

Women's participation in Freedom struggle

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The national movement in India is one of the few liberations movements in the world, where women's had participated in great number. Even since the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, the participation of women in its activities grew steadily. The years of social reforms for women from the second Quarter of the 19th Century had helped to make them come forward and participate in many ways both directly and indirectly, formally and informally with support and backup of many which are now been unrecognized. The huge increase in women's participation following Clarion Call of Mahatma Gandhi is however well documented.

Swadeshi movement -

women's participation in the freedom struggle dates back to 1905, the Swadeshi movement which triggered by the British decisions to partition Bengal, Saw women's entry into the movement and the skillful tactics of several womens Contributed to increase the participation of women in public life. Attempts at mass mobilization also facilitated this participation; pamphlets were written in Bengali and widely distributed. The pamphlets called upon women to Participate in the rituals of Rakhi bandhan and arandhan and at the same time to boycott foreign goods. Sarala Devi daughter of Swarna Kumari Devi started physical culture clubs, began a Swadeshi store for womens work and organized festivals which celebrated Bengali traditions. She played an important role in the Swadeshi movement. The Swadeshi movement also marked the formation of Several Women's organisations - Mahila Shilpa Samiti (1906-1908) was clearly inspired by the Swadeshi movement. Earlier in 1901 Sarala Devi Chaudhurani had formed the Bharat Stree Mahamandal. in Bombay presidency a women magazine Stress Bodh was started in 1857 by the parties.

The Bharat Mahila Parishad organised educational and inspirational programmes in which women of distinction-Ramabai, Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu and several others gave speech before women. In the Madras presidency a women's magazine was started by Kamala, wife of Indian Christian Social reformer Saththianadhan. A Brahmin widow's home was founded in 1913 by Subha lakshmi Annal and a Mahila Seva Samaj in mysore in 1913. In

1916, the Begum of Bhopal formed the All India Muslim women's Conference where papers on social reforms and educations were read and resolutions passed. In 1917, Aka Begum proposed a resolution against polygamy that provoked opposition from Muslims. After 1918 women experienced in organizing and working in local women associations and convinced that women should take the leadership into their own hands and has started provisional and national women's organizations. These women were eventually elite bourgeois and urban consisting of women from the upper class with the advantage of Social status education and privilege. The young women Christian Association of India had become national in 1886. In 1917 Indian women's Association was formed.

Civil Disobedience movement:-

When the Civil Disobedience movement started in 1930, WIA (women's India Association) was faced with a dilemma. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi a founder member of WIA and later as vice president signed protest in 1928 against the all British Composition of the Simon Commission. The choice was between aligning with the national movement and adopting a political stand. Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay observed through the women conference had originally stated, it would not participate in politics it realized that it would have to Concern itself with public in its wide terms without alignment to any particular political party. It took a strong nationalist stand and demanded equal rights for women to enable them to play their full and legitimate role in the national affairs.

Non-Cooperation Movement:-

During the Non-Cooperation movement, women's in different parts of India joined processions propagated the use of Khadi and charkha. Some of them left government Schools and Colleges. Renuka Ray in Calcutta gave up her studies along with her friends and joined the movement. Basanti Devi, wife of C.R. Das accompanied her husband in his tour of Bengal and asked women to boycott foreign goods. She was arrested on December 7, 1921 on the charge of abstracting the gentlemen of Calcutta by selling khadi. In April 1922 she presided over the Bengal provincial Conference of Chittagong and Kasturba Gandhi presided over the Gujarat provincial Conference appealing to women to take to spinning and weaving khadi. In Allahabad, Rameswari Nehra formed Kumari Sabha to encourage girls to take part in public discussions. These were women like-Hemprabha and majumdar, who received lathi blows.

In Bersad Satyagraha of 1923-24 women's turned out in large numbers. It is on record that women displayed greater Courage than men. In the Bardoli Satyagraha of 1938, the women gradually outnumbered men in political gatherings. The salt Satyagraha launched by Gandhiji

in March 1930 was extended to a mass Campaign at the beginning of April 1930. Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay active part in the Satyagraha was commendable. In Dandi march, many women also participated where awakening of villages was astonishing. Lilavati Nushi and Sarojini Naidu organised women and led them in different parts of Bombay to make salt. Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay stood outside the law courts and sold salt at high prices. The women role in Salt Satyagraha was significant in two ways-

- (i) Among Congress women they represented a shift from role of supportive auxiliaries to direct participation in the struggle, even when it involved defiance of the leadership.
- (ii) (ii) The impact of womens role resulted in the Conversion of a section of leadership especially Gandhi and Nehru.

In July 1930 when Lord Irwin was to address the Central Assembly, on the first day of his activities, a decision was made by a group of womens of picketing, 27 women from Lahore, Ambala and Simla were chosen for this purpose, women went in groups of twos and threes and stood outside the central legeslative assembly hall. They had black flags hidden under the fold of their sarees. As soon as the viceroy Came and get down from his car, the women took out their flags and Shouted "Irwin go back" in lahore. There was organized picketing in front of college gates and also students strikes. The arrested women in Lahore jail were - Zutshi, Kamala Nehri's mother, Raspati Kaul, parvati Devi, Asaf Ali and Eatya- vati from Delhi.

In Bihar also numbers of women were arrested. The women also participated in boycotting the British goods. During the week ending July 25, Patna witnessed two demonstrations in which nearly 3000 women's took part. In Karnataka women took part in the struggle were-Kamala Devi Chattophadyay, umabai Kundapur, Krishna bai, panjekar and Ballasi Seddana.

Quit India movement:-

In the 1942, Quit India movement almost all the top leaders were immediately arrested and the movement was practically leaderless. However women's joined in taking out processions holding meetings and demonstrations and organized Strikes. In Assam young girl, Kanaklata Barua led a procession of 500 and was killed in the police firing. In Midnapur, Bengal women played a notable role and were victims of police atrocities. In Bombay Usha Mehta operated an underground radio Station. Asaf Ali was one of the most important figures of 1942, for four years she remained underground avoiding arrest. She published bulletins

and edited along with Ram Manohar Lohia. The inquilab a price of Rs. 5000 was announced as a reward for her capture.

Besides, the women who joined the freedom movement on the Call of Gandhi, there were few who could not believe his creed of non-violence. They were revolutionary and in the 1930's such organizations sprang up rapidly. These were active in Bengal, Dakha, Comilla and Chittagong was the storm Centre where young College girls joined these Secret Societies. In Delhi Roopvati Jain, at the age of 17 was made, incharge of a bomb factory under chandra Shekar Azad, Sushila Devi Cut her finger and put tilak on the forehead of Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutita on April 9, 1920. Durga Devi played the role of Bhagat Singh's wife. Thus, the women participation in the freedom struggle was great and Commendable.