the nationalist movement.
5. Women came out domestic confinement and participated in the freedom struggle.

Role of Women In the freedom movement of India:

The Indian freedom struggle in general. Highlighting the role of women freedom fighters in India's freedom movement. To raise awareness about various women freedom fighters. Highlighting the hardships, pain and sacrifices of Indian women.

Mostly women participate in political scenario in 1920. During this period large number of women came forward. It is very difficult task to list out all women freedom fighters and equally difficult to separate a few amongst them. The participation of Women in the freedom movement of India are highly appreciable.

Basanti Devi:

She was an Indian Independence activist during the British rule in India. She took an active parting various political and social movements. She joined Urmila Devi and Sunita Devi to establish "Nari Karma Mandir". Basanti Devi actively promoted the use of indigenous clothes and boycotted foreign goods, demonstrating her dedication to self-sufficiency. She fought against social taboos and discrimination against women. During the non cooperation movement in 1921, the Indian National Congress called for strikes and a ban on foreign goods. She herself took active part in freedom activities and was arrested during non-cooperation movement. Basanti Devi also presided over the Bengal provincial congress session in 1922 at Chittagong. She said, "Freedom will come as a matter of course to the extent we are able to do penance by our sacrifice, by our sorrows and suffering, by our patience and by our strength of our character.

Kasturba Gandhi (1869-1944) :

In 1917, Kasturba Gandhi worked on the welfare of women in Champaran, Bihar where Gandhi was working with indigo farmers. Leader of the women Satyagraha and was engaged with indigo workers in the Champaran, Bihar in the No Tax Campaign and Rajkot Satyagraha. In 1922, she participated in satyagraha movement in Gujrat. She take part in many civil disobedience campaign. As a result, she was arrested and jailed on numerous occasions.

Kamala Nehru (1899-1936) :

The non cooperation movement of 1921 saw Kamala Nehru entry into the freedom struggle. She played a vital role in the campaign against No Tax in the United Province and was led picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops and participated in the freedom struggle. Kamala Nehru took up the task of organizing the work related to the freedom movement in her own ways. She was also the president of the Allahabad District Congress.

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit:

She participated in daily chores including dairy work and spinning. She also worked in the office that used to Young India. Mrs. Pandit was arrested and imprisoned thrice in 1932, 1940 and 1942 for her involvement in the freedom movement, demonstrating her commitment to the cause. During the Salt Satyagraha she led processions and picketed the liquor and foreign cloth selling shops along with her sister and her baby daughters. She has fought many battles and broken many barriers for the women in India.

Kalpana Dutta :

Kalpana Dutta was a remarkable Indian revolutionary. Kalpana Dutta had joined his 'Indian Republican Army' and started a front against the British. She was known to make bombs for the revolutionist; she joined Surya Sen's Republican Army which had carried the Chittagong Armoury raid. Kalpana was finally arrested on 19 May 1933 and released in 1937.Kalpana worked in the Kisan sabha office and later join the Tramway workers Union Office as a whole time worker.

Sarojini Naidu:

Sarojini Naidu, the nightingale of India, was a poet, politician and freedom fighter whose legacy continues to inspire. In 1917, Sarojini Naidu played a key role in founding the Women's Indian Association. In the 1920, Naidu began to focus more on the nationalist movement as the means of achieving both women's rights and political independence. She was the first Indian women to became the president of INC in 1925 at the Kanpur session and appointed governor of a state. She was also the acting president of the Congress in 1932.She participated in the salt Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience movement, and the Quit India Movement. During Salt satyagraha, she was one of the women protesters at the Dharasana salt work. She played a leading role during Civil disobedience and was jailed. In 1942, she was arrested during "Quit India movement". She travelled across India and delivered lecture on women's empowerment and nationalist.

Aruna Asaf ali :

Aruna Asaf Ali was a freedom fighter who rose to prominence during the Quit India Movement. She unfurled the National Flag at the Gowalia Tank maidan in Bombay to signify the commencement of the Quit India Movement and became a legend for thousands of you that rose to emulate her. She became a full-time activist in the Quit India Movement and went underground to evade arrest. She edited the magazine Inquilab, a magazine of the congress party.

Kamala devi Chattopadhyay:

Kamaladevi played a prominent role in political reforms and India's freedom struggle. She actively participated in the non –cooperation movement, Salt Satyagraha, and other nationalist struggles, advocating for women's rights and equality. She joined Indian National Congress in 1927 and was elected to All–India Congress Committee within a year. Kamala Devi was associated with many a women's organization and attended the International Congress of Women's Leage for peace and freedom which was held on 23 August,1929 in the city of Prague. She acquainted the gathering there with the conditions of India.9 In 1930's she participated in Salt Satyagraha. She worked tirelessly to uplift the socio –economic status of Indian women. She promoted handicrafts, handlooms and theatre. The Government of India conferred on her the Padma Bhushan in 1955 and Padma Vibhushan in 1987.

Rama Devi :

She was a freedom fighter and a social reformer who is well known for her contribution to the Bhoodan and Gramdaan movement which was formed by Acharaya Vinoba Bhave. She was highly influenced by Gandhi. Rama Devi joined the Indian independence movement in 1921 and actively participated in the non-cooperation movement and promoted khadi, Rama Devi also participated in the Civil Disobedience movement and salt satyagraha, encouraging women to join the struggle. In 1930 she took an active part in Salt satyagraha in different corners of Odisha. She went to Inchudi and Srijang in Balasore District, the hotbed of Salt satyagraha along with Kiranbala Sen and Malati Dev. She was arrested in 1930 but was released Following Gandhi Irwin pact. Rama Devi was accompanied by Gandhi in Odisha in 1934.

Sucheta Kriplani:

In 1932, she entered pubic life as a social worker and in 1939 entered politics and joined the Indian National Congress. In 1940, Sucheta Kriplani became an active participant in the Indian independence movement. Her involvement in the 1942 Quit India Movement was particularly notable. Despite the risk of arrest, she continued to evade the British authorities, demonstrating her resilience. Although she was eventually arrested in 1944 and was detained for a year. She played a significant role in mobilizing women and advocating for their participation in the struggle for freedom.

Raj kumari Amrit Kaur:

After Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Kuar realized the importance of gaining freedom from the British Raj. She was inspired by Gandhi. Gokhale was one of the great friends of Amrit Kaur's. She says: "The flames of my passionate desire to see India free from foreign domination were fanned by him."10 She joined the Indian National Congress and began to part joined the India's struggle for freedom as well as contributed to social reform activities in India. She co-founded all India Women's Conference in 1927, became its secretary in 1930, and president in 1933.She was arrested in Bombay for violating the Salt law, when she went to the Northwest frontier province to advocate the causes of freedom struggle; she was arrested and convicted on a charge of sedition. She was the President of All India Women conference for seven years.11 In 1942, she participated in the Quit India Movement and imprisoned her again.

Matangini Hazra:

Matangini Hazra, fondly known as Gandhi Buri(old lady Gandhi), was remarkable figure in India's fight for independence. Her dedication, resilience, and fearless spirit made her a symbol of courage during the struggle against British colonial rule.

In 1932, she took part in the Non –Cooperation movement and was arrested for breaking the salt Act . In 1933, she successfully led a black flag demonstration where governor of Bengal was addressing police cordoned gathering. This time she was arrested and sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment.12 One of the most iconic moments in Matangini Hazra's life occurred on September 19, 1942, during the Quit India Movement. She led a flag march in Tamluk, proudly carrying the Indian national flag despite a ban on its display by the British.

Mahila-samitis (Women's Association):

Mahila Samitis played a vital role in the Indian freedom movement, particularly during the Gandhian phase. Mahila Samitis actively supported national movement, including the Non –Cooperation movement and salt satyagraha often through protests. Women organized protests against the import of foreign goods and the sale of liquor, contributing to the economic disruption of British rule. Women's journal like the Bharat Mahila were also becoming extremely popular which was related to women issues.13 An outstanding women's organization in Gujrat, Jyoti Sangh, women conference (AIWC) was also established in 1927.

CONCLUSION

The Indian freedom struggle saw significant participation from women, who made valuable contribution in various capacities. Their involvement not only strengthened the movement but also laid the groundwork for gender equality and social reforms in post-independence India. Women shouldered critical responsibilities in India's struggle for freedom. They held public meeting, organized picketing of shops selling foreign alcohol and articles, sold khadi and actively participated in National Movements. They bravely faced the baton of the police and went to jails. One cannot ignore the role that women played in the fight for India's independence. Number of courageous women raised their voice against the brutality of British rule. Gandhi says that full freedom of India is not possible unless our daughters stand side by side with the sons in the battle for freedom and this requires them to realize their own power.

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21.Lebra-Chapman, op. cit. p. 155, and Kaur, op cit p. 46.