

The Indispensable role of Women in the Freedom Movement

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Abstract

The role of women in the freedom movements around the world has been crucial yet often overlooked. Women played an indispensable role in shaping the outcomes of many freedom struggles, contributing not only in the traditional capacity of supporting men but as active fighters, leaders, and strategists. Whether in colonial resistance movements, national independence struggles, or social justice causes, women exhibited resilience, courage, and ingenuity in their pursuit of freedom. In various contexts, women provided both moral and material support, organizing rallies, boycotts, and protests, often at great personal risk. They served as spies, messengers, and even armed combatants, defying societal norms and expectations. Their involvement was not confined to the margins but was central to the core strategies of many movements. In India, for instance, figures like Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, and Rani Lakshmbai are emblematic of the powerful contributions women made to the independence movement. Their roles ranged from leading protests to commanding armies.

Women also spearheaded efforts to empower communities, pushing for education, healthcare, and political participation, which laid the foundation for long-term social change. Their contribution was not merely reactive but visionary, advocating for a new social order built on equality and justice. Despite the centrality of their roles, the achievements of women in these movements have often been marginalized in historical narratives. Recognizing the indispensable role of women is crucial for a holistic understanding of freedom struggles. Their courage, leadership, and tenacity not only helped secure independence but also reshaped societies and set the stage for future generations of women to continue advocating for their rights and the rights of others.

Keywords: Sacrifices, Women, Movement, Participation.

Introduction

The history of Indian Struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of women. The sacrifice made by the women of India will occupy the foremost place. When most of the men freedom fighters were in prison, the women came forward and took charge of the struggle. They fought with true spirit and unafraid courage and faced various tortures, exploitations, and hardships to earn us freedom. There is no question that ladies took an interest in the Indian enemy of colonialist battle masse. If we somehow managed to review the names of ladies pioneers in our public development, we will observe that the rundown is an extremely lengthy one. Beginning with Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Mridula Sarabhai at the public level, we might happen to commonplace level pioneers like 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 a few others. As a matter of fact, such is the idea of our patriot development that it is truly challenging to recognize territorial level and all-India level pioneers. Numerous ladies started at the neighborhood level and proceeded to become players in the patriot place stage. Other than this multitude of Indian ladies, there were additionally Irish

ladies like Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins, who brought their own insight into the Irish experience of British abuse to bear on India.

Objectives of Paper

- To study the freedom movement in India in general.
- To create awareness about different women freedom fighter.
- To highlight their sufferings and sacrifices of Indian women.
- To study women's involvement in civil disobedience was met with enthusiasm and unexpected arrests.

Research Methodology:

To write this paper, the data has mainly concentrated on textual approach, books written by prominent notable scholars and articles, papers written on various National and International Journals has been considered to the framework of this paper. Secondary data has been used to write this paper.

Review of Literature:

- Women in India freedom struggle: By Manmohan Kaur, published by Sterling Publishers in 1985. This book covers role of women in national movement from 1857 to 1947 a period of 90 years.
- Women in India freedom struggle: By P.N Chopra, published by the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Government of India in 1975. This work highlights some of the heroic role played by women in India's freedom struggle.
- Women in the Indian National Movement: Unseen faces and unheard voices, 1930-42: By Suruchi Thaper, published by BJorkert in 2006. This work focuses on the nationalist participation of ordinary middle class women in India's freedom movement, especially in the united provinces.
- Indian women through ages: By Ralhan. O.P, published by Anmol Publications in 1995. This book highlights the role of Indian women from ancient period to modern times.
- Freedom fighters of India: By M. G. Agarwal published by Isha Books in 2008. This book highlights the contribution people from all sections of society in the freedom movement.
- Gandhi and the civil disobedience movement: By Judith Brown published by Cambridge University Press in 1972. The book describes the participation of women in the movement as a political nuisance.

Women's Associations

- Rashtriya Stree Sangha or Dash Sevika Sangha was started as auxiliary body of congress.
- 1910 Sarala Devi Chaudhurani Bharat stree Mahanandala tried to spread education
- In 1917, in Madras women's Indian Association was started by enlightened European and Indian ladies- Margaret Cousins and Annie Besant.
- 1925, the National Council of Women in India was formed as a branch of the International council of Women Lady Mehribai Tata was an actives of this society.
- 1927, All India, Women Conference came into existence which championed for all sorts of women rights, from franchise to marriage reform and the rights of woman laborers.
- In 1920 in Bengal, Bangiya Nari Samaj campaigned for woman's voting rights.
- All Bengal Women union campaigned for legislation against trafficking of women.

Prominent Women Freedom Fighters of India

- Sarojini Naidu(1879-1949): She was a prominent leader in the women's movement, advocating for women's rights, education, and social reforms. She also became the first woman to become the president of the Indian National Congress and the first woman to become the Governor of an Indian state (Uttar Pradesh) after India gained independence in 1947.
- Rani Laxmi Bai(1828-1858): Rani Laxmi Bai, also known as the Queen of Jhansi, is one of the most prominent and heroic figures in Indian history. She was born as Manikarnika Tambe on November 19, 1828, in Varanasi, India. She is remembered for her courage, leadership, and dedication during the 1857 Indian Rebellion (often referred to as the First War of Indian Independence).
- Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay(1903-1988): Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was a prominent Indian freedom fighter, social reformer, and an advocate for women's rights. She was known for her commitment to the Swadeshi movement and worked towards promoting Indian handicrafts and rural industries, believing that they would help empower the people and weaken British economic control.
- Annie Basant(1847-1933): She was a prominent British theosophist, social reformer, and a staunch advocate for Indian self-rule. She played a crucial role in India's freedom movement The Home Rule Movement, led by Annie Besant and Tilak, was a key milestone in the Indian independence struggle. Its primary goal was to secure greater political rights for Indians and eventually self-rule. Besant's leadership brought energy and momentum to the movement, and she became a popular figure in India.
- Vijayalakshmi Pandit(1900-1990): Vijayalakshmi Pandit was a distinguished Indian diplomat, politician, and social activist, who played a key role in India's independence movement and later in its post-independence political landscape. She was the first woman to become the President of the United Nations General Assembly and had a significant impact on both India's foreign policy and the promotion of women's rights.
- Durgabai Deshmukh(1909-1981): She was deeply influenced by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, and she took part in several protests and movements aimed at gaining independence from British rule. Her commitment to non-violence, as advocated by Gandhi, led her to participate in the Salt Satyagraha and other important freedom struggles.
- Mridula Sarabai(1911-1974): Mridula Sarabai was actively involved in the Indian independence struggle. She joined the Indian National Congress and became an active participant in the nonviolent protests against British colonial rule. In 1934 she was elected to the All Indian Congress Committee as a delegate from Gujarat.
- Basanti Das(1880-1974): She supported the idea that women should actively participate in the political and social life of the country and worked towards creating awareness about women's education, gender equality, and women's representation in leadership roles. She was an ardent follower of Subhas Chandra Bose and his call for a more aggressive approach towards gaining independence from the British.
- Sucheta Kripalani(1908-1974): was a prominent Indian freedom fighter, political leader, and social activist, best known for her significant contributions to the Indian independence movement and her role in post-independence India. She was a key figure in the Indian National Congress and one of the first women to play a major political role in the country.

- Kamla Das Gupta(1907-2000): She has been a brilliant luminary among the Indian women freedom fighters. She belongs to the militant section and was an active member of the ‘Jugantar Party’. In 1942, she was arrested in connection with the Quit-India movement and lodged in the Presidency jail.
- Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddy(1886-1968): She was the first Indian women who for her merit and services in the field of social service and medicine was nominated to the Madras Legislative Assembly in 1926. She was a passionate advocate for women's rights and worked relentlessly for women's education and empowerment. She was particularly focused on issues such as child marriage, female education, and women's health.
- Margaret Cousins(1878-1954): Margaret Cousins was a passionate advocate for women’s rights. She was deeply influenced by the Irish nationalist movement and the Indian independence struggle. She played an active role in empowering Indian women through education and social reform.
- Raj kumari Amrit Kaur(1889-1964): She was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and his principles of non-violence and self-reliance. She joined the Indian National Congress and became an active participant in the struggle for India's independence from British rule.
- Matangini Hazra(1870-1942): She was a courageous and influential freedom fighter in India, known for her active role in the Indian independence movement. She is remembered for her remarkable bravery and sacrifice in the struggle against British colonial rule, particularly in the Quit India Movement of 1942.
- Hansa Mehta (1897-1995): She was a prominent Indian freedom fighter, educator, and social reformer who played a significant role in India's independence movement and the development of women's rights in post-independence India.
- Pritilata Wodeyar(1911-1932): Pritilata Wodeyar was a bold and fearless freedom fighter who played a crucial role in the revolutionary movement against British colonial rule. Her sacrifice in the Pahartali attack, where she gave up her life for the cause of India's independence, is a testament to her patriotism and determination.
- Usha Mehta(1920-2000): Usha Mehta was a prominent Indian freedom fighter, a revolutionary, and a key figure in the Quit India Movement. She is best known for her role in the underground radio network during the Quit India Movement and for her courage and contributions to India's independence struggle.
- Aruna Asaf Ali(1909-1996): Played a leading role 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.
- Rani Gaidineliu(1915-1993): She was a prominent Indian freedom fighter and spiritual leader from the northeastern region of India, particularly the state of Manipur. She played a significant role in the resistance against British colonial rule. Born in a small village in Manipur, she became known for her leadership and courage in leading her people in a struggle for independence.
- Kalpana Dutta(1913-1995): She was an Indian freedom fighter and a prominent revolutionary from the state of Assam. She was an active member of the Indian independence movement and is best known for her association with the Chattagram

(Chittagong) Armoury Raid of 1930, a significant event in India's struggle for independence.

- Madam Bhikaji Cama(1861-1936): She was also involved in various social reform efforts, particularly those focused on the rights of women and the welfare of the underprivileged. Her speeches and writings encouraged Indians to unite and demand independence from British colonial rule. She was influenced by Dadabhai Naoroji and served as inspiration to India youth in the United Kingdom. She raised the first National Flag at the International Socialist Conference in Stuttgart (Germany) in 1907, founded the free India Society, and launched the periodical 'Bande Mataram' to propagate her revolutionary ideas.

Conclusion

Women played an indispensable and transformative role in the freedom movement, significantly shaping the course of history through their courage, resilience, and unyielding commitment to justice. Their contributions were not limited to traditional roles but extended to leadership, activism, and sacrifice, challenging societal norms and inspiring generations to come. From organizing protests and leading revolutions to providing critical support in the background, women were central to the success of independence movements across the world. Their involvement not only advanced the cause of freedom but also helped lay the foundation for gender equality and social reform. Despite facing oppression and discrimination, women proved to be vital agents of change, and their legacies continue to inspire the ongoing fight for justice and equality today.

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