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A conceptual framework on the role of women in Mysore freedom struggle

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Abstract

In ancient period, women had a honorable place like men, men also had the right of education. In Rig-Vedic Shlokas, references have been made to many women who had composed the Shlokas, namely Lopamudra, Vishwawara, Ghoshal etc. In Upanishad also we have the reference of learned women. In inscriptions of ancient Karnataka, we also have reference of women scholars for example: 900 A. D. inscription mentions that women were well versed in Vedic studies. By this, we come to know that women's education was inclined towards art. During Chalukyas, Vijayabhattarika and Revakka under Rashtrakutas were learned women. In the 10th century Karnataka had the great-educated woman Attimabbe.

Keywords: Culture, Right, British

Introduction

After coming over of Muslims to India, the position of women had been changed. During the Vijayanagar period, wife of Kampana, Gangambika and Tirumaladevi, Ramabhadrambe and others were noted poetesses. They had gained knowledge in the state policy, religion, Logic, literature, fine arts etc. This honour brought to Indian culture is immortal. Later Keladi Chennamma fought against Aurangzeb and gained victory.

In 17th century Belavadi Mallamma fought against Shivaji whom he considered as sister later on. After coming over of British to India, fought against them, awakened the chieftains and sowed the seeds of independence. In the great revolt of 1857, Rani Laxmibai fought against British and gained appreciation from them.

Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhiji, Non Co-operation Movement started which revolted the tolerance, patience and sacrifice of the Indian women readily sacrificed of the nations. In No-Tax campaign women participated in large number. In the last phase of Quit India Movement, women fought, distributed food and pamphlets, took Prabhat Pheri in evening procession and conducted such activities and participated in many movements and underwent imprisonment.

Women's Role in Mysore Freedom Struggle

The study about 'Women's role in Mysore Freedom Struggle (1900-1948)' is the first of its kind on the study of Mysore's glorious role during the freedom struggle. There are many four-fold reasons for being interested in the study of women freedom fighters of Mysore.

1. Firstly that not only men participated at the national level, but also the women of Mysore did not lag behind in the participation of national freedom. But only thing is that they did not come up to that national prominence unlike to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Kasturba Gandhi, Maniben, Sucheta Krupalani etc. Why this could happen is an important issue.
2. Secondly, the interest in the study emerges from the fact. That a very large number of women from different place took part in various activities connected with national freedom movement. But somehow they have missed the attention of national historians. If we go deeply there are hundreds of women who have taken part in the freedom struggle.

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3. The third important point for germination interest in the study is that besides the national movements and activities chalked out by national leaders and in particular by Gandhiji, in which the women participated. The women of Mysore took part in the freedom struggle with others but with a different angle. That is, some new directions, new activities and new movements were undertaken by the women freedom fighters of Mysore. For example Mysore Chalo, Isoor tragedy, Vidhuraswatha Tragedy and Join Union Movement which have not been properly recorded in the freedom history of the state.
4. Fourthly, it was women freedom fighters, who were large in number following the men folk, undertook very bold and even physically dangerous activities and they stood behind the men in running the households in the absence of men (who were taken to jail). How could they balance the situation and show their national pride is very curious issue for the historians.
5. Fifthly interstate women participation in the activities or movements of freedom struggle spread at a faster rate and was upto the national mark. This has been shown a complete blind eye by the historians so far.
6. Sixthly quite interesting to remember that the women freedom fighters not only undertook all the national freedom movements seriously, but also to compliment this goal they had initiated the local reform movement and activities such as education of women, widow marriage, removal of untouchability etc. which is much more important than the national freedom fighters.
7. Lastly, it is very important to keep in mind that there is no single work that could give the picture of large number of women from Mysore taken part in the freedom struggle. This gap is so wide and important that it needs to be filled, though if not during 20th century but at least at the beginning of 21st century. In a way, there is a need for creation a comprehensive work on all the women freedom fighters of Mysore which should be very close to copidium.

Need For the Study

As pointed out above the need for a comprehensive work on women freedom fighters of Mysore is essential to fill the gap but more than that there are a number of problems and limitations in the existing studies about the number and role of women freedom fighters in Mysore.

For example, it is not a wonder that there are few studies directly dealing with the women freedom fighters of Karnataka but not unfortunately,

1. Some of the studies have devoted for the study of exclusively only one or very few women
2. Some studies on the other hand describe, though few women freedom fighter have taken part in one or two activities only.

Women Freedom Fighters in India

Men and Women are two inseparable parts of human society and they have always shared sorrows and joys together. If men have endeavored to free themselves from slavery, women have not lagged behind. History is full of heroic deeds of both men and women who have fought for independence of their motherland. The history of the struggle for India's freedom is like many others story of joint endeavor of both men and women. The contribution made by

women cannot be studied independently of the study of social and economic positions of women in the society.

The part played by women in the fight for freedom is so remarkable and so glorious that one begins to wonder how these women of India, represented as slaves of their men folk and steeped in ignorance and superstitions as viewed, by western observers like the Abbe Dubois and Miss Mayo, could have so suddenly acquired the courage, endurance, determination and spirit' of sacrifice which they showed in such abundant measure during the freedom fight. They shared with their men folk in the trials and tribulations associated with Satyagraha. In this fight even the most unlettered and uneducated women, of whom there were thousands, showed such an understanding of the situation and such awareness of the sacrifice and suffering involved in the fight, that those who formerly scoffed at them were forced to admire and to know that lack of education or literacy does not mean lack of culture.

The impact of the British and the west in general had a profound influence on the status of women in India. The numerous wars arid political upheavals of the 18th century had greatly weakened social stability in India, though less so in the remote rural parts. As the British power began to spread towards the last quarter of the 18th century, new forces of disruption made them felt.

The British remained foreigners and looked down upon the Indians, as the inheritors of an ancient culture, as ignorant and superstitious. In the wake of British Soldier and administrator, came the Christians missionary fulmination against the religion, manners and customs of the Indians and promising to reveal an open door to heaven through his Christian religion. Often he adopted means in no wise upright or honest to convert the people to Christianity. The English officer in India, with very few exceptions, was an insufferable snob, and often a tyrant. He sought not only to upset the political fabric of India, but also to undermine her economic and social stability.

This inevitably produced a reaction. In the political field there were rising, culmination in-the struggle for freedom of 1857*-58. In the social and religious fields mighty reforming movements were set on the foot by about the middle of the 19th century. Raja Ram Mohan Roy worked with single minded devotion for the furtherance of social justice irrespective of caste, creed and sex, Mohipatram Rupram started the Prathana Samaj in Gujarat, Dayanand Sarsawati established the dynamic social reform organisation of the Arya Samaj in Lahore in 1877, which was frankly and avowedly antagonistic to Christianity and sought to revive all that was free and liberal in the ancient Vedic culture, Mahadev Govind Ranade in the Deccan made an all-out effort at social reform by establishing, in 1877, the National Social conference, as he firmly believed that you cannot have a good social system when you find yourself low in the scale of political rights, nor can you be fit to exercise political rights and privileges unless your social system is based on reasons and justice.

All these reformers and revivalists attached great importance to the question of removing the disabilities imposed on women and raising to a position of equality with men. From the time of the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885, women, especially of the higher and educated classes, were becoming more and more vociferous with regard to improvement in their condition. At first, some of the leaders of the congress did not think it right to introduce

the problems of women into the proceedings of the congress. Surendranath Banerjee in 1895, "However, much we may love and respect our ladies, we do not think they are yet qualified for representative government".

Dadabhai Naoroji remarked- "A national congress must continue itself to question in which the entire nation has a direct participation and it must leave the adjustment of social reforms and other class questions to class congress". The result of this was the rise of the National Social Conference in 1887. But A.O. Hume warned his colleagues that "Political reformers of all shades of opinion should never forget that unless the elevation of the female element of the nation proceed paripassu with other work, all their labour for political enfranchisement would prove vain".

Increasing sections of Indian women began to interest themselves and participate in the political movement during the first decade of the 20th century. Before M. Gandhi came to the forefront of the natural movement and became its undisputed leader, two women with outstanding talent and personality, one a foreigner, the other an Indian, were having a deep impression on the mind of the Indian Women and gave impetus to them to participate in the freedom struggle. They were Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant with her militant demand of Home Rule for the Indian people remarked in 1917 that the strength of the Home Rule Movement was rendered tenfold greater by the adhesion to it of a large number of women who brought to it the uncalculating heroism, the endurance, the self-sacrifice of the famine nature.

The agitation against the partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi movement attracted the attention of women in many parts of India. Sarla Devi Choudhurani of the Calcutta session of the congress in 1906.

Margaret Nobie alias Sister Nivedita was involved in the activities of the secret society of revolutionaries led by Sri Aurobindo and his brother, Bnndra Ghose. In Maharashtra, Yasubai Savarkar, wife of G.D. Savarkar formed Atmantshta Yuvati Sangh, with about sixty women as its members. This organisation used to work in collaboration with Abhinav Bharat, a secret society of revolutionaries led by Savarkar brothers Ganesh and Vinayak. This association advocated boycott of foreign goods and adoption of Swadeshi.

During the First World War, Annie Besant dominated Indian Political scene and was elected as President of the Indian National Congress. She was the first women to occupy this coveted position. The emergence of Annie Besant, Smt. Sarojini Naidu and Bi Amman, mother of the Ali brother's marked the beginning of a new chapter in the Indian history in which women started participating in agitation's against the government by taking out processions in protest against its repressive policies.

Avantikabai (1882-1942) took active part in the Champaran Satyagraha launched by Mahatma Gandhi. During freedom struggle, she had to go to jail several times. She was the President of the Hind Manila Samaj for 38 years. Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak contributed foreword for her biography of Gandhiji published in 1918.

The year 1917 was significant for many reasons. As stated earlier Annie Besant was elected President of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta session. ASI India Women's Association was formed. The Deputation led by Sarojini Naidu called on the Viceroy, Lord Cheimsford and Montague at Madras on 18 December 1917, to demand voting right for women.

During Non Co-operation Movement, women started participating in the national movement on a large scale. They took part in the Satyagraha campaigns, took out processions and depying the ban on public meetings and organized demonstrations in front of liquor-shops and those shops, where imported cloth was sold, Mahatma Gandhi wrote an open letter to the Indian women on 11 August 1921, thanking them for their contribution in the freedom movement. Basanti Devi, wife of Chittaranjan Das, his sister Urmila Devi and his niece were arrested in Calcutta for selling Kadhi. Mahatmaji declared that the women of India should have as much share in winning swaraj as men.

Apart from participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement, women had already started taking part in the trade-union movement. Ushatai Dange, wife of Shripad Amrit Dange, was a prominent leader of the Girni Kamgar Union, a most powerful and militant organisation of the textile workers in Bombay.

Women also played a significant role in the Quit India Movement. The Quit India Movement was practically leaderless, as all the senior members of the congress had been put behind bars. Women actively participated, taking out processions, holding meetings and demonstrations and organizing strikes. "Renu Chakravarty was a student leader with a strong communist base, and there were countless terrorist movement of the 30's and other again who had joined the labour movement".

In the west of India, in Bombay Usha Mehta played a stellar role with her daring underground broad casts. Aruna Asaf Ali another "tigress of nationalism", went on to become a romantic evolutionary and one of the most important figures of the 1942 movement.

Women, more particularly Indian women are the embodiment of sacrifice. When Indian women plunged into the national struggle in their hundreds and thousands, and unflinchingly braved all the horrors of Government repression, it roused the men to greater deeds of heroism and gave the struggle a touch of dignity and grace. Difference of breeding, social status and attainments no longer counted in answering the call of the motherland. The unlettered and ignorant women mixed freely with cultured and aristocratic lady on a level of equality. They left their homes to take part in Prabhat Pheries and flag salute.

The police to our shame, it must be said that, most of them were Indians-beat them, kicked them and showered foul abuse upon them. Undeterred by these, with no trace of fear, they carried on their duties, many of them having poison ready to save themselves if there should by any attempt at physical molestation by the police or their goonda minions. Gandhiji's sorcery had transformed overnight the docile, quiet- going and secluded Indian women into an intrepid, resolute patriot.

This was a phenomenon unsurpassed in history, and the world gaped in wonder to see women exhibit a courage and endurance which even men should envy. It was as if Indian women were out to prove to the world the appropriateness of the Vedic representative of Shakti as a woman.

In keeping with this tradition, burden of tears and toils of the long years of struggle for India's freedom was borne by the wives, mother, and daughters, silently and cheerfully. The programme of self-imposed poverty and periodical jail going was possible only because of the willing co-operation of the workers family. In the various resistance movements in the villages, the illiterate women played this passive but

contributory part as comrades of their men folk. Women leader of the stature of Annie Basent, Sarojini Naidu, Swarup Rani Nehru, Vijayalaxmi Pandit, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Nellie Sengupta, Kamala Nehru, Bibi Amus Salam, Sucheta Kripalani, Aruna Asaf All, Smt. Indira Gandhi and scores of other jumped into the freedom struggle under the banner of the Indian National Congress. We also gracefully remember Shrimati Kasturaba Gandhi, who was a source of inspiration to our womenfolk during those difficult days. Shrimati Indira Gandhi, thought of a very tender age, also started taking active part in the struggle and created her Vanar Sena. And by the time India gained Independence, women's participation in Public life became an accepted fact.

Conclusion

The struggle of Indian Independence forms an interesting phase of history having the feature of love, brotherhood, heartedness, betrayal and sacrifice. The Indians right from the inception of British rule, agitated against their policy and gradually moved to fight for independence.

This freedom struggle story is the story of many known and unknown Indians, their dedication and sacrifice, to the causes of freedom. The struggle was not only of men, but also women who played a vital role in the struggle. However, the freedom struggle is a part where we have ample information and example to show the heroic part of women in achieving our goal.

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