

Women Freedom Fighters of India from 1857 to 1905

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of nation once said, "when the history of India's first fight for independence would be written, sacrifices made by the women of India will occupy the foremost place". This statement of Mahatma Gandhi is undoubtedly right. As the well known English poet Shelly asked "can man be free if woman be slave?". By the 18th and 19th century in India many thinkers had been emphasizing the vital links between social progress and the position of women in society.

Women of India have contributed immensely to the enrichment of various aspects of life of their country and if men have endeavored to themselves from slavery, women have not lagged behind. Their role in the Indian freedom struggle had been unique and it has been an interesting topic among the research scholars like Kamal Devi Chattopadhyay and Pratima Asthana.

The First War of Independence (1857-58)

The First War of Independence (1857-58) It was the principal general tumult contrary to the standard of the British East India Company. The Doctrine of Lapse, issue of cartridges lubed with cow and pig fat to Indian soldiers at Meerut 'set off the fire'. Further, the presentation of British arrangement of schooling and various social changes had angered a wide segment of the Indian public, before long turned into a far reaching fomentation and represented a grave test to the British standard.

Because of this disturbance the East India Company was brought under the immediate principle of the British Crown. Despite the British prevailing with regards to squashing it inside a year, it was unquestionably a famous revolt in which the Indian rulers, the majority and the state army partook so energetically that it came to be viewed as the First War of Indian Independence. Rani Lakshmbai was the extraordinarily courageous woman of the First war of India Freedom. She showed the exemplification of enthusiasm, self esteem and gallantry. She was the sovereign of a little state, however the ruler of a boundless realm of wonder.

Keywords: Women freedom fighters, Rani of Ramgarh.

Introduction

The contemporary condition of Indian women was very pitiable. They were suffering from various evil social customs like child marriage, Sati , Female infanticide, restriction of widow remarriage and girl education etc. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Kandari Veeresalingam Pantulu , Mahadev Govind Ranade were some social reformers who played an important role in the awakening of the Indian women. Besides this associations like Theosophical Society, Arya Samaj etc contributed a lot in the upliftment of Indian women. Due to which women played an important role in the freedom struggle of the country, rubbing their shoulders with men, besides fulfilling their responsibilities as mother,wife, daughter and sister.

Women's participation in the pre nineteenth century was hardly noticeable but we do come across a few references to some women reformers who indirectly made a remarkable contribution to the cause of India's freedom. Prominent among them were Maharani Tapaswini, Pandita Ramabai, Swarn Kumari, Rama Bai Ranade and Francina Sorabji etc.

Objective of the Study

To underline the contribution of women freedom fighters in pre- Gandhian era.

Review of Literature

There are number of puranic work on "The part of ladies in freedom development" a portion of the significant books and articles are under as under: Manmohan Kaur (1985) : This book covers the ladies of India in freedom battle from 1857 to 1947 a time of 90 years. It starts with 1857 when the main endeavor of freedom was made and ends with 1947.

P.N Chopra (1975) : This book features the courageous pretended by Indian ladies in India battle for freedom and furthermore clarify their adventure of penance,

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benevolence, boldness. They battled with genuine soul and undismayed mental fortitude.

Suruchi Thaper (2006) : She has accomplished magnificent work on freedom development in India. This book essentially centers around the patriot cooperation of normal working class ladies in India's freedom development, particularly in the assembled areas. The creator features the unmistakable ladies pioneers, for example, Sarojini Naidu, Vijaylaxmi Pandit, Sucheta kirpalani and Annie Beasant.

O.P Ralhan (1995) : This book covers the social monetary condition by Indian ladies who assumed a most huge part in the development of our general public, writer additionally features the job of Indian ladies from old period to current occasions. The extraordinary commitment of these women ought to be brought to the information on the current age.

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 participated in the freedom struggle and made rich contribution in various ways.

Role of Women In India's Independence Begum Hazrat Mahal

While the women of Meerut were partly instrumental, in accelerating action on the part of sepoys, conditions in Lucknow, a place not very far away from Meerut, were inspiring Begum Hazrat Mahal to take up the leadership. Hazrat Mahal was a dancing girl and later became an acknowledged wife of King Wajid Ali Shah of Oudh by „Motah“. The annexation of Oudh which was completed in 1856 came as a heavy blow to the royal family, chiefs and the people. Hazrat Mahal, discontented as she was, decided to stay back in Lucknow, while the deposed king went to Calcutta and made his abode there.

Hazrat Mahal was an influential lady and was the primary figure in figure in bringing about this insurrection. "She has excited all Oudh," said Russell "to take up the interests for her son and the chiefs have sworn to be faithful to him".⁵ The boy's name was Birjis Qadir who was then eleven years old. Hazrat Mahal who became the regent queen exercised all the authority. She ruled the State diplomatically and exhibited qualities of good leadership and statesmanship. The high offices in the State were distributed between the Hindus and Muslims. She also honoured brave soldiers.

Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi

While Hazrat Mahal was busy in exterminating the British from Oudh, Jhansi gave a quick response to the rebel's cause. On June 5, 1857, there was an open rebellion at Jhansi. Jhansi was a small Maratha State but its geographical location was strategically important. It could serve as a nerve centre for the Central Indian States and this consideration prompted Dalhousie to hasten its annexation in 1854. The management of the state, till it became British territory, was with Gangadhar Rao. He had an able wife in Rani Lakshmi Bai. She was the daughter of Moropant Tample who was in the service of Peshwa Chimaji Appa on a monthly salary of rupees fifty. Rani was born on November 19, 1835, at Benares. She was named Manikarnika but she became known by the name she was given after her marriage, Lakshmi Bai. She lost her mother, Bhagirathi Bai, when she was a child. The burden of bringing up rested on the father. She was married at the age of 14 years to Gangadhar Rao then 40 years of age. An interesting account of her has been written by John Lang who became her chief consultant after the annexation of Jhansi.

It is an established fact that the Rani was popular and influential. She mentioned in the petition made by her against the annexation that the people of Jhansi wanted her to be the ruler. Sir Hugh Rose, who fought against her, while referring to the resistance put up by her soldiers writes: "The reason was sufficiently clear, the people of Jhansi fought for the Queen and the independence of their country. Even after the city had fallen her bounty and liberality rendered her an influential and dangerous adversary." It is unbelievable that a person of her standing and influence should not have been taken into confidence by the rebels while designing the overthrow of the British Government.

Rani of Ramgarh

Rani of Ramgarh was another who participated in the outbreak of 1857 – 58. Ramgarh is a small village in Dindori Tehsil of Mandla District in Madhya Pradesh. Raja Lachman Singh, the last ruler died in 1850 leaving his only son Vikarnjit as heir. The latter had not ruled the state for more than a few days when it was discovered that he was mentally unsound.

The outbreak in Central India was a signal for the Rani to rise to the occasion and redress her grievances. Ramgarh became the fountainhead of the revolt in Mandla District in July 1857, and the Rani of Ramgarh its originator. She removed the Tehsildar and took over the administration. When the Commissioner at Jabalpur came to know about the state of affairs in this area, he ordered her on August 26th, to see the Deputy Collector of Mandla District. She ignored the order and started preparations to face the British. The Rani fortified Ramgarh by erecting barricades and increased her army strength. The Rani also contacted the neighbouring chiefs and zamindars with a view to obtaining help from them.

Rani Tace Bai

Tace Bai also followed the example of her sisters in Central India and castigated her allegiance to the British authorities during the outbreak of 1857 – 58. She, however, did not have the same courage as the Rani of Jhansi and the Rani of Ramgarh. She was daughter of Gopal Rao a direct descendant of Gangadhar Govind, a former Government of Jalaun. In 1842, the state had lapsed to the British Government and Rani Tace Bai, a claimant to the state was sanctioned a pension of twelve thousand rupees per annum. After the revolt of 1857 – 58 Gursari chief established himself as the undisputed master of Jalaun District with the exception of parganas Kachhewagarh and Duboh with headquarters at Jalaun. Tantia Tope heading the Scindia's troops who revolted on September 22nd after the fall of Delhi, reached this place on October 29, 1857. Gursari chief was unable to face Tantia Tope and agreed to surrender. However, another claimant, Tace Bai, put forward her claim. Tantia Tope favoured her and put her soon on the Gaddi with the condition that she acknowledge the Nana and pay a sum of three lakh rupees. Thus she transferred her allegiance.

**Madam Bhikaiji Cama
(24th September 1861-
13th August 1936)**

She belonged to the Parsi community and was a philanthropist and an active social worker. During the epidemic of bubonic plague that hit Mumbai in 1896, she herself got infected with the disease while providing aid to the others; she was sent to Britain for her treatment. Throughout her life, she struggled for Indian Independence from abroad as she was told by her acquaintances not to take part in the freedom struggle if she came back to India. While working as secretary to Dadabhai Naoroji she supported the founding of Shyamji Krishna Verma's Indian Home Rule Society. On 22nd August 1907, she unfurled the Indian flag (Flag of Indian Independence) in Stuttgart, Germany while attending the International Socialist Conference, there she made people aware of the aftermath of the famine that had hit the Indian Subcontinent and raised her voice for the human rights and equality in India. She was an active freedom fighter and was later sent to exile in Europe until 1935.

Uda Devi

Uda Devi fought against the British regime in the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Uda Devi and other female Dalit participants are today remembered as the warriors or "Dalit Veeranganas" of the 1857 Indian Rebellion. According to reports, Devi had climbed a pipal tree, from where she shot dead 32 or 36 British soldiers.



And according to some reports, in respect to recognition of her brave feat, British officers like Campbell had bowed their heads over her dead body. She died in November 1857.

Cornelia Sorabji: First Female Lawyer (1866 - 1954)



First female advocate in India; first woman to study law at Oxford University. Cornelia Sorabji was admitted to Oxford in 1892, a milestone that predates the women's suffrage movement in Britain. Upon returning to India, she helped many women with legal matters. It's been discovered that she helped nearly 600 clients over the course of her career, which is no small feat given the obstacles he had to overcome.

Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati: Social Reformer (1858 - 1922)



Known as Pandita for her knowledge of Sanskrit at an early age; Saravasti recipient for her scholarly work by Calcutta University. In addition to her achievements above, she also participated in the freedom movement but was largely known for her advocacy of women's rights, especially in education and politics.

Ramabai Ranade (25 January 1862 - 25 January 1924)



Ramabai Ranade was an Indian social worker and one of the first women's rights activists in the 19th century. Ramabai started 'Hindu Ladies Social Club' in Mumbai to develop public speaking among women. Ramabai was also a founder and President of 'Seva Sadan Society' in Mumbai and Pune. Ramabai devoted her life to the betterment of women's lives.

Kadambini Ganguly

Kadambini Ganguly (18 July 1861 – 3 October 1923) was one of the first Indian female doctors who practiced with a degree in Western medicine, alongside other pioneering women such as Anandibai Joshi. Ganguly was the first woman to gain admission to Calcutta Medical College in 1884, subsequently trained in Scotland, and established a successful medical practice in India. She was heavily criticised by the then conservative society opposing women liberation. After returning to India and campaigning for women's rights ceaselessly, she was indirectly called a 'whore' in the magazine 'Bangabashi', but that could not deter her determination.

Swarnakumari Devi

Swarnakumari Devi (28 August 1855 – 3 July 1932) was a Bengali poet, novelist, musician and social worker from the Indian subcontinent. She was the first Indian woman novelist and the first among the women writers in Bengal to gain prominence.

As her husband was secretary of the Indian National Congress, she was actively involved in politics. In 1889 and 1890 she served in the Indian National Congress. That was the first time women participated publicly in the sessions of the Indian National Congress.

Sakhi Samiti (Society of Friends) was started by Swarnakumari in 1896. With her were other members of the Tagore family. The objective of the society was to assist helpless orphans and widows. The following report was published in Bharati and Balak in 1898.

Saroj Nalini Dutt

She was born on 9th October, 1887 in Hooghly district, the fourth daughter of Brajendranath De, a distinguished member of the Indian Civil Service.

Trailokya Mohini Debi, her grand-mother, moulded her character in another way. Influenced by her ideas Sarojnalini was attracted to various social reforms.

Saroj Nalini Dutt founded a series of Mahila Samities in the Bengal hinterlands, as she travelled from station to station with her ICS husband Guru Saday Dutt. Side by side, the tradition of Hindu Mela was revived and a major women's motion clearly stirred by the Swadeshi movement, was the Mahila Shilpa Samiti, a women's handicraft exhibition organized from 1906 to 1908 by Hiranmoyee Devi, the daughter of the Bengali poetess Swarnakumari Devi.

Conclusion

These brave Indian freedom fighters fought for our motherland and many among them sacrificed their lives for the freedom of our country. Let us remember all of these freedom fighters of India and be proud of them.

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