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Women in Indian Freedom Struggle

Gurjeet Kaur
Research Scholar, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Jalandhar.

Abstract: ***The history of the struggle of Independence of India would be incomplete without describing the contribution of women. What the women of India have done is priceless. The history of the Indian freedom struggle is full of stories of women's sacrifice, altruism and valor. Very few of us know that there were hundreds of women who fought side by side with their male counterparts. They fought with true spirit and indomitable courage. Indian women broke away from various restrictions and left their traditional domestic roles and responsibilities. Therefore, the participation of women in the struggle for freedom and national awakening is incredible and commendable. However, it is not easy for women to fight as warriors in a male-dominated society. Even if women tried to change the perception of people so conservative who thought women are just there to do housework. Furthermore, women not only sacrifice their lives but also struggle with these issues. Rani Laxmi Bhai was one of those women who fought against the British. This paper is n attempt to highlight this legacy of women in history.***
Keywords: Indian, Women, Freedom movement, Role, Society

I. INTRODUCTION

In the pre-independence period, the status of women within the country was not satisfactory. The main reason for this was the prevalence of male dominance. The major responsibilities of women were devoted to domestic work and to take care of family. They were not allowed to participate in the of other tasks and activities, they were not allowed to express their views and perspectives. During this period, several systems were implemented which adversely affected women. These include child marriage, ban on widow remarriage, female feticide, female feticide, purdah system, sati and polygamy. During the period of the East India Company, many social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chander Vidya Sagar and Jyotiba Phule faced many challenges that were associated with bringing about a change in the status of women within Indian society. Women's participation in India's freedom struggle began as early as 1817 when Bhima Bai Holkar fought against the British. Madam Bhikaji Cama, the first Indian woman socialist who fought for the independence of her motherland after the revolt of 1857. There is no doubt that a large number of women have participated in the Indian anti-imperialist struggle.

II. OBJECTIVES

1) To study the freedom movement in India in general.
2) To explore the role played by women freedom fighter in freedom movement in India.
3) To create awareness about different women freedom fighter.
4) To show the social economic emancipation of Indian women.
5) To highlight their sufferings and sacrifices of Indian women.

III. WOMEN OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

There is no doubt that women participated in the anti-British struggle in large numbers. There is a wide list of such women who fought for freedom bravely. Starting with Sarojini Naidu, Rani Laxmi Bai, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Mridula Sarabhai at the national level, we may go on to provincial level leaders 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 several others. It is a very difficult task to distinguish between regional level and all-India level leaders. Most of the women began at the local level and become the national leaders. Besides all these Indian women, there were also international women like Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins, who brought their own knowledge of the Irish experience of British exploitation to help India. There are some freedom fighter women listed below:

A. Rani Laxmi Bai

Indian history has never seen a brave and powerful female warrior like Rani Laxmibai. She is a shining example of patriotism and national pride. She is an inspiration and admiration for many. Her name is thus written in golden letters in the history of India. She was the great personality of 1857’ war.

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B. Sarojini Naidu

She emerged as a prominent nationalist around 1917. She was the second woman to become president of the INC in 1925. She joined the national movement in 1905 during the protest against the Partition of Bengal. At the Dharasana Salt Factory, during Sal Satyagraha, she was one of the women who protested.

She played an important role during the Civil Disobedience and was arrested. In 1942, she was arrested during the "Quit India Movement".

She traveled across India and gave lectures on female empowerment and nationalism. She was also involved in the formation of the Women's India Association and was with the Women's Voting Rights delegation in London.

C. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

In the 1930s, she also participated in the Salt Satyagraha. She promoted handicrafts, handloom and theatre. The Government of India honored her with the Padma Bhushan in 1955 and the Padma Vibhushan in 1987.

D. Annie Basant

She became the first President of the Indian National Congress in 1917. Her colleague Margaret's cousins drafted the Indian Women's Voting Rights Bill and launched the "Women's Indian Federation". Annie Basant also worked in theosophical society which was awaring the Indians to fight with British.

E. Vijayalakhsmi Pandit

Mrs. Pandit was jailed thrice for her nationalist activities in 1932, 1940 and 1942. During the Salt Satyagraha, she led a procession and along with his sister and her daughters staged a sit-in at shops selling liquor and foreign clothes. She has fought many battles for women in India and has broken many barriers.

F. Mridula Sarabai

During Partition she fought very bravely to save girls abducted by mobs and to prevent refugees, both Hindu and Muslim from being hurt or killed. In 1934 she was elected to the All Indian Congress Committee as a delegate from Gujarat.

G. Durgabai Deshmukh

She was jailed for three years for participating in Salt Satyagraha. During this Satyagraha, when southern leaders like Rajaji and T. Prakasam were busy organizing other events of the movement, it was Durgabai who led a group of salt lawbreakers at Marina Beach in Madras. She has started 'Andhra Mahila Sabha' and 'Hindi Balika Patasala' at a very young age.

H. Basanti Das

She was an activist during the British rule in India. She took an active part in various political and social movements. She was arrested during non-cooperation movement. She received Padma Vibhushan in 1973.

I. Sucheta Kriplani

In 1932, she entered pubic life as a social worker and in 1939 she entered in politics and joined the Indian National Congress. In 1940, she offered individual satyagraha at Faizabad and was imprisoned for two years. During the Quit India Movement, she went underground and rendered remarkable service of secretly organizing anti-British resistance.

J. Kamla Das Gupta

She has been a shining light among Indian women freedom fighters. She belongs to the extremist class and was an active member of 'Jugantar Party'. In 1942, she was arrested and imprisoned in the Presidency Jail in connection with the Quit India Movement.

K. Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddy

She was the first Indian woman to serve in the field of social service and medicine. She was nominated to the Madras Legislative Assembly in 1926.

As a protest against the atrocities on women and repressive measures against women agitators during the Salt Satyagraha and Non-Cooperation Movement, she resigned from her offices and jumped into the freedom struggle.

L. Margaret Cousins

An Irish woman warrior, after fighting for voting rights for women in Ireland, arrived in India with her husband and advocated for the same cause for Indian women. She joined hands with Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu and helped in setting up several women's associations to bring awareness among them.

M. Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur

She belongs to the ruling house of Kapurthala. She was inspired by Gandhi and joined Congress during Salt Satyagraha. She was arrested in Bombay for breaking the salt law, when she went to the North-West Frontier Province to champion the cause of freedom struggle; she was arrested and convicted of sedition. She was the president of the All India Women's Conference for seven years.

N. Matangini Hazra

Gandhi Budhi (Gandhian Old Women) of West Bengal, is the freedom fighter and martyr who will be remembered for her heroic act. She joined the freedom movement in 1932. During the Salt Satyagraha, she was imprisoned. In 1933, she successfully led the black flag demonstration where the Governor of Bengal was addressing a police cordon meeting. This time she was arrested and sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment.

O. Indira Gandhi

The most remarkable woman in modern India is Indra Gandhi. She became the member of Indian National Congress in 1938. Her public activity entered a new phase with India Independence in 1947. She took over the responsibility of running the Prime minister’s house. She worked tirelessly for the social and economic advancement of the minorities. She had a vision of a modern self-reliant and dynamic economy. She fought boldly and vigorously against communalism, revivalism and religious fundamentalism of all types. She became the indomitable symbol of India self-confidence.

IV. WOMEN UNDER GANDHIAN LEADERSHIP

Gandhi had empowered and inspired women by fighting against caste, discrimination, child marriage and encouraging women's education. He motivated women to participate in large numbers. The non-cooperation movement is witness to unprecedented female activism, especially of the educated and middle class. Amrit Kaur, Aruna Asaf, Sarala Devi and Muthul Lakshmi Reddy emerged as prominent leaders. Inspired by Gandhian ideals during the Civil Disobedience Movement, Sarojini Naidu led a peaceful protest against the Salt Law, Taxes in Dharasana Salt Works even after Gandhi's arrest. She fought for the right to vote and was elected the first Indian woman president of the Indian National Congress. Under the leadership of Usha Mehta, Aruna Asaf Ali, underground activism in the Quit India Movement was instrumental in sustaining the movement. In the 1920s, the majority of women participated in the political scene. A large number of women came forward during this period. Thus, breaking the barriers of socio-economic oppression, Indian women have come together to realize the potential of collective action and have laid down seats for women's empowerment in independent India.

V. CONCLUSION

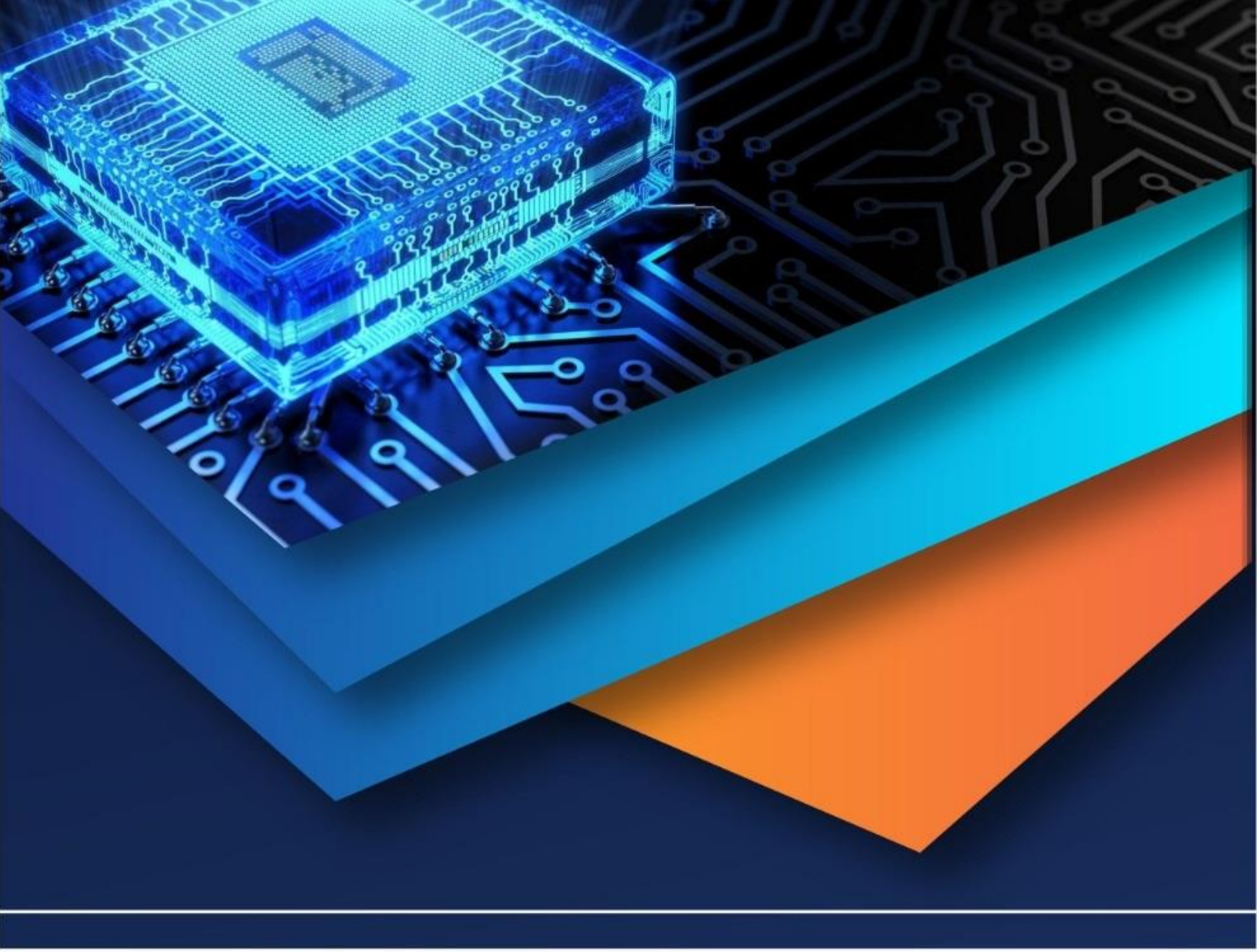
The story of women's participation in India's struggle for freedom is a story of making bold choices, finding themselves on the streets, inside the prison and in the legislature. After so many efforts, India gained independence on August 15, 1947. Thousands of Indian women dedicated their lives to achieving independence for their country. The non-violent movement that led to India's independence not only took women but also depended on the active participation of women for its success. Finally, we can say that in the last fifty years, the women's movement has matured and progressively deepened its ties with other movements such as trade unions, environmental movements and other progressive movements that fight against all forms of oppression, injustice and degradation.

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