



शोध भूमि

शिक्षा एवं शिक्षण शास्त्र विषय की पूर्व समीक्षित शोध पत्रिका

Women in India's Freedom Movement: A Legacy of Bravery, Sacrifice, and Resistance

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ABSTRACT:

The history of India's freedom struggle remains incomplete without a meaningful recognition of women's participation. Indian women made extraordinary sacrifices and displayed remarkable courage, resilience, and patriotism while fighting against British colonial rule. Despite being constrained by rigid social norms, patriarchal values, and expectations that confined them to domestic roles, women emerged as active participants in protests, mass movements, revolutionary activities, and even armed resistance. Many fought alongside men, endured imprisonment, torture, and social ostracism, and in several cases laid down their lives for the cause of national freedom. This paper examines the significant yet often underrepresented contributions of women to India's freedom movement and the broader process of national awakening. It highlights how women challenged traditional gender roles and redefined their position in society through political activism and leadership. Special emphasis is placed on iconic figures such as Rani Lakshmi Bai, whose bravery and defiance against British authority symbolize women's resistance and determination. By revisiting their struggles and achievements, this study seeks to restore women to their rightful place in the historical narrative of India's liberation and acknowledge their enduring legacy in shaping modern India.

Keywords: Women Freedom Fighters; Indian Freedom Struggle; National Awakening; Rani Lakshmi Bai; Gandhian Movement; Colonial Resistance

Introduction:

Subhas Chandra Bose's call to arms "Give me blood, and I'll bring you freedom," inspired all people of India, not only men, but women too to envision their own greatness and recognize

their own spirit for freedom while fighting against the oppressive rule of Imperialism and the Patriarchal System in India. Prior to Indian Independence, the lifestyle of women was domesticated to a great extent by a highly restrictive patriarchal workplace that provided little opportunity for women to participate in the public domain or any public way. Women were mainly confined to the four walls of their homes and rarely (if ever) had the chance to publicly share their opinions and be heard. The following customs limited women to lives of servitude and silence: child marriage; the bans against widow remarriage; the murders of female infants and female fetuses; the veil or the purdah; Sati; and polygamy. Change began to occur. As the concept of freedom became more prevalent, women began to notice that they needed to be included in the national movement for liberty. Increasing awareness of women attaining parity with men gained momentum after the British East India Company started interfering in India. The first two Indian Social Reformers who defied backward customs to work for the advancement of women's status were: Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Jyotiba Phule. These men planted the seeds for social change and ultimately encouraged women to aspire for dreams outside of the traditional roles assigned to them within Indian Society. These reformers allowed women to imagine new possibilities for themselves. During this period there were many ladies, who mastered the art of martial arts. Rani Laxmi Bai fought for the Independence of the country. Women participation in India's freedom struggle began as early 1817 when Bhima Bai Holkar fought against britishers. Madam Bhikaji Cama, the first Indian women socialist who fought for her motherland's freedom after the 1857 uprising. There is no doubt that women participation in Indian anti-imperialist struggle in large number.

Review of Literature:

There are number of precious work on "The role of women in freedom movement" some of the important books and articles are under as under:

O.P Ralhan (1995): This book covers the social economic condition by Indian women who played a most significant role in the evolution of our society, author also highlight the role of Indian women from ancient period to modern times. The great contribution of these ladies should be brought to the knowledge of the present generation.

M.G Agarwal: This multivolume illuminates the role played by the freedom fighters during the freedom struggle. The book highlights the contribution of people from all sections of society in the freedom movement during India freedom. This is an attempt to draw upon their remembrance of the freedom struggle. Efforts have been made to include freedom fighters from various regions and also explain about those women who participate in the freedom struggle and made rich contribution in various ways.

Judith Brown (1972): The book describes the participation of women in the movement as a political nuisance. Tarachand: It tries to examine role of women in the social process, perception of their own lives, the broader social reality, the roots etc. He also enlists some efforts to overcome such problems.

Manmohan Kaur (1985): This book covers women of India in freedom struggle from 1857 to 1947 a period of 90 years. It starts with 1857 when the first attempt of freedom was made and end with 1947.

P.N Chopra (1975): This book presents the courageous role played by Indian women in India struggle for freedom and also explains their saga of sacrifice, selflessness, bravery. They fought with true spirit and undismayed courage.

Suruchi Thaper (2006): She has done outstanding work on the Indian liberation movement. The nationalist involvement of everyday middle-class women in India's liberation movement, particularly in the united provinces, is a major subject of his book.. The author highlights the prominent women leaders such as Sarojini Naidu, Vijaylaxmi Pandit, Suchetakiripalani and Annie Beasant

MILESTONES IN INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE

The first war of Independence (1857-58) Partition of Bengal, Swadeshi Movement (1905) Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (1919) Non-cooperation movement (1920) Civil disobedience: The Dandi March (1930) The Quit India Movement (1942)

WOMEN LEADERS OF THE INDIAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT Without a doubt, many women took part in the anti-imperialist battle in India. The list of women who have led our national movement is rather long, If we were to recall the names of women leaders in our national movement, we will find that the list is a very long one. 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. In fact, such is the nature of our nationalist movement that it is very difficult to distinguish between regional level and all-India level leaders. Several women got their start at the local level and eventually rose to prominence on the nationalist stage. In addition to all of these Indian women, there were also Irish women, such as Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins, who brought their own knowledge of the Irish experience of British exploitation to bear on India.

WOMEN FREEDOM FIGHTER OF INDIA

It is incredibly challenging to identify all women who have fought for independence , and is equally challenging to isolate a select group of them. Sarojini Naidu: Also known as the 'Nightingale of India'. She was a distinguished poet, renowned freedom fighter, and a great orator. She emerged as prominent Nationalist around 1917. She was second women to became the president of INC in 1925. She joined the national movement during the protest against the partition of Bengal in 1905. During Salt satyagraha, she was one of the women protesters at the Dharsana salt work. She played a leading role during Civil disobedience and was jailed. In 1942, she was arrested during "Quit India movement". She lectured about women's empowerment and nationalism while travelling across India. She was also closely associated with the formation of women's India Association and accompanied the women's voting rights delegation to London. Rani Laxmi Bai: popularly known as "Jhansi ki Rani" Indian history has not yet witnessed a women warrior as brave and powerful as Rani Laxmi Bai. She is a glorious example of patriotism and national pride. She is an inspiration and an admiration for a lot of people. In her confrontation with the British, she was a sign of courage, patriotism, self-respect, perseverance and generosity. The Rani of Jhansi was a pivotal

figure in the Indian Revolt of 1857. Her name is thus written in golden letters in the history of India. Begum Hazrat Mahal : During the First Indian War of Independence, Begum Hazrat Mahal, often known as the 'Begum of Awadh,' was the first female independence warrior. She was a key figure in the first Indian independence struggle, fighting alongside other revolutionaries against British soldiers. However, British soldiers invaded Awadh again and were able to retake it after a protracted siege, forcing her to flee. She refused to accept any of the British authorities' favours or privileges. She eventually found refuge in Nepal, where she died after some time. She was the only important leader who never surrendered to the British, and she fought the British for the next twenty years of her life in exile in Nepal. Rani velu Nachiyar: known as "veeramangai" (Brave woman) was the first queen to fight against the British colonial power in the country. She was trained in war weapons usage, martial arts and horse riding. In collaboration with Hyder ali and Gopala nayakar, she fought the British. The warrior queen with an army of 5000 personnel gave the British a tough time. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay: In 1930's she participated in Salt Satyagraha. She promoted handicrafts, handlooms and theatre. The Government of India conferred on her the Padma Bhushan in 1955 and Padma Vibhushan in 1987. Annie Basant: She became the first president of Indian National Congress in 1917. Annie Besant was a great and courageous lady who has been titled as a freedom fighter as she fought for many war to help people to get their real freedom. She was deeply involved in the Indian Independence movement and continued her campaign to make India an Independent country. She loved the Indian people culture, tradition and understand their beliefs as she was a writer and speaker. She made India her own country in 1893 and started awakening Indian people from deep sleep through her loud speech. Once, Mahatma Gandhi said about her that she awakened Indian people from their deep sleep. Aruna Asaf ali: was an Indian educator, political activist, and publisher. Aruna was an active member of the Congress Party. She had participated in public marches during the Salt Satyagraha. She edited 'InQilab' a monthly journal of the Indian National Congress. She is known as the Grand Old Lady of the Independence Movement. She is known for hoisting the Indian National Congress flag in Bombay during the Quit India Movement. Vijayalakshmi Pandit: Mrs. Pandit was jailed for her nationalistic activities thrice in 1932, 1940 and 1942. During the Salt Satyagraha she led processions and picketed the liquor and foreign cloth selling shops along with her sister and her baby daughters. She has fought many battles and broken many barriers for the women in India. Durgabai Deshmukh: She was imprisoned for three years for participating in the Salt Satyagraha. During this Satyagraha when leaders like Rajaji and T. Prakasam in south were busy in organising other facts of the movement, it was Durgabai who led a group of salt law breakers to Marina Beach at Madras. She was instrumental in initiating 'Andhra Mahila Sabha' and 'Hindi Balika Patasala' at a very young age. Mridula Sarabai: During Partition she fought at great personal risk 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. Basanti Das: She was an Indian Independence activist during the British rule in India. She took an active part in various political and social movements. She herself

took active part in freedom activities and was arrested during non-cooperation movement. She received Padma Vibhushan in 1973. Sucheta Kriplani: In 1932, she entered public life as a social worker and in 1939 entered 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. Kamla Das Gupta: She has been a brilliant luminary among the Indian women freedom fighters. She belongs to the militant section and was an active member of the 'Jugantar Party'. In 1942, she was arrested in connection with the Quit-India movement and lodged in the Presidency jail. Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddy: She was the first Indian woman who for her merit and services in the field of social service and medicine were nominated to the Madras Legislative Assembly in 1926. As a protest against torturing women and use of repressive measures against female agitators during Salt Satyagraha and Non-cooperation Movement, she resigned her offices and jumped into the freedom struggle. Margaret Cousins: An Irish woman crusader, after fighting for the voting right for women in Ireland, arrived in India along with her husband and advocates the same causes for Indian women. She joined hand with Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu and helped in the founding of many women association to bring about an awakening among them. Raj kumara Amrit Kaur: She belong to the ruling house of Kapurthala. She was inspired by Gandhi and joined Congress during the Salt Satyagraha. She was arrested in Bombay for Gandhi says that full freedom of India is not possible unless our daughters stand side by side with the sons in the battle for freedom and this requires them to realize their own power. Indira Gandhi: one of the exceptional women in modern India. 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.

WOMEN'S MOBILIZATION DURING GANDHIAN ERA

Gandhi was the epitome of wisdom and culture in our time. He was respected and referred to by his people as Mahatma. He was an economist, a political philosopher, a social reformer, and a truth-seeker. He changed the way people treated their own country and changed the way the Indian National Congress (INC) represented their people. Through him, he gave people courage, and he showed them how to peacefully confront injustice. Mahatma Gandhi is viewed as the most important person in India's quest for freedom, as he was the one person who led the way for all of India to seek independence from the British. His non-violent methods were vital to India's success in achieving independence from Britain. From 1918 until 1922, the Indian independence movement peaked in terms of numbers participating, and it was under Gandhi that the INC created an abundance of non-violent civil disobedience campaigns. The overall objective was to disrupt the British government's operation by refusing to comply with

British Law. In Gandhi's eyes, full independence for India was impossible if he didn't involve women. That meant helping them to understand their own value and potential..

WOMEN UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF GANDHI

Gandhi had fought against caste, inequality, child marriages, and encouraged women's education, which had empowered and inspired women. This motivated the women to participate in huge numbers. The Noncooperation movement has seen unprecedented levels of women participation, particularly among educated and middle-class women. Amrit Kaur, Aruna Asaf, Sarla Devi and Muthul Laxmi Reddy became well-known leaders. Sarojini Naidu who was motivated by Gandhian principles and organised a non-violent protest against the salt law and taxes at Dharsana salt works during the civil disobedient movement. She fought for the right to vote and was elected as first Indian women president of Indian National Congress. In Quit India movement the underground activism led by Usha Mehta, Aruna Asaf Ali was crucial in sustaining the movement. Mostly women participate in political scenario in 1920. During this period large number of women came forward. Indian women have thus united to understand the potential of collective action and created the groundwork for women's emancipation in independent India by breaking down the barriers of socio-economic discrimination.

Objectives of the Research Paper:

- To examine the role and contribution of Indian women in the freedom struggle against British colonial rule.
- To highlight the courage, sacrifice, and leadership of women freedom fighters, with special reference to Rani Lakshmi Bai.
- To analyze the social and cultural constraints faced by women in pre-independence India and how they challenged patriarchal norms.
- To assess the impact of women's participation on India's national awakening and the broader independence movement.
- To bring attention to the lesser-known and often overlooked contributions of women, thereby correcting gender bias in historical narratives.

Conclusion:

Women played a key role in India's fight for independence, as they demonstrated their willingness to risk their safety in pursuit of their freedom. Countless thousands gave their lives in service to their country, and many women actively participated in the non-violent movement that secured India's independence. The peaceful resistance, ideas, and courage of the Indian people ultimately challenged and overcame the might of the British Empire, which at one point controlled much of the world. Since the history of India's struggle for independence is incomplete without acknowledging the many sacrifices made by Indian women, it is only right to recognize their invaluable contributions to the country's independence. The record of devotion and courage demonstrated by Indian women towards achieving their freedom is now enshrined in the history books of India, and their legacy is eternal. In addition to the sacrifices made by countless thousands in the name of freedom, women were equally as important to the success of India's struggle for independence. Hundreds of courageous women took to

the streets in protest of the harsh treatment inflicted upon the Indians by the British. Many of these women led large demonstrations and organized protests against the British occupation of India.

Acknowledgments:

I consider it is our moral duty to pay my regards, honour, and thanks to the authors, learned writers, librarians, and publishers of all the books, online sources, Resources, AI, and Research papers which I have consulted during the preparation of the present paper. I shall remain grateful to them for their support and powerful knowledge which is available on the website, papers, Journals and books.

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