

## WOMEN IN INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE

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### 45t5Abstract:

The history of India's freedom struggle would be incomplete without acknowledging the immense contributions of women. Their sacrifices hold a place of utmost importance in this narrative. The chronicles of India's independence movement are filled with stories of women who displayed extraordinary courage, selflessness, and patriotism. While often overlooked, hundreds of women stood shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts, fighting with unwavering spirit and fearless determination. They broke through the barriers of traditional roles and societal restrictions, stepping out of their homes to actively participate in the national awakening. Their involvement in the freedom struggle was not only remarkable but also deeply inspiring. In a male-dominated society, it was never easy for women to emerge as warriors. Despite facing deep-rooted orthodox beliefs that confined them to domestic duties, many women challenged these norms and redefined their roles. They not only made immense sacrifices but also confronted social prejudices with resilience and strength. One such iconic figure was Rani Lakshmibai, who valiantly resisted British rule, defying all odds. The aim of this paper is to explore the role played by women freedom fighter in freedom movement in India. The study is based on secondary sources.

***Keywords: Indian, Women, Freedom movement, Role, Society***

### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

The history of India's freedom struggle would be incomplete without acknowledging the immense contributions of women. Their sacrifices hold a place of utmost importance in this narrative. The chronicles of India's independence movement are filled with stories of women who displayed extraordinary courage, selflessness, and patriotism. While often overlooked, hundreds of women stood shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts, fighting with unwavering spirit and fearless determination. They broke through the barriers of traditional roles and societal restrictions, stepping out of their homes to actively participate in the national awakening. Their involvement in the freedom struggle was not only remarkable but also deeply inspiring.

### **II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

To explore the role played by women freedom fighter in freedom movement in India.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on secondary data, including a textual analysis of books authored by eminent scholars, as well as articles and papers published in various national and international journals, which were utilized to develop the framework of this study.

### IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

There are several notable Puranic and historical works that discuss the role of women in the Indian freedom movement. Some of the key books and articles include the following:

1. **Manmohan Kaur (1985):** This book provides a comprehensive overview of Indian women's participation in the freedom struggle from 1857 to 1947, covering a span of 90 years. It begins with the first major uprising in 1857 and concludes with India's independence in 1947.
2. **P.N. Chopra (1975):** This work highlights the heroic contributions of Indian women in the struggle for independence. It emphasizes their stories of sacrifice, selflessness, and courage, portraying how they fought with unwavering spirit and determination.
3. **Suruchi Thapar (2006):** In this significant study of India's freedom movement, the author focuses on the nationalist involvement of ordinary middle-class women, particularly in the United Provinces. The book also sheds light on prominent female leaders such as Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Sucheta Kripalani, and Annie Besant.
4. **O.P. Ralhan (1995):** This work explores the socio-economic conditions of Indian women who played a vital role in shaping society from ancient times to the modern era. The author underscores the importance of acknowledging the invaluable contributions of these women, especially for the awareness of the present generation.
5. **M.G. Agarwal:** This multivolume series highlights the role of freedom fighters from diverse sections of Indian society. It aims to preserve the memory of those who contributed to the independence movement, including women who played significant roles and made notable contributions in various capacities across different regions of the country.

### V. DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS:

The notable woman in this context is Begum Hazrat Mahal. As the wife of the deposed ruler of Lucknow, she played an active role in the Revolt of 1857, strongly opposing the Doctrine of Lapse through which Lord Dalhousie sought to annex Lucknow. She offered fierce resistance to British forces, but following the fall of Lucknow, she was forced to flee to Kathmandu.

Annie Besant, an Irish-born theosophist and staunch advocate for Indian self-rule, played a pivotal role in India's freedom movement. In 1916, she founded the Home Rule League in Madras to press

for self-governance and was instrumental in expanding political awareness across the country. She also established the Theosophical Society of India and became the first woman President of the Indian National Congress in 1917, presiding over the Calcutta session. Through her writings in *New India* and *Commonwealth*, she helped shape public opinion both within India and abroad in favor of Indian autonomy. Her contributions to the freedom movement, education, and social reform remain deeply appreciated to this day.

Kasturba Gandhi, the wife of Mahatma Gandhi, was one of his most steadfast supporters and among the earliest women to be imprisoned during the struggle in Transvaal. She actively participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942, for which she was arrested and later died while in detention in Poona.

Several women from the Nehru family also made significant contributions to the Indian freedom movement. Swarup Rani Nehru, mother of Jawaharlal Nehru, wholeheartedly supported the nationalist cause. Despite her age and frailty, she courageously joined the struggle, encouraging her husband and children to do the same. Kamala Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru's wife, actively engaged in multiple movements and played a vital role in leading the Civil Disobedience Movement. She was instrumental in organizing the No Tax Campaign in the United Provinces (present-day Uttar Pradesh).

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Jawaharlal Nehru's sister, joined the Non-Cooperation Movement and was imprisoned three times during the Civil Disobedience Movement—in 1932, 1941, and 1942. In 1937, she was elected to the provincial legislature of the United Provinces and served as the Minister of Local Self-Government and Public Health. She later represented India at the United Nations in San Francisco and became the first woman to be elected President of the United Nations General Assembly, where she boldly challenged British colonialism on the global stage.

Indira Gandhi, daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, demonstrated her patriotic spirit from a young age by organizing a 'Vanar Sena' (Monkey Army) of young volunteers to support the freedom struggle. She joined the Indian National Congress in 1938 and was imprisoned for 13 months during the Quit India Movement in 1942. She went on to become India's first and only female Prime Minister. The Nehru family's legacy—spanning four generations of unwavering dedication to the nation's cause—remains unparalleled in the history of India's struggle for independence.

Sarojini Naidu occupies a prominent place among India's women freedom fighters. She played a crucial role in awakening and mobilizing Indian women to join the national movement. In 1925, she became the first woman to preside over the Indian National Congress during its Kanpur session. In 1928, she traveled to the United States, carrying Mahatma Gandhi's message of nonviolent resistance. Following Gandhi's arrest in 1930, Sarojini Naidu assumed leadership of the movement, demonstrating her firm commitment and capable leadership. She also took part in the Second Round Table Conference in 1931 alongside Gandhi and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. In 1932, she served as the acting President of the Congress. She was again arrested

during the Quit India Movement in 1942 and spent 21 months in prison. A gifted poet in English, she earned the title "Nightingale of India." After India's independence, she became the first woman to serve as the Governor of an Indian state, taking office in Uttar Pradesh.

Aruna Asaf Ali emerged as a leading figure during the Quit India Movement. Her defining moment came in 1942 when she hoisted the Indian national flag at Gowalia Tank Maidan in Bombay, marking the launch of the movement. This courageous act made her an icon of resistance and inspired countless youth to join the freedom struggle. She became a full-time underground activist, evading British authorities while continuing to contribute to the cause. As editor of *Inquilab*, a monthly journal of the Indian National Congress, she played a key role in sustaining revolutionary thought. In recognition of her immense contribution to India's independence, she was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna, the nation's highest civilian honor.

Madam Bhikaji Cama, deeply influenced by Dadabhai Naoroji, served as an inspirational figure for Indian youth, particularly those residing in the United Kingdom. In 1907, she unfurled the first version of the Indian national flag at the International Socialist Conference in Stuttgart, Germany. She also founded the Free India Society and launched the revolutionary journal *Bande Mataram* to spread the message of Indian independence. Through her travels and speeches, she raised awareness about India's struggle for freedom on the global stage. Rightly regarded as 'Mother India's first cultural representative in the West,' she laid the foundation for international support for the Indian nationalist movement.

Kalpana Dutta was a prominent revolutionary who was deeply influenced by the ideals of Surya Sen. She actively participated in the historic Chittagong Armoury Raid and later joined the Communist Party of India, continuing her commitment to the cause of Indian liberation through a leftist ideological framework.

Rani Gaidinliu, a notable Naga nationalist leader from Manipur, led a resistance movement against British colonial rule during the Civil Disobedience Movement. At a young age, she took up the mantle of leadership in the Naga nationalist struggle, advocating for the expulsion of the British from her homeland. Her courage and dedication earned widespread recognition from national leaders. She was arrested in 1932 and remained imprisoned until India's independence. For her extraordinary contributions, Jawaharlal Nehru honored her with the title "Rani of the Nagas."

Padmaja Naidu, daughter of Sarojini Naidu, carried forward her mother's legacy of national service. At just 21, she entered the political sphere and co-founded the Hyderabad branch of the Indian National Congress. She worked to promote the use of Khadi and urged people to boycott foreign goods. Her involvement in the Quit India Movement led to her imprisonment in 1942. After independence, she served as the Governor of West Bengal and remained closely associated with the Indian Red Cross for over five decades. Her humanitarian spirit and contributions to public service are remembered with deep respect.

Sucheta Kripalani, a passionate nationalist with socialist leanings, was closely associated with Jayaprakash Narayan and played a key role in the Quit India Movement. An alumna of St. Stephen's College, she sang *Vande Mataram* during the historic independence session of the Constituent Assembly on August 15, 1947. She was a member of the Constituent Assembly in 1946 and later served as General Secretary of the Indian National Congress from 1958 to 1960. Her political career reached a milestone when she became the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh (1963–1967), making her the first woman to hold such a position in an Indian state.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi from 1919 onward. As a dedicated Congress member, she actively took part in the Salt Satyagraha of 1930 and the Quit India Movement in 1942. After independence, she became India's first Health Minister and played a vital role in shaping the country's healthcare system. She was also the founding President of the Indian Council for Child Welfare and a founding member of the All India Women's Conference, both of which reflected her lifelong commitment to the welfare of women and children.

Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay emerged as a formidable force in India's freedom struggle and social reform movements. Elected President of the Youth Congress in December 1929, she boldly urged the Indian National Congress to adopt *Poorna Swaraj* (complete independence) as its ultimate goal. On January 26, 1930, during a protest, she captured the nation's imagination by fiercely defending the national flag during a scuffle—holding onto the Tricolor despite being assaulted and bleeding. Her courage became symbolic of the spirit of resistance. She also revitalized the All India Women's Conference, transforming it into a powerful platform for women's rights and national activism.

Mira Alfassa, universally known as "The Mother," was born in Paris in 1878 and came to India in 1914, where she met Sri Aurobindo. A spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo, she inspired the founding of Auroville—an experimental international township near Puducherry dedicated to human unity. She also played a significant role in influencing women leaders such as Annie Besant and Nellie Sengupta. The Mother's contributions enriched India's spiritual and cultural heritage, leaving a lasting legacy in both philosophical and educational spheres.

Two British-born women, Mira Behn and Sarla Behn—affectionately known as Mahatma Gandhi's "English daughters"—also made remarkable contributions to India's freedom and rural upliftment. Mira Behn, born Madeleine Slade, became a close disciple of Gandhi and accompanied him to the Round Table Conference. She devoted her life to rural development and environmental causes in India. Sarla Behn, born Katherine Mary Heilman, was also a committed Gandhian who established an ashram in Kausani in the Kumaon Hills of Uttarakhand. She worked tirelessly in villages, supporting the families of political prisoners, and later authored the book *Reviving Our Dying Planet*, focusing on ecological and social regeneration.

On the occasion of India's Independence Day, it is only fitting to pay heartfelt tribute to these brave daughters of India and the courageous foreign women who stood shoulder to shoulder with Indians

in the fight for freedom and nation-building. Their selfless dedication and enduring contributions continue to inspire generations.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The story of women's participation in India's freedom struggle is one of courage, conviction, and transformative choices. From taking to the streets and facing imprisonment to entering the legislature, Indian women played a vital and multifaceted role in the nation's journey to independence. After decades of struggle and sacrifice, India finally attained freedom on August 15, 1947. Thousands of women selflessly dedicated their lives to liberating their motherland. The success of the nonviolent movement, which ultimately led to independence, was not only inclusive of women—it was fundamentally dependent on their active involvement.

For the first time in world history, a vast colonial empire—one upon which the sun famously never set—was brought to its knees not through armed conflict, but through the moral and political strength of an unarmed people armed only with peace, conviction, and courage. Indian women stood at the heart of this revolutionary achievement.

In the decades since independence, the women's movement in India has evolved and matured. Over the last fifty years, it has deepened its alliances with other progressive movements, including labor unions, environmental initiatives, and campaigns against various forms of oppression and injustice. Today, the women's movement continues to play a crucial role in advocating for equality, dignity, and social transformation.

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