



WOMEN IN INDIAN FREEDOM AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS (UP TO 1947)

Dr. Jagannath K.

Guest Lecturer , Department of History , Gulbarga University ,
Kalaburagi , Karnataka.

ABSTRACT

In India, many women are facing problem of gender inequality now. When the pages of history are turned, many of the brave women with their courage, bravery, intellect, organizing capabilities and administrative tactics, came forward to gain freedom and independence of India. The paper described the role of women in organizations, national movement and freedom struggle up to India's Independence.

KEYWORDS: brave women , intellect, organizing capabilities.

INTRODUCTION

The status of women was higher during the Vedic period and has declined during the medieval age and due to the welfare policies and efforts of the government, it is improving. Upadhyaya and Upadhyaya¹ discussed about the roles of women as administrators during the Vedic and Puranic age. Draupadi is one feminine character in the *Mahabharata*, typical of the age. She is the most forceful and consistent personality of the epic. Draupadi often dominated her husbands and their council. She is even mentioned in the epic as Panditha (learned). Similarly, Damayanti takes the responsibility for running the administration when Nala Maharaja is negligent about the affairs of his state. Though queens usually did not assume the reign of government when their husbands were alive, they did not hesitate to assume full control of the administration as regents when their husbands died or sons were minor or taken prisoners. During the captivity of the king Udayana of Kausambi, his mother had taken full charge of the administration and had discharged her duties in a manner that excited the admiration of even the experienced ministers. Curtius records that when the ruler of Massaga had died fighting Alexander, the queen directed the attack against the foreign invaders. In second century B.C. Queen Nayanika was at the head of the administration of the extensive Satavahana Empire of Deccan during the minority of her son. The Nanaghat cave inscription speaks of appointment of Nayanika as the regent of her minor son Vedsari. In the fourth century A.D. Prabhavati Gupta, the daughter of Chandra Gupta II, ruled successfully as a regent for many years when her son Divakarsena Pravarsena II was a minor.

There are such few examples in the Rajput period also. Minaldevi, mother of great Siddhraj Jai Singh of Gujarat, ruled over her kingdom in the end of eleventh century. Similarly, administration of Mewar was taken up by Kumardevi in 1193, when her husband Samarasi died on the battlefield along with Prithviraja III.

During the time of Harsha, his sister Rajashree, after the death of her husband, Maukharī, Grihavarman of Kannauj, occupied a seat of honour by the side of her brother and also participated in state deliberations². Vijaybhattacharika, queen of Chalukya Chandraditya, ruled the kingdom efficiently after her husband's death.

In A.D. 786, Silamahadevi, the crowned queen of the Rastrakuta king Dhruv, making a land grant on her own authority. She also issued royal orders in her name. Obviously she felt that being the crowned queen, she had an inherent right to issue routine administrative orders,



without any reference to her husband, or the latter may have expressly invested her with certain important power of making land grants. Revakanammadi, a daughter of Rastrakuta Amoghvarsha I and wife of Erraganga, was the governor of the district of Edetore in A.D. 837. Malila devi, a queen of Chalukya Somesvara, was governing the extensive province of Banawasi in A.D. 1053. Ketaladevi, another queen of the same king, was the governor of Agrahara of Ponavad. Akkadevi, an elder sister of Jayasimsha III, was ruling over the district of Kinsukad in A.D. 1022. Kumkumadevi, a sister of Vijayaditya, was ruling over a portion of Dharwar district in Karnataka in A.D. 1077. Laxmidevi, the chief queen of Vikramaditya VI, was in charge of the administration of 18 religious endowments³.

After the death of king Shakarvarman (7th century), his queen Sugandha accepted the prayers of her people and ministers and ascended the throne. She is considered to be one of the most successful monarchs. India also produced some outstanding Muslim queens who inherited their parents' title and governed kingdoms efficiently and wisely. The names of Sultana Razia, Chand Bibi, Mallika-e-Jahan, Lad Malika, MahamAnga, Noor Jahan are significant examples of political power wielded by women in medieval India. Queen Jhansi, Rani Chennamma, Belvadi Mallamma and such other rulers were also popular administrators during the British India.

WOMEN IN FREEDOM MOVEMENT:

Ladies were in the bleeding edge of all the fundamental things on the plan of the social change development. For reformers, ladies' liberation was an essential to national recovery and a file of national accomplishment in the associated talk of human advancement, advancement, innovation, and nationalism⁵. One strand in the development focused on authoritative cure. A progression of crusades brought about the abrogation of sati in 1829 and the empowering of dowager remarriage in 1856. Another strand was worried about making the female partner of the new male tip top, "New Women", who might share the sensibilities of the men in the family and have the capacity to manage their new class jobs. The central instrument was formal instruction yet the issue turned out to be inseparably connected with the sexual orientation isolation and disconnection (purdah) drilled by the upper stations and classes and, by augmentation, with a revising of open private sex jobs.

Between the 1850s reformers, who favored both authoritative intercessions by the frontier state and a more extensive program of female emancipation, set up associations like the Brahmo Samaj in eastern India, the Prarthana Samaj in western India, the Arya Samaj in northern India, and the Theosophical Society in southern India⁴. First class urban men drove these developments and tested a considerable lot of the custom and social confinements to which upper-position ladies were subjected. As fathers and spouses, the men could stretch out numerous advantages of advancement to a little however noteworthy gathering of ladies. These ladies were drawn into the general population circles of formal training and in the long run into business, political support, and leadership^{5&6}.

These accomplishments are in some cases thought little of: "first class" has regularly been utilized to classify—and reject—ladies who attempted to pick up an instruction and a place in India's open life, neither of which streamed consequently or effectively from their class or position status. Ladies frequently earned "flexibility" at the cost of social scorn, segregation, and badgering. And keeping in mind that a few ladies were supported by benevolent male relatives, others confronted extreme familial resistance⁷.

In 1883, Kadambini Basu and Chandramukhi Basu got B.A.s from Calcutta University, turning into the principal female alumni of the British realm.

Kadambini proceeded to prepare in prescription and rehearsed as a specialist in Calcutta in the 1880s⁸. Other ladies moved toward becoming specialists, instructors, and teachers. Ladies' instruction likewise continued apace in urban focuses like Bombay, Poona, and Madras. Astounding ladies like Pandita Ramabai, Anandibai Joshi, Tarabai Shinde, Haimavati Sen and Saraladevi, some special and some not, tested man centric requirements, in any event in their own lives, and some proceeded to take part in the rising patriot movement^{9&10}.

While the liberal segment of the new first class requested lawful and managerial activity from the colonial state in their change venture, more moderate Indian feeling opposed frontier mediation into traditional social relations. The discussions between these two gatherings have frequently been viewed as a fight between modernists and traditionalists¹¹. Lata Mani, be that as it may, contends that the two gatherings were redefining custom and, thusly, "Indianness." Women were "neither the subjects nor the articles" of this discourse, yet simply the "site" on which the discussions were conducted¹². What's more, even as this recast custom came to involve the center of present day Indian character, sexual orientation as the excellent site (or symbolic articulation) progressed toward becoming and stays integral to political and social procedures of personality development.

The Age of Consent Controversy (1890-91), which took after from the pioneer government's endeavor to raise the time of marriage for Indian ladies, was a watershed in this regard¹³. Patriot protection from change appeared as a resistance of convention. The predominant philosophy being formed in this procedure moved ladies from a file of social ailment (as in the talk of frontier teacher reformists) to an exemplification of good request. The great lady, the modest spouse and mother enabled by otherworldly quality, turned into the notable portrayal of the nation¹⁴.

Saraladevi Chaudhurani, maybe the most striking of the "New Women", was both a women's activist and a patriot, a functioning member in both the social change and patriot developments. She was one of the principal ladies to see the requirement for and begin a relationship for ladies. She contended that ladies' issues couldn't be tended to sufficiently as an aide of the National Social Conference (set up by the Indian National Congress in 1887) or by men who "publicize themselves as bosses of the weaker sex, square with open doors for ladies, female training and female liberation... their pet subjects of speech at the yearly show"¹⁵, yet who really lived in the "shade of Manu," unwilling to permit ladies free action¹⁶. Saraladevi established the Bharat Stree Mahamandal (Great Group of Indian Women) in Allahabad in 1910.

Saraladevi's endeavors went ahead the foot rear areas of a few ladies' clubs, gatherings, and affiliations started by men. These incorporated the Bharat Ashram (Indian Hermitage) in Bengal, framed by Keshab Chunder Sen (of Brahma Samaj) in the 1870s; Arya Mahila Samaj (The Aryan Women's Association) in Bombay, framed by Pandita Ramabai and Justice Ranade in the 1880s; Bharat Mahila Parishad (Ladies' Social Conference), shaped as a component of the National Social Conference in 1905; and Anjuman-e-Khawatin-e-Islam (The Muslim Women's Association) in Punjab, framed by Amir-un-Nisa of the Mian family.

The Swadesh movement in Bengal (1905-1908) marked the beginning of women's participation in nationalist activities. Many of the women were from families involved in nationalist politics. Middle class nationalist women contributed jewelry, money and even grain to the movement. They took active part in the boycott of foreign goods and in revolutionary activities. Sister Nivedita is reported to have become a member of the National Revolutionary Council and in that capacity, organized women for nationalist activities. Like her there were several others seen as a threat by the British including Agyavati in Delhi, Madame Cama who was described by the Government as the recognized leader of the revolutionary movement and Kumudini Mitra who started a journal called 'Suprabath' which linked nationalist politics to women's traditional power. Madame Cama, a Parsi woman nationalist persuaded the International Socialist Congress to support the Indian Independence Movement and also began a monthly journal called 'Vande Mataram' towards this end. The movement for independence also gave rise to the question of women's suffrage.

In December 1917, Annie Besant and a few other women met Mr. Montague to demand voting of rights for Indian women. During the same period several all-India women's organizations came into being. In 1917, Annie Besant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Malathi Patvardhan, Ammu Swaminathan, Mrs. Dadabhoy and Mrs. Ambujamal founded the Women's Indian Association. Described as the first truly feminist organization in India, it strongly supported the Home Rule Movement. In 1926, the All India Women's Conference was formed and became extremely active on the question of women's suffrage, labour issues, relief and nationalist work. The 1920's also witnessed a second generation of feminists who were advocates of women's rights. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Lady Feroz Bai Mehta, Mrs. N. Sengupta, was some of the prominent

women activists of this period. Several other women were active on causes other than the Independence movement including Prabhavati Mirza (a powerful trade unionist), Kamini Roy (a social reformist), and Aghorekamini Roy (founder of a Social Welfare Women's Organization). A number of these reformist and revolutionary women were also eminent writers. NagendrakalaMustafi, MankumariBasu, Kamini Roy, KasibhaiKanitkar, Mary Bhore, GodavaribaiSamaskar, Kamala Sathianandan, Rameshwari Nehru, Roopkumari Nehru, Parvatibai and Rukmanibai are examples of this stream of women activists who combined activism and writing. Women who were strong leaders in the Independence movement were Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Basanti Devi. A strong supporter of women's rights, Sarojini Naidu worked with the Congress and the Muslim League. She was instrumental in the passage of a resolution to support women's franchise and became the first Indian woman to become the elected President of the Indian National Congress. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay participated in the Satyagraha movement of the 1930s.

One of the methods Mahatma Gandhiji chose to undermine the authority of the British was for Indians to defy the law which made it illegal for them to make salt. At that time, salt-making was a monopoly and earned considerable revenues for the British. Mahatma Gandhi began his campaign by going on a march - the salt march - through many villages, leading finally to the sea, where he and others broke the law by making salt. Aruna Asaf Ali's first major political involvement was in the salt march at which she was arrested and prosecuted. No woman had been included by Gandhi in his chosen number of marchers. But nationalist women protested and they forced him to allow them to participate. Sarojini Naidu became the first woman President of the Indian National Congress in 1925. Her presence was a signal for hundreds of other women to join, and eventually the salt protest was made successful by the many women who not only made salt, but also sat openly in marketplaces selling, and indeed, buying it¹⁷.

Aruna Asaf Ali played an active role in the Quit India movement, edited *Inquilab* magazine of the Congress and established the National Federation of Indian Women. She came to be known as the Grand Old Lady of the Independent Movement and heroine of the 1942 movement. Basanti Devi took an active part in anti-British activities and was arrested for picketing foreign goods shops, and in 1922 presided over the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. Thousands of women joined in the salt satyagraha, which is "generally remembered as the first time 'masses of Indian women' got involved in the struggle for Independence"¹⁸. Several women's organizations were formed to mobilize women to participate in nationalist activities including processions, pickets, and charka spinning such as the Ladies Picketing Board, *DeshSevika Sangh*, *Nari Satyagraha Samiti* and *MahilaRashtriya Sangh*. Beyond any doubt, the active participation of women in the political struggles for independence consummated in a Constitution based on the principles of equality and guaranteeing equal rights to suffrage for women, in the year 1947 itself.

The trajectories of these movements were usually traced from the social reform movements of the 19th century when campaigns for the betterment of the conditions of women's lives were taken up, initially by men. By the end of the century women had begun to organize themselves and gradually they took up a number of causes such as education, the conditions of women's work and so on. It was in the early part of the 20th century that women's organizations were set up and many of the women who were active in these later became involved in the freedom movement.

Revolutionaries also took part in the Nationalist Movement, by adopting the extreme and violent methods for achieving the goals. Kalpana Dutt, inspired by Chittagong Army, joined the revolutionary organizations at an early age and she worked vigorously in the movement from 1930 to 1933 and got transportation for life. PrithiLatha, a senior revolutionary during freedom movement, led a group of seven in an attack on the European Club at Pahartali in the suburbs of Chittagong on 25th September 1931. All other members of the group escaped but PrithiLatha committed suicide. In her pocket, she carried a message to the women of India. It said, "Women today have taken the firm resolution that they will not remain in the background... I earnestly hope that our sisters would not nurse the feeling that they are weak. With this hope in my heart, I am proceeding today for self-immolation". While expressing her will she wanted to show

that women could also sacrifice their lives for the country"¹⁹. Such was the dedication of women in the Freedom Movement.

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

Women's equal status in society is emphasized by the Indian Constitution in 1950s, but before the same, women were possessed subjugated position (even now in few issues) in family and society. It is highlighted that, at the historical freedom movements, political participation and administration, women were also front runners in few of the kingdoms and at different provinces. As such, the courage, intellect, bravery, etc of these women paved way for present day women to gain status, equality and respect. It is concluded that, women during the British rule, though low-educated, are aware about the organized movement, which they were thought that way to success. Hence, it is essential for the women to form organizations to gain their rights and the women's organizations in India should be strengthened to fight for equality and social justice.

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