

# Elapsed glory of Women in Indian Freedom Struggle

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**Abstract:-** The celebrated glory of Indian independence remains incomplete without women. Contributions that we read till date mention specific women personalities but undoubtedly the freedom struggle was much more than that, it included women from all spheres and milieu. The following paper attempts to bring forth the glory of lost women who contributed significantly in the freedom struggle and delve into the whys and wherefores of this distortion. Annie Beasant, Sarojni Naidu, Basanti Debi, and possibly couple of dozen activists initially in the era stood out as notable women. Most of the aforementioned activists were either spouses, mothers, or sisters of congress leaders (Pal). All those who belonged to an elite and if not elite, however from an educated background. The unsung glory of women's participation from all spheres incorporates more than what we have read and their sacrifices and struggles remain undocumented within the preeminent record of independent India. These spheres are not devoid of women as commercial sex workers or trans women who barely found two or more records in the pages of history to reveal their stories of unsung glory.

**Keywords:-** Middle class women, Indian freedom struggle, Transgender, Trans women, LGBTQIA+, Feminism.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The affiliation amongst the independence movement and women was mutualistic. The movement's success was reliant on women's contribution and the freedom movement that advanced from the separatists' undertakings of the women (Thapar-Björkert 1997).

From constructing diverse women's organization to actively involving in militant struggle women moved step by step with every contributor of with bogus pursuits to portray this movement as solely homogenous. Within Indian society, some socioeconomic divisions were abandoned and overlooked. Thus, it is not unexpected that gender issues particularly women's involvement in the freedom struggle, are not addressed (Kasturi and Mazumdar 1994: 1-6).

Moreover, it may be argued that the participation in the movement was due to Gandhi's persuasion and his belief that the struggle was nonviolent and thus women could participate equally. "Women amply possessed the qualities required for a non-violent struggle: tolerance, courage and capacity for suffering" (Rao 1994:41). These views restrict the women in the stereotypical and patriarchal mindset of Indians. Why women were even expected to tolerate and suffer? Even though the following statement was used in a positive manner but this offers an insight into the psyche of the women who were expected to suffer. Despite the fact that the freedom movement involved 'mass participation' from middle class women who were common, simple and

unsophisticated but we barely and rarely hear their voices. When these issues are brought up, the analysis of the whole struggle is constrained to middle class cooperation with the public.

As mentioned by Gandhi, women's inherent ability for the non-violent struggle, tolerance and capacity for suffering was never a weakness and despite such attributed qualities we notice active participation of women in militant milieu, and in spite of "significant contribution of women in the militant struggle" no one kept them alive in documentation, instead of that every one noticed "general masses arising together with the flame of nationalism".

Revolutionizing the work of women the following paper discuss women in various spheres- militant, domestic, and societal.

## II. WOMEN IN MILITANT MILIEU AND CHALLENGES

The chivalrous documentation of women deserting their dwellings and joining hands on street in opposition to the foreign domain is well depicted in the history (Thapar-Björkert, 2006). But raised amid taboos and societal evils, that restricted women to household must be borne in mind as well as the psychological ramification of all such evils. Literature explicitly mentions about women's participation within the militant struggle exemplifying multiple women taking lead in non-violent nationalist movement. (*Chatterjee .M 2001*).

Conventionally, the revolutionary groups those who firmly believed in military resistance against the foreign domain to earn back their sovereign land, were actually composed of like-minded men. But even here we find a handful of women who were present and active throughout the revolution. **Sarala Debi Ghoshal** was such a revolutionary key figure in the early twentieth century. She was not a participant but a patron of revolutionary groups, and is said to have got her friends and acquaintances to take a pledge on the map of India that they would be prepared to sacrifice their lives for the country's independence. (*Chatterjee .M 2001*). Even though there have been lot contributions yet maximum went undocumented. The gender ironies of the nationalism are constructed on the predetermined stereotypical gender roles for men and women and while no recognition is given to the third gender. We Indians adorned our goddesses with furious weapons and imagery of saviour yet adorning the women of all spheres in the golden pages of history seemed difficult for historians. Further there were discriminations and constraints within the domestic spheres as well.

### III. DOMESTIC SPHERE REVOLUTIONIZED

Public and private margins overlapped and the domestic arena became a significant site for the rooted politicization of women's consciousness. They not have to be active in the public space to demonstrate their level of political consciousness and its adaptability to the prevailing political agenda. Representations such as "saviour of civilisation" allowed women to go "on the streets" and take on a more militant role, while others could stay at home and inculcate patriotism in their children. (Thapar-Björkert 1997). Although family dynamics were important in determining how one can express themselves politically and publicly. There were clear demarcation between the nationalist households and common households. Women from who belonged to nationalist households were more sensitive towards the cause, while women from vulnerable background where their households had no prior connection to nationalist ideologies found difficult to found grounds within the movement. The psychological plight of problems like poverty, patriarchy and all societal evils that prevailed shaped women of pre-independence era. We found serious insights that suggested that even then the middle-class women were restrained to their homes, and it's obvious that breaking the societal purview would have been difficult for them. Not all women can abandon their households and join hands on street for the country(Thapar-Björkert, 2006). Even if these vulnerable women would have tried to be a part; but expectations from women, their anticipated responsibility towards their in-laws, children and husband would have stopped them from directly participating.

If the scenarios for the females were like this, no one can understand the plight of the women from vulnerable sections who actually fought with their own values to be a part of the nationalist movement and still not making to the pages of history is a grievous sin. However early representations, depictions, and images of women helped in gaining popular support. Portraying Bharat as 'Bharat Mata' revolutionized the scope of nationalism among the local population. The Gender ideology that manifested women as personifications of the motherland now had to acclimatize to women as being among the characters of the movement. (Engels, 1989, p. 433). Yet the plight of vulnerable sections remained same, their contributions were not documented. Even though the vulnerable section found the courage to allow their women partially to support and cultivate the movement they however lacked in fighting with their man-made problems.

### IV. VULNERABLE SECTIONS AMONG THE ALREADY VULNERABLE SECTION

The already vulnerable section was involved in cultivating hatred, patriarchy, discrimination and prejudice for their own kind. We found vulnerable sections among these vulnerable sections who tried to step up in helping for a novel cause were did not received same amount of respect and also poses certain questions. While observing the glorious texts of the long-written glory of all freedom

fighters we actually strive hard to sit and find common women who belonged to different communities. For instance, the role of commercial sex workers of Medinipur in the nationalist movement has been significant. Commercial workers enthusiastically contributed in this movement despite knowing the fact that it will ruin their profession. It is needed to mention that there are no significant discussions regarding the active role and contribution of sex workers of Medinipur in the Indian freedom struggle. Their sacrifice wasn't recorded within the golden page of our history till the platinum jubilee celebration of Indian independence (Mitra, a. 2002).

There was plethora of discrimination within the sections that may have been a reason of under-representation. In the 1930s prostitutes of Uttar-Pradesh, Kanpur were constrained from joining the movement and were accused of being unfit to even sit near other ladies in a district congress committee meeting (Thapar 1993). Many such instances aid in comprehending the real aspects of the nationalism that wasn't free from discrimination and people from all the spheres of society contributed, struggled for the freedom.

### V. WHYS AND WHEREFORES OF MISREPRESENTATION

There are multiple researches that mentions participation of women as a collective force in the nationalist movement but no single preference has ever been given. This might due to the patriarchal mindset that prevailed in India and it's backed by the social evils as well. Moreover, most men never felt safe in sending their women out. Discriminations within the women (Mitra, a.2002) in terms of work, class etc.

Women often refused to come out of the domestic sphere because, '*us samay aache khandan ke aurate ghar se bahar nahin nikalti*' (in those days women from good families did not come out of the house) (Thapar-Björkert, 2006). This statement stands in contrast with other middle-classwomen and women from much vulnerable communities who must have fought much stronger value systems of the own community in a time when women were not even allowed to express themselves.

Long - established explanations of patriotism have largely been written from a male perspective. Yet, the expansion of previously untapped materials such as women's writings, analogies, anecdotal writing, interviews, as well as more forsaken documented archives hierarchical and private files, official reports, and journalists, increased the breadth and depth of women's set of experiences. In India, women fought for their rightful place in the public spotlight, challenging the system's overall male-centricity and taking an interest in the effort to gain independence. (Rimpy and kumar 2001).

### VI. WAY FORWARD

What has been the status of women throughout history-their changing status with the passage of time, and their role in the Indian Independence Movement is still a

subject of intense research. 'If we genuinely want to talk about how we gained our independence? Without mentioning the contribution of women, the conversation would be lacking.' (Rimpy and Kumar 2001) Moreover there is extensive research gap in terms of literature dedicated to the analyses and recognition of the contribution made by the transgender community of India, as there is negligible chance of a community remaining in isolation despite of all prevailing taboos in the society. The impact and involvement of the vulnerable sections in an imperative and widespread event such as freedom struggle shall be documented and researched upon.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Through the following discourse one must get an idea of how women and other marginalized community did not get fair amount of representation in the historical texts. Further one can also notice the amount of discrimination that persisted in our society, discrimination in terms of 'kinds of work', caste, religion and what not. Attempt has been made to criticize the existing issue through a humanitarian lens. Common woman is a broad term that inevitably comprise of women from sex workers community and trans community, the discrimination towards a particular community (for which we got instances in Medinipur) is stereotyped based on their work and preferences towards work, it leaves no hope for women from a community (Transgenders) that got no recognition.

This is grievous interrogation for the historians who could not even pay attention to these little detail and whereabouts of how trans people were treated during that time and how trans women contributed in a significant event. If the feminist ideologies existing today goes on to include inclusivity and equality in terms of opportunity. We can create opportunities throughout past, we can shape history and can give women the righteous place they all deserve.

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