



ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT OF INDIA

Moseda Khatun

Independent Researcher in History, Malda, West Bengal, India.

ABSTRACT

In India, women are always deprived by the dearth of opportunities and proper spaces. This is due to innate preponderance of male over female within the society for years. Though the women, women organizations, throughout the country, played a significant role in India's freedom movement, their role were never highlighted. In the recent years several scholars have tried to assess the role of women in the nationalist movement of India. This paper also aimed at to highlight the role and participation of some notable women in India's freedom movement. Available and well circulated literatures have been consulted to complete this research.



KEYWORDS: *Freedom Movement, Women organization, Notable Women. Nationalist Movement.*

INTRODUCTION

The history of Indian freedom movement would be incomplete if the contributions of women in that movement are ignored. A large number of women had made huge contribution and some of them sacrificed their lives in the struggle for India's freedom. It has been observed that most of the women freedom fighters were mothers and housewives; still they contributed massively for national freedom movement. They fought for the country's freedom with true spirit and fearless courage. They faced severe tortures, even gang raped by the troops just because of engagement in the movement. In spite of various tortures, they led various movements bravely for the country's freedom. The participation of women in India's freedom movement began as early as in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In the 20th century there are the several names which are remembered even today for their immense contribution both in the field of freedom struggles and in political field of India. The women from time to time had strengthened the nationalist movement not only in the way it is shaped for them but once they participated they had mobilized the freedom movement in their own way (Chatterjee, 2016).

NOTABLE INDIA'S WOMEN FREEDOM FIGHTERS

I. RANI LAKSHMI BAI

Rani Lakshmi Bai, known as Manu in her childhood, was born in the holy city of Varanasi in Brahmin family. Her later childhood name was Chhabili. She became proficient at horsemanship, the use of the sword and other weapons, possibly even guns. She became the wife of Gangadhar Rao, Maharaja of Jhansi. After the death of Maharaja Gangadhar Rao, Rani Lakshmi Bai fought against

the 'Doctrine of Lapse' which was enunciated by Governor-General Lord Dalhousie. She became the central character of the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 (Lebra, 2008). No other woman warrior in the history of India has made such a powerful impact on the minds of the Indian people as the Rani of Jhansi, Lakshmi Bai. She refused to surrender Jhansi to the East India Company as per the 'Doctrine of Lapse' and fought bravely attired as a male during the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 and died in the battle field fighting the British forces. Her fearlessness and courage inspired many Indians to stand up against the alien rule (Kaur, 2013).

II. PRAMADABALA ACHARYA

Sm, Pramadabala was dweller of Midnapore district of Erstwhile Bengal. She joined the National Congress and took active part in several national movements such as Civil Disobedience, Salt No-Tax Campaign, Quit India movements etc. Her house was burnt by the cops and her movable properties were taken away by them and she was thoroughly beaten up by them (Maity, n.d.).

III. MATANGINI HAZRA

Matangini Hazra, a famous Gandhi's leader and a humanitarian, was born at Hogla village under Tamluk Thana in Midnapore district of undivided Bengal. She had no access to education at her parent's house and she became widowed at an early age of eighteen without having any children. She played an active role in the struggle for independence from colonial rule (Banglapedia, n.d.). She participated in Gandhi's Civil Disobedience Movement in 1932. During the Quit India Movement in 1942, at the age of seventy two years she led the procession of around six thousand people to capture the Court, government offices and police establishment of the Tamluk town of Midnapore. When her procession reached the border of the town, they were repeatedly warned not to proceed further, for the section 144 was already there. As soon as she stepped forward a bullet had injured her one leg. She shouted '*Bande Mataram*' repeatedly. Subsequently two other bullets pierced her forehead and chest. She then dropped down dead with a national flag firmly fixed in her hand (Maity, n.d.).

IV. BIRAJASUNDARI MAITY

Birajasundari is the wife of late Ramanath Maity of Contai of Bengal. She actively participated in Civil Disobedience Movement, Salt and No-Tax Movements. She was arrested and suffered imprisonment and torture by the British police.

V. MAHADEVI VERMA

Mahadevi Verma, was born on March 26 in the year of 1907, a famous educationist and freedom fighter. She did not actively participate in political activities but she adopted Gandhi's ideals, including dressing primarily in khadi and giving up speaking in English. She inspired many Indians to participate in freedom movement at that time (India Today, 2019).

VI. BASANTI DEVI

She was born on 23rd March of 1880 in Assam state under the colonial rule of British. She became an Indian independence activist during the British rule. She was the wife of famous freedom fighter and social activist Chittaranjan Das who is known as '*Banglar Bagh*'. After the death of her husband, she took an active part in various freedom struggles. She continued her social work after the country's independence and she is awarded Padma Vibhushan in the year of 1973 (India Today, 2019).

VII. ASHALATA SEN

Ashalata Sen was a notable Indian independence activist, social worker and poet. Her nationalistic poem that was against the partition of Bengal published in the monthly 'Antahpur' at

the age of ten years. She was highly motivated by the non-cooperation movement started by Mahatma Gandhi in the year of 1921. She built a weaving machine in Gandaria in Dhaka. She took active part in the salt Satyagraha or Dandi March led by Mahatma Gandhi in 1930. She also thought and worked for the betterment of women in society (India Today, 2019).

VIII. MANIBEN PATEL

Maniben Patel, a well known Indian freedom activist and was a Member of the Indian parliament. She was born on April 3, 1903 at Karanasad of Gujrat. She was the daughter of renowned freedom fighter and post-Independence Indian great leader Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. After completion her education, she started working regularly at Gandhi's ashram in Ahmedabad. She emerged as a leader during the No-tax movement. She motivated and influenced the women to join with Gandhi and Sardar Patel and support No-Tax movement (India Today, 2019).

IX. RAMA DEVI

Rama Devi, an Indian freedom fighter and a social reformer, was born on December 3 in 1899. She was called Maa by the people of Odisha. She was highly driven by Mahatma Gandhi and took an active part in Non-Cooperation Movement in 1921. She used to go from village to village to encourage women to join the India's independence movement. She worked for the Congress party for years (India Today, 2019).

X. SAROJINI NAIDU

Sarojini Naidu, a distinguished poet and renowned freedom fighter, was born on 13th February of 1879 at Hyderabad. Her father, Aghorenath Chattopadhyay, was a brilliant scientist, a linguist and scholar who was the principal of Nizam College. She married to Dr Govindarajulu Naidu in 1898.

During this time, she campaigned for the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms, the Khilafat issue, the draconian Rowlett Act and the Satyagraha. At the point when Gandhi's dispatched the Civil Disobedience Movement, She demonstrated a dedicated lieutenant. With incredible mental fortitude she controlled the rotors, sold prohibited writing, and tended to excited gatherings on the bloodletting at Jallianwala Bag in Amritsar. In 1930 when Mahatma Gandhi picked her to lead the salt Satyagraha the tales of her mental fortitude got army. After Gandhi's capture she had arranged 2,000 volunteers under the searing sun to assault the Dahrsana Salt Works, while the police confronted them a large portion of a mile up the street with rifle, lathis (canes) are steel tipped clubs. The Volunteers wildly cheered when she shook off the arm of the British police officer who came to arrest her and marched proudly to the barbed wire in full force and she came under the influence of Gopalkrishna Gokhale and Gandhi. Gokhale advised her to spare all her energy and talents for the nation's cause. She became a follower of Gandhi's and accompanied him to England. She fully devoted herself for the welfare of youth, dignity of labour, education, women's emancipation and nationalism. She worked for Hindu-Muslim unity and dreamed for India as secular country. The period from 1917 to 1919 was the most dynamic phase of Sarojini's career as a public figure. She campaigned with regard to the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, the Rowlett or 'Black Bills', the Khilafat issue, the Sabarmati Pact and the Satyagraha Pledge. She was Gandhi's most faithful lieutenant when he launched the Civil Disobedience Movement on April 6 in the year of 1919, continuing the work after he was imprisoned, although she could also good-naturedly criticise what she considered his more impractical ideas. She returned the Kaiser-i-Hind medal, which the British Raj had awarded her for her outstanding work during the plague epidemic. In 1924 she travelled to South Africa to care for the interests of fellow Indians there, and became president of the Congress the following year, 1925. Her anti-British activities sent her to prison in 1930-32. She accompanied Gandhi to the inconclusive Second Round Table Conference held in 1931 in London. Whenever in England, she openly criticized British rule in India which caught the attention of scholars and intellectuals. She was a great peacemaker. She organized the 'National Week' in

1940, virtually running the whole Congress campaign at this stage (Jain, n.d.). She earned her the sobriquet 'the Nightingale of India', or 'Bharat Kokila' by Mahatma Gandhi's because of colour, imagery and lyrical quality of her poetry.

XI. BEGAM HAZRAT MAHAL

Begam Hazrat Mahal was a significant figure in India's Struggle for freedom from British frontier rule. She was additionally called as Begum of Awadh and was the second spouse of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, leader of Lucknow. During the Revolt of 1857, Begum Hazrat Mahal's band of allies, driven by Raja Jalal Singh, defied the powers of the British; later, they held onto control of Lucknow. She worked in shut relationship with different heads of the India's First War of Independence (Revolt of 1857), including Nana Sahib. Begum was a tactician as well as battled on the combat zone. At the point when the powers under the order of the British re-caught Lucknow and a large portion of the piece of Awadh, she had to withdraw. At the point when her powers lost ground, she escaped Awadh and coordinated warriors again in different spots. She turned down all proposals of absolution and stipends by the British rulers. At long last, she took shelter in a refugee camp in Nepal where she passed on in the year 1879. To recognize her unlimited endeavors in battling for the opportunity of country, the Government of India gave a stamp on tenth May 1984 (Kaur, 2013).

XII. KASTURBA GANDHI

She was an Indian political activist who was a leader in the struggle for civil rights and for independence from British rule in India. She was the wife of M. K. Gandhi. She joined her husband while he was in South Africa and worked with him for many years there. She was a head of ladies' Satyagraha for which she was detained. She assisted her husband on account of Indigo laborer in Champaran, Bihar and the No duty Campaign in Kaira, Gujarat. She was captured twice for picketing alcohol and unfamiliar material shops, and in 1939 for taking an interest in the Rajkot Satyagraha.

XIII. ARUNA ASAF ALI

Aruna Asaf Ali was born on 16 July 1909 in a Brahmin family in Kalka, Panjab, British India. She was a radical nationalist played an outstanding role in the historic Quit India Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi on August 9, 1942, and was a prominent leader of the underground movement. She published bulletins, went from place to place and even met Mahatma Gandhi to avoiding her arrest. She edited 'Inqulab' a monthly journal of the Indian National Congress.

XIV. KRISHNA DEVI

Krishna Devi, a Punjabi woman will be remembered forever for her contribution in India's freedom struggle. She took part in Satyagraha at Raipur. Under the leadership of Krishna Devi the women of Sambalpur assembled at a special meeting held in the honour of Mahatma Gandhi and Kasturba Gandhi. In 1931, she was arrested and sent to Sambalpur jail while addressing a mammoth peasant conference at Budharaja. She played a prominent role to inspire many women to participate in the freedom movement (Hota, 2016).

XV. KANAIBALA PATTANAYAKA

Sm. Kanaibala Pattanayaka of village Goyalbaria, P.S. Mahisadal of Midnapore district, took active part in several nationalist movements like Civil Disobedience movement, Dandi March and No-Tax campaigns. In 1932 she led the campaign of boycotting British goods and was arrested by the police. She was then physically assaulted and was raped by a police constable of Mahisadal police station (Maity, n.d.).

XVI. KAMLA NEHRU

Kamala Nehru, spouse of our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, gave full help to her better half in his craving to turn out effectively for the opportunity battle. She coordinated parades, tended to gatherings and drove picketing of alcohol and unfamiliar fabric shops in Allahabad which was home of town of Jawaharlal Nehru. She took unmistakable part in getting sorted out the No Tax Campaign in United Provinces (presently Uttar Pradesh). She coordinated gatherings of ladies in Allahabad and propagated utilization of Khadi materials during the Non Cooperation development in the time of 1921-22. She was captured twice by British specialists.

XVII. VIJAY LAKSHMI PUNDIT

Vijay Lakshmi Pundit is a sister of Jawaharlal Nehru and daughter of Motilal Nehru, were the president of congress. She was motivated by Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi and galvanized by Sarojini Naidu. She took active part in Non Co-operation Movement to fight against the British colonial rule. Vijay Lakshmi represented India in many of the Conferences abroad. She attended numerous public lectures and challenged the British dominated delegate's rights to represent India therein. She was arrested in 1932 and sentenced to one year rigorous imprisonment. She was arrested in 1940 and yet again during the Quit India Movement in 1942. Pandit was the first Indian woman to hold a cabinet post in pre-independent India (Kaur, 2013).

CONCLUSION

In this discussion only few notable women freedom fighters has been mentioned but there were uncountable women who involved many nationalist movements directly or indirectly and made a significant contribution in India's freedom struggle. In most cases they were not been glorified as freedom fighters in the history of freedom movement of India in spite of having remarkable endowment in that struggle. In spite of negligence towards our brave women freedom soldiers, history will reverberate with singing the songs of glory and devotion of those esteemed women freedom warriors who have dedicated and sacrificed their lives to the motherland.

REFERENCES

1. Banglapedia. *National encyclopaedia of Bangladesh*
http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Hazra_Matangini (accessed January 7, 2021).
2. Chatterjee, Kasturi Roy. 2016. Role of Bengali Women in the Freedom Movement. *Heteroglossia: A Multidisciplinary Research Journal June*, 50. Vol. 01, No. 01. <https://www.sundarbanmahavidyalaya.in/ejournal/pdf/9-05.pdf> (accessed February 2, 2021).
3. Hota, Priyambada. 2016. Role of women in the freedom movement in Western Odisha: Some reflections. *Odisha Review*, 26-31
<http://magazines.odisha.gov.in/Orissareview/2016/August/engpdf/27-32.pdf>.
4. India Today. 2019. *5 unknown women freedom fighters of India who did as much as Gandhi's and Nehru*. <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/5-unknown-women-freedom-fighters-of-india-who-did-as-much-as-gandhi-and-nehru-1557264-2019-06-27> (accessed February 5, 2021).
5. Jain, Reena. *Streeshakti: The parallel force*.
<http://www.streeshakti.com/bookS.aspx?author=10> (accessed February 5, 2021).
6. Kaur, Satwinder. 2013. Role of Women in India's Struggle for Freedom. *International journal of management and social sciences research* 112-114, Vol—2, no-4
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.300.6387&rep=rep1&type=pdf> (accessed February 4, 2021).
7. Lebra, Joyce Chapman. 2008. *Women against the Raj: The Rani of Jhansi Regiment*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
8. Maity, Kumar Sachindra. 2000. Role of Women in the Freedom struggle of Midnapore district (W.B.). *Jadabpur Journal of International Relations* 16-27, No-5, Issue-1.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0973598400110003?journalCode=jnra>((accessed January 28, 2021)

9. Singh, Manraj. 2014. Role of Women in India's struggle for freedom. *International Journal of Research (IJR)*. No-1, Issue-2.

https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=Role+of+Women+in+India%E2%80%99s+struggle+for+freedom.+International+Journal+of+Research+%28IJR%29+by+manraj&btnG= (accessed February 4, 2021).