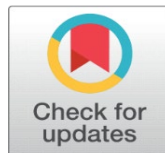
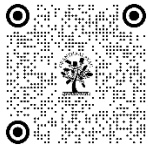


A STUDY OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL MOVEMENT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BIHAR

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DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.2740](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2.2023.2740)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

Women played a pivotal role in the history of India's independence, stepping out of their homes to join protests, endure arrests, and face hardships, including brutalities. Their contributions not only energised the movement but also left a lasting impact on the struggle for freedom. It is important to acknowledge the significant contributions of women in national movements. They fought with remarkable spirit and courage, playing an incredible and vital role in both the freedom movement and the nation's awakening. Women not only sacrificed their lives but also endured numerous challenges. One such example is Rani Laxmi Bai, a fearless leader who fought valiantly against British rule during India's struggle for independence. Women in India made significant contributions to the freedom struggle by actively participating in major movements like non-cooperation, civil disobedience, and Quit India, etc. This study highlights the activism of prominent figures such as Sarojini Naidu, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Sucheta Kripalani, along with other local leaders who played key roles in mobilising both rural and urban communities against the British.

Keywords: Independence, Women, National, British, Freedom, Quit, Non- Cooperation, Civil Disobedience

1. INTRODUCTION

In the pre-independence era, the status of women in the country was greatly disadvantaged, largely due to the dominance of men. The "women's question" in the 19th century was very important, and James Mill used it to construct a "civilisation critique of India." The degraded condition of Indian women was taken as an indicator of India's inferior status in the hierarchy of civilization. In the words of Romila Thapar, both Sudras and women were debarred from access to Vedic ritual rites. The public sphere became the sphere of activities for men; women were confined to the household. According to the Manu, women are to be protected by their fathers, husbands, and sons at different stages of their lives. Coming down in the pre-colonial period, in eighteenth century women were groomed to become good wives, serve their husbands, and expected to give birth to sons. If they become widows, they were to spend their lives in celibacy, cherishing memories of their dead husbands. Restrictions on Muslim women were also similar; multitudes of social

arrangements were maintained not only in social but also in physical distance between the sexes, through the medium of Purdah. By the nineteenth century, the purdah had become common for Hindu and Muslim women.

Women's primary roles were confined to household responsibilities, and they were not permitted to participate in other activities or tasks. In those times, women's mobility was largely confined to the four walls of their homes. The average Indian woman had little to no access to schools, colleges, or other public spaces. The issues that were dominated in the 19th century included the abolition of sati, widow remarriage, women's education, and increasing the age of marriage. With the efforts of reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Keshab Chandra Sen, the condition of women saw significant improvement. The Brahmo Samaj and Prarthana Samaj played a significant role in educating women, providing them with their first experiences in public life. By the end of the 19th century, women began to take on the role of emancipators themselves, advocating for personal reforms and political rights. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Protestant missionaries, supported by allies in both India and England, led efforts to advocate for various social reforms within Hindu society. During the East India Company era, social reformers like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Jyotiba Phule faced numerous challenges in their efforts to improve the status of women in Indian society. After the 1857 revolt, Madam Bhikaji Cama became the first Indian woman socialist to fight against the British for freedom. Indian women fought for their rightful place in society, challenging the dominant patriarchal system while also actively participating in the national struggle for independence. The active involvement of women was essential in shaping the direction and success of key movements such as the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement, among others. The sacrifices made by Indian women hold a prominent place in the history of the freedom struggle.

2. WOMEN LEADERS OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Numerous women played vital roles in the freedom struggle, including prominent figures like, Rani Laxmi Bai, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, and Mridula Sarabhai at the national level. Additionally, there were provincial leaders such as A.V. Kuttimalu Amma in Kerala, Rameshwari Nehru and Bi Amman in Uttar Pradesh, Satyawati Devi and Subhadra Joshi in Delhi, and Usha Mehta and Hansa Mehta in Bombay, among many others. Furthermore, Irish women like Annie Besant also contributed their role against British exploitation in the Indian context.

Women's involvement in the Indian national movement broadened the foundation of the women's movement in India. Their participation in the freedom struggle not only reinforced the national quest for independence but also offered a platform to address the challenges and contradictions of the patriarchal society. During this period, number of women, such as Ramabai and Mai Bhagwati, emerged as reformers and public speakers at meetings. It was around this time that women began actively participating in nationalist campaigns and organizations, with many enlightened women eventually joining India's freedom movement. For many women, political engagement fueled their feminist consciousness, while their dedication to improving women's status motivated their participation in the freedom struggle.

At the fourth session of the Indian National Congress held in Bombay in 1889, ten female delegates were present—one elected by men at a public meeting and the others chosen by various women's associations. Among the attendees were European women, Christians, a Parsi, an orthodox Hindu, and three Brahmos. Notable participants included Pandita Ramabai, a social reformer and educator Swarnakumari Devi, a prominent Bengali writer and Kadambini Ganguli, Bengal's first female doctor, along with other women from Bombay.

The Indian National Congress, established in 1885, also welcomed women as members. Swarnakumari Devi attended the fourth session of the Congress in Bombay in 1889. Among the most active female freedom fighters from the Central Provinces were Satyabhama Tilak, Yamunabai Savarkar, Avantika Bai Gokhale, Lakshmibai Khare, Lakshmibai Datar, Lakshmibai Rahalkar, Janakibai Gore and Godabai Khare. They formed a women's wing of Abhinav Bharat, called the Atma Night Yuvati Sabha, which covertly supported revolutionaries. In Maharashtra, women organized events like Hindu Sahbhajan and Haldi Kumkum to combat untouchability. During her visit to India, Mrs. McDonald, wife of Ramsay McDonald, observed: "A storm-like movement is sweeping through the women."

In Punjab, women such as Pravati Devi, Radha Devi, Atma Devi, Kartar Kaur, Lado Rani Zutshi, and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur actively participated in the boycott of the Simon Commission. In Uttar Pradesh, Swarnam Rani Nehru and Begum Abdul Qadir were involved actively, while in the Central Provinces, Anusuya Bai was active in the freedom movement.

Women like Amina Ghulam Rasul Qureshi, Kusum Ben, Ganga Ben, and Danda Ben participated in the no-tax payment movement in Gujarat. The success of this movement was largely due to the efforts of these women.

3. WOMEN FREEDOM FIGHTER OF INDIA

Sarojini Naidu emerged as a prominent nationalist leader around 1917, having joined the national movement during the protests against the partition of Bengal in 1905. She first attended the Indian National Congress in 1904 in Bombay, where she was invited to recite her poem "Ode to India". At the 1906 Congress session in Calcutta, her impassioned speech so impressed Gopal Krishna Gokhale that he encouraged her to dedicate her life to the nation.

Sarojini played a key role during the Salt Satyagraha, being one of the women protestors at the Dharsana Salt Works, and was a leading figure in the Civil Disobedience Movement. She inspired the women to join the freedom struggle. In 1925, she became the first female president of the Indian National Congress during the Kanpur session and later served as acting president in 1932. In the Quit India Movement of 1942, she was arrested for fighting against the British. She also brought Gandhi's message of non-violent resistance to the U.S. in 1928.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay actively participated in the Salt Satyagraha during the 1930s. In December 1929, she was elected president of the Youth Congress. On January 26, 1930, she captured the nation's attention when she clung to the Tricolour during a scuffle to protect it. She also transformed the All India Women's Conference into a vibrant movement. In recognition of her contributions, she was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1955 and the Padma Vibhushan in 1987 by the Government of India.

Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, daughter of Swarnakumari, played an active role in the nationalist movement and composed a song encouraging people from various provinces to join the struggle for freedom. She was involved in organizing Swadeshi fairs and also established Lakshmir Bhandar, a shop dedicated to selling only indigenous products.

Kumudini Mitra, the daughter of the prominent nationalist Krishna Kumar Mitra, organized a group of educated women to facilitate connections among various revolutionaries. She raised the causes for the revolutionaries through *Suprabhat* and *Bengali* magazine.

Madam Bhikaji Cama, inspired by Dadabhai Naoroji, became a significant source of motivation for Indian youth in the UK. She unfurled the first National Flag in Germany in 1907. She also organized the Free India Society and launched the journal *Vande Mataram* to spread her revolutionary ideas.

Kalpana Dutta was another notable female revolutionary leader who was inspired by the revolutionary ideals of Surya Sen. She joined the Communist Party of India, where she played an active role in the national movement.

Sucheta Kriplani was a remarkable freedom fighter, nationalist, and the first female chief minister of an Indian state. Her contributions to India's independence movement are notable, marked by her close association with Jai Prakash Narayan and a strong socialistic ideology. She played an active role in the Quit India Movement of 1942, where she not only organized underground activities but also inspired and mobilized women to join the resistance against British rule, which ultimately led to her arrest.

In 1940, Kriplani founded the All India Mahila Congress, a pioneering effort aimed at involving women in the nationalist movement and advocating for their rights. Her early career included work as a professor of constitutional history, where she displayed a keen understanding of governance and leadership, skills she later applied to political life. Her leadership and dedication paved the way for future female politicians in India. Notably, on August 15, 1947, the day of India's independence, Kriplani sang "Vande Mataram" in the Constituent Assembly, a moment that underscored her patriotic spirit and dedication to the country's freedom. Sucheta Kriplani remains celebrated as a distinguished freedom fighter, social reformer, and trailblazing politician, who was deeply committed to India's progress and equality.

Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur was a dedicated freedom fighter and an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi from 1919. She played a vital role in India's independence struggle, joining the Salt Satyagraha in 1930 and later participating in the Quit India Movement of 1942. Her contributions extended well beyond independence; as India's first health minister, she championed public health reforms, focusing on women's and children's health.

She was also instrumental in founding and presiding over the Indian Council of Child Welfare, through which she advocated for child welfare programs and policies across the country. Her leadership extended internationally as well—she became the first woman and first Asian president of the World Health Assembly in 1950. An enduring icon of social

reform, Kaur tirelessly worked for women's rights, rural health services, and the eradication of discrimination, leaving a lasting legacy in India's social and political landscape.

Aruna Asaf Ali, widely celebrated as the "Grand Old Lady" of India's independence movement. Her iconic role in the 1942 Quit India Movement included famously raising the Indian flag at the Gowalia Tank Maidan in Bombay, an act that became emblematic of India's resolve to break free from British rule. She had earlier been active in the 1930 Salt Satyagraha and other major protests, showing an unwavering commitment to the cause. Aruna's deep involvement in the independence movement was influenced in part by her husband, Asaf Ali, a prominent Congress leader, through whom she encountered the revolutionary slogan "Inquilab Zindabad" when he met Bhagat Singh as Gandhi's chosen counsel and emissary in Lahore Jail. Known for her fearlessness, Aruna's participation in protests and underground activities often led to imprisonment, yet she remained steadfast.

Usha Mehta was a pioneering freedom fighter who became India's first underground radio jockey, establishing Congress Radio in 1942 to defy British censorship and inspire resistance during the Quit India Movement. Known for her courage and resourcefulness, she operated Congress Radio secretly, using it as a platform to broadcast banned news, updates on the freedom struggle, and patriotic songs like "Bande Mataram," keeping the spirit of resistance alive among Indians. Through Congress Radio, Usha Mehta provided uncensored information and countered British propaganda, making her a key figure in the movement. Her broadcasts spread news of nationalist leaders' activities and highlighted ongoing protests, which the British sought to suppress. Despite the constant threat of arrest, she continued her broadcasts until British authorities eventually shut down the station and imprisoned her.

Usha's commitment to the cause of independence went beyond Congress Radio. She remained active in the movement, inspiring others through her unwavering dedication to freedom. Her work stands as a powerful testament to the courage and resilience of those who fought for India's independence against colonial oppression, particularly through innovative means that broke new ground in the freedom struggle.

Rani Gaidinliu was a formidable Naga nationalist leader from Manipur who led a powerful resistance against British rule, especially during the Civil Disobedience Movement, with the goal of expelling foreign forces from her homeland. She was a visionary in her determination to preserve the rights and traditions of her people, standing as a symbol of courage and cultural pride. Beginning her activism at a young age, Gaidinliu rallied Naga communities to oppose colonial oppression, often risking her life to resist British incursions. Her influence extended beyond Manipur, as she mobilized people across the Naga Hills and neighbouring regions, inspiring widespread support. In recognition of her courage and unwavering dedication, Jawaharlal Nehru honoured her with the title "Rani of the Nagas," a tribute to her leadership and impact on the Naga cause. She spent several years imprisoned by the British, but her resolve remained unbroken. Even after India's independence, she continued to advocate for the rights of the Naga people, becoming a significant figure in the post-independence era. Her legacy lives on as a symbol of strength, cultural pride, and unwavering dedication to her people's freedom and identity.

4. WOMEN'S MOBILIZATION DURING THE GANDHIAN ERA

Mahatma Gandhi's role in India's freedom struggle is regarded as the most pivotal, as he led the movement for independence through his peaceful and non-violent methods. Gandhi's approach, shaped by his experiences in South Africa, recognized the potential of women as passive resisters. As he developed his strategy of Satyagraha in India, he believed that women could participate alongside men.

Women played a crucial role in supporting Gandhi's efforts, particularly in raising the Tilak Swaraj Fund by contributing cash and jewellery. Among Muslim women, Abida Banu Begum, known as Bai Amman, the mother of the Ali brothers, travelled across the Central Provinces to promote Khadi and foster Hindu-Muslim unity. Gandhi empowered and inspired women by fighting against caste discrimination, child marriage, and advocating for women's education. He encouraged women to actively participate in the freedom struggle, motivating them to join in large numbers.

The Non-Cooperation Movement saw an unprecedented rise in women's activism, particularly among the educated and middle classes. Leaders like Amrit Kaur, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sarala Devi, and Muthulakshmi Reddy emerged as prominent figures during this time.

During the Civil Disobedience Movement, inspired by Gandhian ideals, Sarojini Naidu led a peaceful protest at the Dharsana Salt Works against the Salt Law and taxes, even after Gandhi's arrest. She also advocated for women's voting rights and became the first Indian woman to be elected President of the Indian National Congress.

During the Quit India Movement, the underground activities led by Aruna Asaf Ali and Usha Mehta played a critical role in sustaining the movement.

BIHAR

Bihar boasts a rich cultural heritage and has played a significant role in Indian history, spanning from the Vedic period to modern times. Women have made notable contributions by actively engaging in every stage of progress. Schools were opened in Bihar to provide education to women and also encourage women to participate in public events. During Gandhiji's tour of Bihar, women began attending his public conferences in large numbers. Among the prominent figures from Bihar who contributed to India's independence movement are Prabhavati Devi, Vindhyavasini Devi, Ram Pyari Devi, Tara Rani Srivastava, and Tarkeshwari Sinha.

Prabhavati Devi was an Indian political dissident who married Jai Prakash Narayan on May 16, 1920. He encouraged her to pursue her education and become skilled in spinning with the charkha. She founded the Mahila Charkha Samiti in Patna to involve those women who were isolated, following Gandhian principles. She was arrested and sent to Bhagalpur prison during Quit India Movement.

Vindhyavasini Devi dedicated herself to social work following her meeting with Gandhi Ji in 1919, subsequently becoming a permanent member of the Congress party.

Ram Pyari Devi married Jagat Narayan Lal on March 12, 1930, and participated in the Salt Satyagraha on March 30. She was imprisoned for a year for her involvement. She gained significant recognition, even defeating Kisan leader Sahajanand Saraswati to become a member of the All India Congress Committee.

Tara Rani was born in Saran, Bihar and she was married to Phulendu Babu. She organized women in and around her village and accompanied her husband in protesting against colonial rule. Both participated in the Quit India Movement in 1942.

Annie Besant's leadership has influenced to women in Bihar. She started Home Rule League and made efforts to motivate local women to participate in the freedom struggle. She also played a significant role in opposing the Simon Commission.

5. CONCLUSION

The story of women's participation in India's freedom struggle is one of bold choices, where they found themselves in the streets, behind bars, and within legislative bodies. Thousands of Indian women devoted their lives to securing the freedom of their motherland. The non-violent movement that ultimately led to India's independence not only involved women but relied heavily on their active participation for success. Women from all provinces and presidencies played a vital role during the struggle. Initially, the movement faced challenges due to a lack of education, but as women became more aware and engaged, they rallied to Gandhiji's call, with both urban and rural women stepping forward to make significant contributions. At the Banaras Congress session of 1905, around 600 women from various parts of the country gathered to demonstrate female solidarity and mobilize support for the nationalist movement. This event highlights the active participation of women in the freedom struggle. Their involvement inspired countless others and was crucial in the fight against British rule. Beyond the struggle for independence, women also laid the foundation for a more inclusive and equitable society in the post-independence era. Their bravery, resilience, and unwavering commitment to the cause of freedom are remembered and celebrated as a vital part of India's rich history of struggle and victory.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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