

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIA'S STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

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ABSTRACT

The narrative of India's struggle for independence remains incomplete without acknowledging the remarkable contributions of women. Their sacrifices and unwavering commitment to the cause of freedom hold a place of utmost importance in the nation's history. These women displayed exceptional courage, resilience, and patriotism in the face of brutal oppression, exploitation, and countless hardships imposed by colonial rule.

At a time when many male freedom fighters were imprisoned or suppressed, it was the women who stepped forward to carry the movement forward, assuming leadership roles, organizing protests, spreading nationalist ideas, and even engaging in revolutionary activities. Their participation was not limited to symbolic gestures they were active agents of change who risked everything for the nation's liberation.

From leading armed revolts to participating in non-violent movements, their roles were both diverse and impactful. The list of such extraordinary women Rani Lakshmi Bai, Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Aruna Asaf Ali, Kamala Nehru, and many more is extensive, and their enduring legacy continues to inspire generations. Their dedication and selfless service to the cause of India's independence deserve to be remembered and celebrated as an integral part of the country's historical fabric.

Key Words :- Freedom, struggle, exploitation, Courage, Satyagraha.

INTRODUCTION

Woman participation in India freedom struggle began as early as in 1817. Bhima Bai Holkar fought bravely against the British colonel Malcolm and defeated him in guerilla warfare. Many women including Rani Channama of Kittur, Rani Begam Hazrat Mahal of Avadh fought against British East India company in the 19th century; 30 years before the First War of Independence 1857. The role played by women in the War of Independence (the Great Revolt) of 1857 was creditable and invited the admiration even leaders of the Revolt. Rani of Ramgarh, Rani Jindan Kaur, Rani Tara Bai, Baiza Bai, Chauhan Rani, Tapasvini Maharani daringly led

their troops into the battlefield.

Ramabai : After Madhvi death (1882), Ramabai moved to Pune where she founded Arya Mahila Samaj (Arya Society). Influenced by the ideals of the Brahmo Samaj and Hindu reformers, the purpose of the society was to promote the cause of women education and deliverance from the oppression of child marriage. When in 1882 the Hunter Commission was appointed by the colonial Government of India to look into education, Ramabai gave evidence before it. If they observe the slightest fault, they magnify the grain of mustard-seed into a mountain, and try to ruin the character of a woman. She suggested that teachers be trained and women school inspectors be appointed. Further, she said that as the situation in India was that women conditions were such that women could only medically treat them, Indian women should be admitted to medical colleges. Ramabai evidence created a great sensation and reached Queen Victoria. It bore fruit later in starting of the Women Medical Movement by Lord Dufferin. In Maharashtra, Ramabai made contact with Christian organizations also involved in women education and medical missionary work.

Avantibai - When the revolt of 1857 broke out, Avantibai raised and led an army of 4000. citation needed Her first battle with the British took place in the village of Kheri near Mandla , where she and her army were able to defeat the British forces. However, stung by the defeat the British came back with vengeance and launched an attack on Ramgarh. Avantibai moved to the hills of Devharigarh for safety. The British army set fire to Ramgarh, and turned to Devhargarh to attack the queen. Avantibai resorted to guerilla warfare to fend off the British army. She took the sword from guards sword and pierced it into herself and thus committing suicide on 20 March 1858 when facing almost certain defeat in battle.

Rani chennama :- Rani chennama husband died in 1824, leaving her with a son and a state full of volatility. This was followed by her son death in 1824. Rani Chennamma was left with the state of Kittur and an uphill task to maintain its independence from the British. Following the death of her husband and son, Rani Chennama adopted Shivalingappa in the year 1824 and made him heir to the throne. This irked the East India Company, who ordered Shivalingappa expulsion, on the pretext of the Doctrine of Lapse introduced by Lord Dalhousie, the then Governor General, to annex independent Indian States in 1848. This doctrine was based on the idea that in case the ruler of an independent state died childless, the right of ruling the State reverted or 'lapsed' to the sovereign. The state of Kittur came under the administration of Dharwad collectorate in charge of St John Thackeray of which Mr. Chaplin was the commissioner, both of whom did not recognize the new ruler and regent and notified Kittur to accept the British regime. Rani Chennama sent a letter to Mountstuart Elphinstone , Lieutenant- Governor of the Bombay Presidency pleading her cause, but the request was turned down, and war broke out. The British tried to confiscate the treasure and jewels of Kittur, valued at around 1.5 million rupees. They attacked with a force of 20,797 men and 437 guns, mainly from the third troop of Madras Native Horse Artillery. In the first round of war, during October 1824, British forces lost heavily and St John Thackeray, collector and political agent, was killed in the war. Amatur Balappa, a lieutenant of Chennama, was mainly responsible for his killing and losses to British forces. Two British officers, Sir Walter Elliot and Mr. Stevenson were also taken as hostages. Rani Chennama released them with an understanding with Chaplin that the war would be terminated but Chaplin continued the war with more forces. During the second assault, subcollector of Solapur, Munro, nephew of Thomas Munro was killed. Rani Chennama fought fiercely with the aid of her deputy, Sangolli Rayanna , but was ultimately captured and imprisoned at Bailhongal

Fort, where she died on 21 February 1829. Chennama was also helped by her henchman Gurusiddappa in the war against British.

Rani Laxmibai: On 10 May 1857, the Indian Rebellion started in Meerut. When news of the rebellion reached Jhansi, the Rani asked the British political officer, Captain Alexander Skene, for permission to raise a body of armed men for her own protection; Skene agreed to this. The city was relatively calm in the midst of the regional unrest in the summer of 1857, but the Rani conducted a Haldi Kumkum ceremony with pomp in front of all the women of Jhansi to provide assurance to her subjects, and to convince them that the British were cowards and not to be afraid of them. Until this point, Laxmi bai was reluctant to rebel against the British. In June 1857, rebels of the 12th Bengal Native Infantry seized the Star Fort of Jhansi, containing the treasure and magazine, and after persuading the British to lay down their arms by promising them no harm, broke their word and massacred 40 to 60 European officers of the garrison along with their wives and children. The Rani involvement in this massacre is still a subject of debate. An army doctor, Thomas Lowe, wrote after the rebellion characterising her as the Jezebel of India the young rani upon whose head rested the blood of the slain. Four days after the massacre the sepoys left Jhansi, having obtained a large sum of money from the Rani, and having threatened to blow up the palace where she lived. Following this, as the only source of authority in the city the Rani felt obliged to assume the administration and wrote to Major Erskine, commise set up a foundry to cast cannon to be used on the walls of the fort and assembled forces including some from former feudatories of Jhansi and elements of the mutineers which were able to defeat the invaders in August 1857. Her intention at this time was still to hold Jhansi on behalf of the Britishsioner of the Saugor division explaining the events which had led her to do so. The Rani appealed to the British for aid but it was now believed by the governor-general that she was responsible for the massacre and no reply was received.

Rani Gaidinliu : Nagaland Rani Gaidiuliu was a Naga spiritual and political leader who led a revolt against British rule in India.

Pritilata waddedar : Pritilata decided to join the Indian independence movement. Surjo Sen had heard about her and wanted her to join their revolutionary group. On 13 June 1932, Pritilata met Surjo Sen and Nirmal Sen in their Dhalghat camp. A contemporary revolutionary, Binod Bihari Chowdhury, objected that they did not allow women to join their group. However, Pritilata was allowed to join the group because the revolutionaries reasoned that women transporting weapons would not attract as much suspicion as men. Inspiration from Ramkrishna BiswasEdit Surjo Sen and his revolutionary group decided to kill Mr. Craig, inspector General of Chittagong. Ramakrishna Biswas and Kalipada Chakravarty were assigned for this task. But they mistakenly killed SP of Chandpur and Tarini Mukherjee instead of Craig. Ramakrishna Biswas and Kalipada Chakravarty were arrested on 2 December 1930. After the trial Biswas was ordered to be hanged till death and Chakravarty to be exiled to Cellular Jail. The family and friends lacked the amount of money required to travel to Chittagong to Alipore Jail of Calcutta. Since at that time Pritilata was staying in Kolkata, she was asked to go to Alipore Jail and meet Ramkrishna Biswas. Kalpana data The Chittagong armory raid was carried out on 18 April 1930. Kalpana joined the Indian Republican Army, Chattagram branch, the armed resistance group led by Surya Sen, in May 1931. In September 1931 Surya Sen entrusted her along with Pritilata Waddedar to attack the European Club in Chittagong. A week before the attack, she was arrested while carrying out reconnaissance of the area. She went into hiding after her release on bail. On 16 February 1933 the police

encircled their hiding place in Gairala village. During this raid Surya Sen was arrested but Kalpana managed to escape. Kalpana was finally arrested on 19 May 1933. In the second supplementary trial of the Chittagong armory raid case, Kalpana was sentenced to transportation for life. She was released in 1939. Besides these Binadas, Sunita Chaudhari and Shantidas who took part in freedom struggle in Bengal area. Binadas killed Anderson the British governor and Sunita Chaudhari and Shantidas killed Stevens the British officer and went to jail for 8 year.

Kasturba Gandhi: Kasturba Gandhi first involved herself with politics in South Africa in 1904 when, with her husband and others, she established the Phoenix Settlement near Durban. In 1913 she took part in protests against the ill-treatment of Indian immigrants in South Africa, for which she was arrested and on September 23, 1913 was sentenced to hard labour. While in prison, she led other women in prayer and encouraged educated women to teach the uneducated women how to read and write. Gandhi and Mohandas left South Africa in July 1914 and returned to live in India. In spite of Kasturba's chronic bronchitis she continued to take part in civil actions and protests across India and often took her husband spot when he was in prison. In 1917, Gandhi worked on the welfare of women in Champaran, Bihar where Mohandas was working with indigo farmers. She taught women hygiene, discipline, health, reading and writing. citation needed In 1922, she participated in a Satyagraha (nonviolent resistance) movement in Borsad, Gujarat even though she was in poor health. She did not take part in Gandhi famous Salt March in 1930, but continued to take part in many civil disobedience campaigns and marches. As a result, she was arrested and jailed on numerous occasions.

ArunaAsaf Ali: Aruna Asaf Ali had a major role in Indian Independence Movement. She became a member of Indian National Congress after marrying Asaf Ali and participated in public processions during the Salt Satyagraha. She was arrested on the charge that she was a vagrant and hence not released in 1931 under the Gandhi–Irwin Pact which stipulated release of all political prisoners. Other women co-prisoners refused to leave the premises unless she was also released and gave in only after Mahatma Gandhi intervened. A public agitation secured her release. In 1932, she was held prisoner at the Tihar Jail where she protested the indifferent treatment of political prisoners by launching a hunger strike. Her efforts resulted in an improvement of conditions in the Tihar Jail but she was moved to Ambala and was subjected to solitary confinement. She was politically not very active after her release, but at the ending of 1942, she took part in the underground movement. Clarification needed She was active in it. Rise to prominence during the Quit India movement Edit On 8 August 1942, the All India Congress Committee passed the Quit India resolution at the Bombay session. The government responded by arresting the major leaders and all members of the Congress Working Committee and thus tried to pre-empt the movement from success. Young Aruna Asaf Ali presided over the remainder of the session on 9 August and hoisted the Congress flag at the Gowalia Tank Maidan. This marked the commencement of the movement. The police fired upon the assembly at the session. Aruna was dubbed the Heroine of the 1942 movement for her bravery in the face of danger and was called Grand Old Lady of the Independence movement in her later years. Despite the absence of direct leadership, spontaneous protests and demonstrations were held all over the country, as an expression of the desire of India youth to achieve independence. An arrest warrant was issued in her name but she went underground to evade the arrest and started an underground movement in the year 1942. Her property was seized and sold. In the meanwhile, she also edited Inquilab, a monthly magazine of the Congress Party, along with Ram Manohar Lohia. In a 1944

issue, she exhorted the youth to action by asking them to forget futile discussions about violence and non-violence and join the revolution. The government announced a reward of 5,000 rupees for her capture. However, she also faced criticism from Gandhi for her support of the Royal Indian Navy mutiny, a movement she saw as the single greatest unifying factor of Hindus and Muslims at a time that was the peak of the movement for Pakistan.

Laxmi Sehgal : Laxmi Sehgal was a revolutionary of the Indian Independence movement, an officer of the Indian National army, and minister of women's affairs in the Azad Hind government. Laxmi is commonly referred to in India as caption Lakshmi a reference to her rank when taken prisoner in Burma during the second world war.

Sarojini Naidu :- Sarojini Naidu was an Indian political activist and poet : A proponent of civil rights, women's emancipation and anti-imperialistic ideas. She was an important figure in Indian struggle for independence from colonial rule.

The span of the women who took part in Indian national struggle is wide, and it is unable to cover all the women in one essay. There are some Major and minor role also. There are some dalit women who took active part in Indian freedom struggle. They are Jayabai Sidhalinga and Bhaghrati Tambat they threw tar on the statue of Lord Wilson.

CONCLUSION :

In conclusion, the role of women in India's freedom struggle was vast and multifaceted. During this era, numerous women emerged as courageous participants, contributing both directly and indirectly to the nation's fight against British colonial rule. Prominent figures such as **Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi, Rani Chennamma of Kittur, Avantibai Lodhi, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Tara Bai, Pritilata Waddedar, Bina Das, Suniti Chaudhury, Shanti Das, and Sarojini Naidu** played significant roles, ranging from leading armies and revolutionary acts to mobilizing masses through speeches and civil disobedience. In addition to these well-known names, countless other women—including those from **Dalit and marginalized communities** contributed immensely behind the scenes. Their efforts, though often undocumented or overlooked in mainstream historical narratives, were equally vital in sustaining the momentum of the independence movement. These unsung heroines supported the cause through intelligence gathering, fundraising, spreading nationalist ideas, and sheltering revolutionaries, often at great personal risk. Their bravery, determination, and sacrifice form an integral yet underappreciated part of India's journey to freedom. It is essential to recognize and honor these women, whose legacy continues to inspire generations in the ongoing struggle for equality and justice.

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