

Participation of Women in India's Freedom Movement: With Special Reference to Quit India Movement (1942-1947)

***Dr. Harish Chandra**

Abstract

In August 1942, Gandhiji initiated the "Bharat Chhodo Andolan" or Quit India Movement. The All India Congress Committee, which was adopted as a resolution on 8 August 1942 in Bombay, declared a petition for the immediate end of British rule. Every one of this nation began to dream of a free India inspired by the 'Karo ya Maro' ('Do or Die') slogan of Gandhiji. Congress wanted to mobilise a mass campaign on non-violent terms on the immense scale that is conceivable. As a result, a hasty decision was made by the British government and the Congress was outlawed, and most of its leaders were detained before they could even start deploying citizens. But still the people were unstoppable; all over the world there were exhibitions and rebellions.

Keywords: Movement, Declared, Immediate, Unstoppable;

Introduction:

Political Conditions of The Period

The year 1939 saw the outbreak of Europe's Second World War. On September 3, 1939, England declared war on the German Reich, professedly in defence of independence and of weak nations. And yet Britain, which was her dependency, did not want to give India independence. India had no separate foreign policy and had to obey England's one set down. India was declared to be at war with Germany on the same day by Lord Linlithgow, the then Governor General of India (September, 3 1939). The office ministries of Congress were not informed and withdrew as a token of dissent. As far back as 1936, the Indian National Congress had made clear in its election manifesto its "opposition to Indian participation in an imperialist war." 1 The working committee of the Indian National Congress, which convened in September 1939, further stressed this stance of the Congress. The Working Committee held that the "declared wishes of the Indian people have been deliberately ignored by the British government," and although the committee unhesitatingly opposes the Nazi government's recent violence against Poland in Germany, the Indian people must determine the question of war

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and peace for India. On August 9, 1942, Gandhiji was arrested and he left a short but powerful message in three words to the nation: "Do or Die." This message became a mantra for the millions and a source of strength and dedication that was gradually needed at the altar of liberty. When the news of Gandhiji's arrest was received, Hartals was in Bombay, Ahmadabad, and Poona. This virus had spread all over the world by August 11, 1942. Processions, assemblies and protests were also organised alongside individuals; the universities closed down for lack of students. Job was affected by agricultural labour in Ahmadabad, Bombay, Kanpur, Indore, Bangalore and Mysore. The agricultural areas were also influenced by the campaign. People proclaimed themselves free in some locations, courts and buildings were taken, and police stations were seized. Secretariat headquarters, courts and other government departments were hoisted with flags. In some districts, mostly in Bihar, Central Provinces, Andhra, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Assam and parts of Bengal, the government machinery was paralysed. The government has replied by taking countermeasures. It implemented the "Penalty Enhancement Ordinance, the Collective Fine Ordinance, the Special Court Ordinance, the whipping Ordinance." These ordinances permitted certain types of political prisoners being plundered, robbed, flogged and even killed. Searches were performed and funds seized. The offices and finances of Congress were the property of the nation. "India has been a "Great Jail."³ In the first round-up, activists were arrested and women took on the campaign in their absence and bore the brunt of British wrath. The women not only carried out processions and marches, but also held camps where they were trained in civic duties and first aid, enlightened on democracy and the Indian constitution, In these camps, training was also provided in lathi and drill. The women organised the Relief Fund for Political Prisoners and raised substantial sums. Some women went underground and from there, led the revolution. They had tales to share about the heroic role that women played in every province.

State wise Involvement of Women View:

ASSAM:

The women of this province took prominent part in this movement. It was perhaps the sudden unbounded passion for liberty which made them take over command of the battle for freedom. "The struggle waged by Assam to break down the shackles of slavery", observed Mitra and Chakraborty in „Rebel, India“, "is largely a struggle for Assam"s womanhood." The women"s organization sprung up under Smt. Anupriya Barua and Sudhalata Dutta, as a result of excesses committed by the military and police. The women visited the terrorized areas and encouraged and cheered the people. Again it was left to the women to face the military and armed police and to lead processions in places like Gohapur, Barapujia, Thok and Brahampur. It was in Assam that "Free India"s Fighting Force" was organized. Women also joined this force and they took charge of providing amenities. They organized the Red Cross First Aid parties and distributed warm clothing, bandages and many other things to the workers and countrymen all over Assam. The Government later broke up the organization but the women carried on their work.⁶ Tezpur is another place in Assam where women from surrounding villages paraded the streets of the town, sang songs, shouted slogans and hoisted the tri - color.

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BENGAL

The women of Bengal had been participating in the freedom struggle ever since the battle began. The people of Midnapore District played a notable part in the movement of 1942. The Tamlauk sub – division had organized itself against the Japanese invasion. They raised an army of volunteers which included men and women. Several camps were opened to give training to those who joined the ranks. Local relief committees were formed. A Khadi Center was also organized where four thousand spinners were working. Most of these were women. A National Government was formed within the limits laid down by the Congress Committee. It was assisted by the various Ministries. The National Government kept on functioning till August 8, 1944

UTTAR PRADESH

Following repressive measures adopted by the Government, the Congress office was seized by the police. On August 10, 1942, a group of girl students raided the office and took possession of it. Batches of girl student toured the districts and rendered whatever relief and succor they could to the people. Women of respectable Hindu families were asked to leave their houses at the point of bayonets including the mothers of the newly born babies. They were asked to part with their ornaments. In some cases the ornaments were removed from their bodies forcibly. In Samanwal village of District Ghazipur an Ahir woman was shot down when she was running away from the soldiers. It was reported from Banaras that the ladies who had suffered at the hands of police related lamentable stories. In some cases she women were dragged by their long hairs; they were asked to perform sit – ups; no food was given to them. In one case a child of was roasted alive before his mother’s eyes. Some women were tortured to disclose the whereabouts of their husbands. Nine students were extended from Banaras Hindu University for actively participating in the movement.

PUNJAB

The Punjab energetically responded to the call of Mahatma Gandhi – students, both boys and girls, unhesitatingly came forward in the field. It was in the city of Lahore that on November 10, 1942, one hundred and four students were arrested. This number included twenty – two girls. The girls were courageous, they distributed the badges. The girls even did not pay any heed to the heed presence of the police and did not get into the police van till they were told by their principal to do so.

NORTH – WEST FRONTIER PROVINCES

The freedom movement had taken such a strong hold amongst the women that even Purdah – stricken Bannu was no exception. They took out processions and marched proudly raising slogans against the alien usurper. The procession was taken out as a mark of protest against the arrests of Hindu – Muslim merchant for giving food and shelter to the Khudai Khidmatgars. It was the first demonstration arranged by the women in the history of the province and as a result it had far reaching effect on the people.

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SIND

The women of this area took out procession. The police of Karachi adopted new methods to harass them. The women were abused and they were taken away to far off places and released in the middle of night. The City Magistrate, Rup Chand, while conducting the case of girl, slapped her on the face because she refused to apologies. Two girl volunteers entered the city Magistrate's Court and ordered him in writing to vacate the post as he had been found incompetent. Copies of this order were distributed in the court. Both of them were arrested, tried and were convicted to long terms of imprisonment.

MADHYA PRADESH

In every province novel methods were being tried to do away with the foreign yoke. In this province women approached officials and members of the bar on Raksha Bandan Day and requested the former to resign and the letter to refrain from attending the courts. In these province women of the village Chimur had to suffer a great deal at the hands of the police and military. On August 19, 1942, a special train with 200 European soldiers and fifty Indian constables reached Wardha. The wife of the sarpanch (chairman of village panchayat) who was pregnant was also raped.

WOMEN REFORMERS DURING THE MOVEMENT:**SAROJINI NAIDU**

Mrs. Naidu of the fame of Dharasasna Salt raid was again active during this period. In this course of these few years Sarojini Naidu strove hard to bring the two communities closer. She addressed meetings and spoke from various platforms. Addressing a political conference at Vellore (Madras) she said: "The Hindus and Muslims are the two eyes of the nation and if both eyes were to be focused together on the Swaraj image under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, freedom would be theirs ere long." Sarojini was arrested on December, 3, 1940, for taking part in the individual Satyagraha inaugurated by Vinoba Bhave. She fell ill and had to be released on December 11, 1940. As soon as Sarojini's health permitted she started her political work. She was again arrested immediately after the passing of the Quit – India resolution on August 9, 1942. Sarojini came out of the Aga Khan Palace in shattered health and remained inactive for ten months after her release in March 1943.

KHURSHED BEHN

Khurshed Behn, a famous organizer of the volunteer Army in 1930, went to the North – West Frontier Province in 1940 to spread the gospel of non – violence amongst the people there. She went from village to village, meeting the Pathans, Pirs, Maliks and Khans and spoke to them of the cruelty of kidnapping people. She met the members of the Hindu community also instilling in them the spirit of courage and bravery. At the close of the year she wanted to go to walo Tangi, a tribal

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territory and sought the Government's permission to cross the border. When the government did not respond she informed the Government of her intention of crossing the border. In an attempt to cross the border she was arrested on December 4, 1940, and was tried. She was sentenced to pay a fine of one thousand rupees or in default thereof to undergo three months imprisonment. However, she preferred to be imprisoned rather than pay the fine.

USHA MEHTA

Bombay kept up the struggle through Radio. Usha Mehta was one of the prominent workers of the Congress Radio Conspiracy Case. Usha had a leaning towards the Congress session but this time when the famous Quit – India resolution was passed she was present and was a witness to this important decision. It was her great desire to do something to make this resolution a success. Picketing of foreign cloth shops and liquor shops was distasteful to her. She wanted to do something different. Usha Metha's dream was realized when some friends decided to run a secret transmitting station. "It appealed to me immensely and I jumped at the idea and plunged into the movement in spite of staunch opposition from my father who being a government servant did not approve of my idea and who wanted me to finish my education." Nothing deterred this brave girl, not even the danger it presented to her father who was a Judge at the time.

KASTURBA GANDHI

Bombay witnessed a martyr's death. Kasturba Gandhi, who had shared the responsibilities of the freedom struggle with Gandhiji, died as a prisoner on February 24, 1944. She could not even get the required medical help. It was after a great deal of correspondence by Gandhiji that physicians of her choice were allowed to attend her.

HANSA METHA

Hansa Mehta plunged into the freedom struggle early in life. Greatly inspired by the leaders of the she day she travelled all over India, meeting women to create awareness among them. This, however, was disliked by the British Government. The *Abhudaya*, dated August 30, 1930, reported on a trick played by the railway authorities to send engines to drown the voices of the people shouting „Inquilab Zindabad“ on the arrival of Kamla Nehru and Hansa Metha at Delhi Railway station. The engines were made to hoot non – stop.

SUCHETA KRIPLANI

Sucheta Kriplani's interest in politics dates back from the days she was a lecturer in Banars University in 1934. Her marriage to Acharya J.B. Kriplani, then General Secretary of the All India Congress, further accentuated her interest. She left her job in the Banares University and plunge into political activities. Individual Satyagraha was launched by the Congress in 1940 and she was one of the chosen ones who was permitted to take part in this Satyagraha and was arrested.

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OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

- To study the freedom movement in India in general.
- To explore the role played by women freedom fighter in freedom movement in India.
- To create awareness about different women freedom fighter.
- To show the social economic emancipation of Indian women

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To write this paper, the data has mainly concentrated on textual approach, books written by eminent scholars and articles, papers written on various National and International Journals has been considered to do the framework of this paper. Thus, secondary data has been used to write this paper.

CONCLUSION:

The news of the imprisonment of Congress leaders put the fire into the fuel and all the freedom lovers came on roads. Spontaneous hartals, protest meetings and strikes took place all over the country. As the Quit India Movement was practically leaderless as all senior members of the congress had been imprisoned, two females Aruna Asif Ali and Usha Mehta ,committed patriots set up a radio transmitter, called the ' Voice of Freedom' to disseminate information about the war of freedom. Many other women joined in taking out processions, holding meeting, demonstrations and organizing strikes. The freedom lovers without caring about their lives prepared the pious path on which the glorious victory chariot moved forward. There is description of some women who dedicated their lives and showed undying devotion to the service of India in the form of Quit India Movement.

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