

Diverse And Significant Contribution of Indian Women Freedom Fighters

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Published on: 15/01/2025

Abstract:

Women's participation in Indian struggle has been immense yet invisible. During freedom struggle their efforts in and outside the confines of their homes was tremendous. Their efforts are however not depicted as they deserved to be. In their own different way, limited by social constraints their ways of contributing towards the freedom struggle were different and even unnoticed in many ways. Whether it was Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement or Quit India Movement they presence increased as we went through different phases of freedom struggle. There are various factors which are responsible for their little or insignificant mention in historical narratives. This might be due to various reasons such as their limited number in open revolt or resistance, societal constraints on their public life or them playing a subordinate role in the struggle. The huge research gap in this field provides ample scope for study and exploration. The present research paper aims to bridge this gap through a study of various available resources like published scholarly articles, books, journal papers, archival material and other relevant data. The research paper will primarily focus on collective efforts of women freedom fighters and their diverse ways of expressing nationalistic sentiments.

Keywords: freedom struggle, women, Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, Quit India Movement

Most leaders of mass movements have praised women's natural abilities to endure suffering and hold strong faith. Gandhi Ji saw large numbers of women participants would protect the peaceful and orderly nature of the movement so he trained them to direct protest activities. Women's participation in protests was important to Gandhi yet he never meant for those who were mistreated to hide behind women as a defence. He wanted to stop men from backing down by keeping women away from the Dandi march since he predicted the government's forceful reaction.

Gandhi's fight against caste, inequality, child marriage, and promotion of women's education had empowered and motivated women. They inspire a great deal of participation from the women. Unprecedented levels of female activism are seen in the non-cooperation movement, particularly among educated and middle-class women. Aruna Asaf, Sarla Devi, Amrit Kaur, and Muthul Laxmi Reddy became well-known leaders. Even after Gandhi's arrest, Sarojini Naidu, motivated by Gandhi's principles, organized a nonviolent demonstration against the salt law and tariffs at Dharsana Salt Works during the civil disobedience movement. She campaigned for the right to vote and became the first Indian woman to be elected to the Indian National Congress presidency. Aruna Asaf Ali's underground involvement during the Quit India campaign, spearheaded by Usha Mehta, was essential to keeping the movement going.³

Women's involvement in nationalist movements began with the Bengali Swadeshi Movement. Women in various parts of India were interested in the Swadeshi Movement and the movement against the partition of Bengal. Propaganda, popular mobilization, and revivalist consciousness all helped to enhance women's involvement in public affairs during this time (1905–11). The Swadeshi Movement placed a strong emphasis on raising education levels, promoting cultural heritage, and boycotting foreign products. Several women's organizations were founded during this time. During this Swadeshi period, a few women's associations were established. In 1910, Sarala Devi organized the women's movement and established Bharat Stri Maha Mandal in Lahore. This society has sections established in Calcutta and Allahabad. This society's objective was to bring women together on the basis of equality and a declaration of faith based on their financial excitement for the betterment and material growth of Indian women. Kanchi Mahila Parishad was founded by Parvati Devi, the headmistress of a Hindu girls' school in Kanchi, a Madras government residential neighbourhood, to provide Kanchi women with the skills necessary to voice their opinions publicly on pressing national issues. The process of women being associated with the freedom struggle was quickened by Annie Besant's introduction into Indian politics in 1914.

Annie Besant spearheaded the emancipation movement and advanced the demand for women's political rights when they were first created. Her leadership offered the women of the land courage, support, and inspiration to engage in the national life of the nation and to join the national movement in greater numbers. The influence of Madame Blavatsky led her to become a member of the Theosophical Society. In 1916, Annie Besant was a key figure in the Home Rule Movement. She was the editor of the weekly publication *Common Will* and the daily newspaper *New India*. She was taken into custody and imprisoned. Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins made every effort to get franchise for Indian women. As the inaugural President of the Indian Women's Association, she played a significant role in advocating for women's political rights. Men and women over the age of eighteen were eligible to join her Home Rule League. Annie Besant was the first female president of the Indian National Congress, having been elected in 1917.

When Sarojini Naidu visited and spoke at the Muslim League Session in 1913, she made her political debut as the "Ambassador of Hindu Muslim Unity." In 1916, three years later, Sarojini Naidu gave a speech on self-government. He thereafter started to play a significant role in the political life of the nation. Sarojini Naidu worked for women's rights and self-government because she believed that serving the country brought happiness and salvation. December 1917 saw Sarojini Naidu head a delegation of influential women from the social and political spheres in the same year. This deputation was waiting on Montague to ensure that women could vote. When she went to the Congress special session in Bombay the following September, 1918, she helped to pass a resolution pertaining to women's suffrage, which stated that they would not be denied the right to vote due to their gender. As part of the Home Rule League Deputation, Sarojini Naidu traveled to England in 1919 to testify before the Joint Parliamentary Committee. She also used this occasion to argue for women's franchise rights. Leading the charge in Bardoli was Sardar Patel, who started a nontax movement. The goal of this campaign was to address an economic injustice. From the beginning, the women of Bardoli participated in this movement, but they lacked leadership. The movement among Bombay's women was

considerably bolstered by Mithuben Petit and Bhaktben Desai. Even though it required them to walk a considerable distance, the women showed up for the sessions.

Bengali women participated in both revolutionary activities and Gandhian civil disobedience movements. Through his words Subhas Chandra Bose encouraged women to uphold revolutionary principles. Organisations including the Ladies Picketing Board and Mahila Rashtriya Sangh worked to motivate women to volunteer in national demonstrations and activities such as spinning on charka. Devoted leaders and supporters across Indian regions made the Satyagraha Movement spread quickly to become an organised struggle for national independence. The Madras Salt Satyagraha movement received powerful leadership from Durgabai and Nageswara Rao Pantulu alongside T. Prakasan. During the Salt Satyagraha Rukmini Lakshmapati became the initial woman arrested for her participation. She led the organisation as president of Tamilnadu Provincial Congress Committee. During Salt Satyagraha activities Durgabai Deshmukh became the leader of the movement before her arrest and thereafter held the position of war dictator in Madras. Karnataka female activists took part in the freedom struggle including Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Umabai Kundapur, Krishnabai Panjekar, Ballari Siddama, and minor roles for Gowramma and others. A group of 5000 female supporters in Punjab began Prabhakar-Pheries for Civil Disobedience Movement through frequent picketing and meeting activities. These individuals from India used their blood and hard work to draw new marks on the large national map showing extraordinary courageous acts for Motherland. Around 80,000 people faced detention during Salt Satyagraha and 17,000 of them were female participants. As a leader in the Quit India Movement Rajkumari Amrit Kaur took key roles in setting up protest marches and rallies. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur came from her position as a royal princess in Kapurthala state.

During the 1942 Quit India Movement Amrit Kaur dedicated all her time to leading daily processions. During her processions in Shimla from August 9 to August 16 the police assaulted participants with batons fifteen times including a vicious beating. University of Banaras Sucheta Kriplani acted as an instructor. The Congress authorised Satyagraha Service in 1940 and she became one of the participants who were let take part in it which resulted in her arrest. During 1944 law enforcement officers detained her for the second time. She spent most of her time in social assistance work as a member of the relief services after her discharge in 1945.

During the Quit India Movement Aruna Asaf Ali proved instrumental in the freedom fight. Public advertisements about the reward of 5,000 rupees sought to capture Sucheta Kriplani because the British government wanted to arrest her. She cooperated with Ram Manohar Lohia in his editorial role for "Inquilab" and running bulletin releases. With her spirit, Aruna Asaf Ali became a dedicated member of the Freedom Fighter Army. She got recognised through the Salt Satyagraha as she led group meetings while producing salt and arranging marches. In 1942 Usha Mehta joined the Quit India Movement as a student. After leading the Monkey Brigade youths she established the underground Voice of India Radio station. Women took a significant role in achieving India's independence. They supported local businesses and national actions by raising Khadi support, organising public events and demonstrations at foreign product and alcohol sellers. The women charged forward to face the policeman holding his baton.

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