

The Changing Role of Women in the Struggle Against Colonial Rule: from “Motherhood” to “Feminist”.

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Abstract: *Women— Single and married, Young and Old, came forward and joined the struggle against Colonial rule, without mentioning their contributions, the history of Indian freedom struggle would be incomplete. Nationalist leaders deliberately cultivated linkages with Peasants, Workers and women’s organizations to demonstrate mass support for their position. Women were amazed to find Political Participation approved of by men, who wanted their wives to behave in the home like the Perfect wives in religious texts. The story of Women’s role in nationalist struggle is not simply one of those who were a leader of any activities. The nature of their work influenced how women saw themselves and how others saw their contribution to national development. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay’s (1838-94) emotional hymn, “Bande Mataram”, became famous throughout India, this call was not a call to women to join the Political Movement. This call was a linking of idealized motherhood with nationalism. Josodhara Bagchi has argued that this ideology of motherhood by creating a myth about her strength and power took away from Women their real Power, confined them exclusively to their reproductive role.*

The Participation of Women in Swadeshi Movement was Limited in protesting the decision of Partition by boycotting foreign goods and buying only Swadeshi goods.

In revolutionary terrorism, Women gave their support to the revolutionary organization. Nanibala Devi (1888-1967) was widowed at fifteen, joined the new Juganter Party, and acted as their housekeeper, occasionally posing as the Wife of one of revolutionaries. Gandhi reduces the Women’s sexuality to nation and its non-violence movement invoking the myth of Sita.

In the early 20th century some Women took up arms against the British establishment and calls for a refashioning of Women subject autonomously. This article will try to highlight the Women’s Participation in agitation Politics which shaped the Women’s movement.

Keyword: *Women, nationalist struggle, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Motherhood, Swadeshi movement, boycott, sexuality, Women’s movement.*

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Introduction:

The wheel of the civilization could not move continuously without Women. Swami Vivekananda says that Civilization is like a bird; man and woman is the two wing of the bird. The bird could not fly easily if we cut her one wing. So women's participation is a Key component of the civilization. The history of Indian freedom Struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of women. The sacrifice made by the Women of India will occupy the foremost place. They fought with true spirit and undaunted courage and faced various tortures, exploitations and hardships to earn us freedom. When most of the men freedom fighters were in prison the Women came forward and took change of the struggle. 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.

Research Methodology:

The present study is historical descriptive and analytical one. The study is primarily based on the secondary sources. The Secondary sources have been collected from various books and journals. The study is qualitative in nature.

ASSAM:

Assam, perhaps the sudden unbounded passion for liberty which made the Women take over command of the battle for freedom. The struggle waged by Assam to breakdown the shackles of slavery, observed Mitra and Chakraborty. They describe it "is largely a struggle for Assam's Womanhood".¹

During the Quit India Movement Kanaklata Joined the Mritya Bahini, a death squad comprising groups of Youth from the Gohpur sub division of Assam. On 20 September 1942, the Bahini decided it would hoist the national flag at the local Police Station. A procession of unarmed villagers was led by Barua to do so. The police under Rebati Mohan Som the Officer-in-charge of the Police Station warned the Procession of dire consequences if they proceeded with their plan. Undeterred by the Police, the procession continued marching ahead v when the Police fired upon the procession. Kanaklata was shot and the flag she was carrying with her was taken up by Mukunda Kakoti who too was shot at. Both Kanaktala and Kakoti were killed in the Police action. Kanaktala was only 17 years of age at the time of her martyrdom.

BENGAL:

Kalpna Datta was an Indian independence movement activist and a member of the armed independence movement led by Surya Sen which carried out the Chittagong armoury raid in 1930. IN September, 1931 Surya Sen entrusted her along with Pritilata waddadar to attack the European club in Chittagong. But a week before the attack, she was arrested while carrying out reconnaissance of the area. On 17 February 1933 the Police encircled their hiding place in gairila village, and that raid Surya Sen was arrested but Kalpna was able to escape from there .She was finally arrested on 19 May 1933, and released in 1939. She busied herself in studies and also engaged in propaganda. She worked in labour areas and Dhobi Para. Kalpna worked in the Kisan Sabha office and later Joined the Tramway worker's Union office as a whole time worker.

The Women of Bengal had been participating in the freedom struggle ever since the battle began. The people of Midnapur District played a notable part in the movement of 1942. The Tamluk sub-division had organized itself against the Japanese invasion. They raised an army of volunteers which included men and women. One such procession was led by a seventy one year old lady Smt. Matangini Hazra ,with six thousand supporters, mostly Women volunteers, with the purpose of taking over the Tamluk Police station. When the procession reached they had outskirts of the town, they were ordered to disband under section 144 of the Indian Penal code by the crown police. As she stepped forward, Hazra was shot once. Apparently she had stepped forward and appealed to the police not to open fire at the crowd. As she was repeatedly shot, she kept chanting VandeMataram. She died with the flag of the Indian National Congress held high and still flying. A statue stands at the spot where she was killed in Tamluk and a five rupee postage stamp issued.

PUNJAB:

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur came from the royal family of Kapurthala state. Amrit Kaur had most of her education in England and was a keen sports woman. On her return to India She set about organizing sports and games in the Punjab and she became Interested in the Indian independence movement. Her father had share a close association with Gopal Krishna Gokhale She says, "The flames of my passionate desire to see India free from foreign domination were fanned by him." ²

Kaur was drawn to the vision of Mahatma Gandhi and meet him in Bombay in 1919. She joined the Indian National Congress and began to participate in India's struggle for freedom. She Co-founded the All India women's conference in 1927, became its secretary in 1930 and President in 1933. For her participation in Gandhi-led 240 mile Dandi March

in 1930, British Raj authorities imprisoned her. As a representative of the INC, in 1937 she went on a mission of goodwill to Bannu, in the present day Khyber- Pakhtunkhwa. The British Raj authorities charged her with sedition and imprisoned her. IN 1942, she participated in the Quit India Movement and Raj authorities imprisoned her again.

She served as the chairperson of the All India Women's Education Fund Association. She worked to reduce illiteracy, and eradicate the custom of child marriages and the Purdah system for Women.

After India's independence, Amrit Kaur became Part of Jawaharlal Nehru's first cabinet, she was the first Woman to hold cabinet rank. She was assigned the Ministry of Health and was one of only two Indian Christians in the cabinet. In 1950 she was elected the president of World Health Assembly, becoming the first Woman and the first Asian to hold that Post. Kaur served as the Chairperson of the Indian Red cross Society for fourteen Years. During her Leadership, the Indian Red Cross did a number of pioneering works in the hinterlands of India. She started the Amrit Kaur college of Nursing and the National Sports Club of India. Her private papers are part of the Archives at the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, at Teen Murti House, Delhi.

Pushpa Gujral is another Woman of Punjab who took prominent Part in the movement of 1942. Her interest in Political work began in 1919, but she became active only during the movement of 1930. At this time she was elected President of the city and District congress committee. She collected funds for the families of political prisoners. She went to Jail for the first time in 1940 for offering Satyagraha and Second time in 1942. Pushpa Gujral became the convener, Punjab Pradesh congress committee (Women) and was also associated with many other SOCIAL WORK AGENCIES. She is member of the Punjab State Social Welfare Advisory Board.

UTTARPRADESH:

Sucheta Kripalini fought her way into becoming the first ever Woman to occupy a position of power in the Indian Political sphere. She came to the forefront during the Quit India movement. She later worked closely with Mahatma Gandhi during the partition riots. She accompanied him to Noakali in 1946. She was one of the few women who were elected to the constituent Assembly and was part of the sub- committee that drafted the Indian constitution. She became a part of the subcommittee that laid down the charter for the constitution of India. On 14 August 1947, she sang 'VandeMataram' in the Independence session of the constituent Assembly a few minutes before Nehru delivered his famous Speech.

After Independence she served as Minister of Labour community Department and industry in the UP government from 1960 to 1963. In October 1963, she became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh the first Woman to hold that position in any Indian state. In 1967 she contested the 4th Lok Sabha elections from the Gonda district of Uttar Pradesh and won. In 1971, Sucheta Kripalani decided to retire from politics.

BOMBAY:

Bombay was one of the most important Province which was affected by the political upsurge by Women. Sarojini Naidu of the fame of Dharasasnasalt raid was again active during this period. She addressed meetings and spoke from various platforms. She was arrested on 3rd December, 1940 for taking part in the individual Satyagraha introduced by Vinoba Bhave. In 1942, she was arrested during the Quit India movement and stayed in jail for 21 months. She appeared in Public again on January 7, 1944 and addressed a meeting at Bombay. Immediately after India attained independence, she had the privilege of being the first Women Governor of Uttar Pradesh in 1947 and occupied upto March 1949. She is remembered for his writing skill and struggle for Women's movements and rights.

Bombay kept up the Struggle through Radio. Usha Mehta was one of the prominent workers of the secret congress Radio, an underground radio station. On 14 August 1942, Usha and some of her close associates began the secret congress Radio, a clandestine radio station. The first words broadcast in her voice were: This is the congress radio calling on [a wave length of] 42.34 meters from somewhere in India. The radio broadcast recorded messages from Gandhi and other prominent leaders across India. To elude the authorities, the organizers moved the station's location almost daily. Ultimately, however, the police found them on 12 November 1942 and arrested the organizers, including Usha Mehta.

Even after India's independence, Usha continued to be socially active, particularly in spreading the Gandhian thought and Philosophy. She authored many articles, essays, and books in English and Gujarati. In 1998, the Government of India conferred on her Padma Vibhushan, the second highest Civilian award of Republic of India.

Hansa Mehta Plunged into the freedom struggle early in Life. Greatly inspired by the leaders she travelled all over India, meeting women to create awareness among them. An eminent educationist and a dedicated social worker, she believed that unless there was improvement in the quality of life of women. She was the first woman Vice-chancellor in India (Baroda University) and was actively associated with the All India Women's conference. In the constituent Assembly after the oath of dedication. Smt. Hansa Mehta presented a national flag to the constituent Assembly on behalf of the Women of India.

Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay (1903-1988) was an Indian social reformer and freedom activist. She was most remembered for her contribution to the Indian Independence movement for being the driving force behind the renaissance of Indian handicrafts, handlooms, and theatre in independence India; and for upliftment of the socio-economic standard of Indian women by pioneering the co-operation.

When she was in London, Kamaladevi came to know of Mahatma Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement in 1923, and she promptly returned to India, to join the Seva Dal, a Gandhian organization setup to promote social upliftment. Soon she was placed in charge of the Women's section of the Dal, where she got involved in recruiting, training and organising girls and Women of all ages Women across India, to become voluntary Workers, "Sevikas".

In 1926, she met the Suffragette Margaret E. Cousins, the founder of All India Women's conference, who inspired her to run for the "Madras Provincial Legislative Assembly". Thus she became the first Woman to run for a legislative seat in India. Though she could campaign for only a few days, she lost by a small margin of 55 votes.

She was a part of the seven member lead team, announced by Mahatma Gandhi, in the famous Salt Satyagraha (1930), to prepare salt at the Bombay beach front, the only other Woman volunteer of the team was Avantikabai Gokhale.

The Government of India conferred on her the Padma Vibhushan in 1987, which are among the most revered civilian awards of the Republic of India. The Fellowship is the highest award of Sangeet Natak Akademi, India's National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama.

Aruna Asaf Ali (Aruna Ganguly) was a luminous star in the firmament of India's freedom struggle. She participated in public Processions during the salt Satyagraha and was arrested on charges of being vagrant. In 1942, she took part in the underground movement and hoisting the Indian National flag at the Gowalia Tank maidan in Bombay.

She played a crucial role in the formation of National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW). In 1958 she was elected the mayor of Delhi. In 1996 She was bestowed the Bharat Ratna. In 1998, the government issued a commemorative stamp for her.

MADRAS PRESIDENCY:

Rukmani Lakshmipathi was an Indian Independence activist and Politician belonging to the Indian National Congress. In 1923, she joined the congress. In 1926, she attended the International women's suffrage Alliance Congress at Paris as the Indian representative. For her participation in the salt Satyagraha in Vedaranyam. She was jailed for a year, becoming the first female prisoner in the salt Satyagraha movement. She was the first woman to be elected to the Madras Legislature in 1934 and the first to serve as a minister in the Madras Presidency. She was the first (and only) Woman minister of the Presidency.

Conclusion:

The History of the freedom movement is especially important for Women's movement, which shaped the movement for women's rights. The nationalist leaders are content to have women play a secondary role in the movement. But in the years following the civil disobedient movement, more and more women entered into the profession, and some men learned to work side by side with them as colleagues. But at the same time the participation of Women had some clear drawbacks. Those demonstration claimed to represent all Indian Women, but the number of groups involved was never large. There were distinct regional differences in the number of women who joined. Most women leaders were unable to get beyond their own sense of "respectability" when they sought recruits. Purity of Woman became an index of status of a cast. Gandhi called them "Unsexed". He shifted the focus from "motherhood" to "sisterhood". The revolutionary Woman have described themselves as sacrificing all the things a woman wants- marriage, children and home— for the country. They marched and picketed in Sex-segregated groups, usually wearing distinctive orange and white saris to emphasize their purity and sacrifice. Male guardianship describe the woman participation as woman could 'come out' because the house was on fire. The expectation was that once the fire was out, woman would go back inside the house. The gender division also followed in labour and wages. The female workers protested against this inequality. But nothing changed, because the trade unions valued more their motherhood. So, if we want our equal position in the struggle of freedom movement, in wages, & also in our own personal life, feminist consciousness is must require. Then we will be the perfect comradeship.

Notes:

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2. Morton, E. 1954, *Women Behind Gandhiji*, London. P- 139

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