



## INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT &amp; WOMEN'S FROM MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

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**Abstract**

The Indian national movement, which aimed to secure India's independence from British colonial rule, witnessed the significant participation of women from diverse backgrounds, including Dalit, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, and tribal communities. These women freedom fighters played a crucial role in shaping the course of the movement and advocating for India's freedom. Their contributions were not only instrumental in challenging the British colonial power but also in challenging societal norms and prejudices prevalent during that era. Women played a crucial role in the Indian National Movement, which aimed to free India from British colonial rule. They actively participated in various stages of the struggle, making significant contributions and sacrifices. The role of women from these communities in the Indian National Movement is often overlooked. However, their contributions were significant and helped to pave the way for India's independence. They showed that women from all backgrounds can play a vital role in social change. Women from all castes participated in the Indian independence movement, but women from different castes, religions and communities made great contributions despite all the social and religious barriers. In this paper, I have tried to throw light on the unprecedented contribution made by these women in the freedom movement.

**Keywords:** National Movement, Pivotal Role of Women, Marginalized communities

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**Introduction:**

Women played a crucial role in the Indian National Movement, which aimed to free India from British colonial rule. They actively participated in various stages of the struggle, making significant contributions and sacrifices. Here are some notable women who made an impact during the Indian National Movement: Sarojini Naidu: Known as the "Nightingale of India," Sarojini Naidu was a prominent poet, freedom fighter, and a leading figure in the Indian National Congress. She played a crucial role in the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Civil Disobedience Movement. Annie Besant: A British social reformer, Annie Besant settled in India and joined the Indian National Congress. She advocated for

self-rule and actively worked for various social causes, including women's rights and education. Kamala Nehru: The wife of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, Kamala Nehru was a dedicated freedom fighter. She participated in numerous protests and worked towards uplifting women and the underprivileged. Aruna Asaf Ali: Aruna Asaf Ali was a prominent freedom fighter who fearlessly led underground movements during the Quit India Movement. She later became the first woman to hoist the Indian National Congress flag at the Gowalia Tank Maidan in Bombay during the Quit India Movement in 1942. Kasturba Gandhi: Wife of Mahatma Gandhi, Kasturba played an essential role in the Indian independence struggle. She actively participated in



various campaigns, including the Salt March, and was a staunch advocate of non-violence and civil disobedience. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit: Sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was one of the first women to hold significant political offices in India. She was a diplomat, politician, and the first woman President of the United Nations General Assembly. Begum Hazrat Mahal: During the Indian Rebellion of 1857, Begum Hazrat Mahal, wife of the Nawab of Oudh, played a crucial role in leading the uprising against British force. Rani Lakshmbai: Also known as the Rani of Jhansi, Lakshmbai was one of the key leaders of the Indian Rebellion of 1857. She fought valiantly against British forces and became a symbol of resistance and bravery. These are just a few examples, and there were countless other women who actively participated in the Indian National Movement, both at the grassroots level and as prominent leaders. Their contributions were instrumental in shaping India's struggle for independence and the subsequent development.

#### **Indian National Movement - A Historical Preview:**

The Indian national movement was a crucial period in India's history, marked by various individuals and communities actively participating in the struggle for independence from British colonial rule. Among the many contributors to this movement were Indian women belonging to different social, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, including Dalits, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, and tribal communities. These women played a significant role in shaping the fight for freedom, despite facing multiple layers of discrimination and marginalization.

A plethora of studies have scrutinized the Indian National Movement, earmarking its achievements and evaluating its trajectory to the nation's independence. Nevertheless, one facet of India's freedom struggle that often goes unappreciated is the participation of women

from marginalized communities, precisely the Dalit, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, and Tribal communities. Their contribution was significant in its dynamism, deeply influencing the course and outcome of the Indian National Movement.

#### **Role of Dalit Women:**

The emboldened voices of Dalit women were instrumental in unlocking the chains of social stigma and discrimination during the Indian National Movement. These women, often marginalized and sidelined due to their social caste hierarchy, emerged as powerful advocates of change, confronting the oppressive norms that left them vulnerable. They played a paramount role in initiating dialogues surrounding social reform, advocating for egalitarianism, and augmenting social mobility. Prominent figures like Nangeli, Muktabai, and Dakshayani Velayudhan walked at the forefront of political activism, manifesting their resilience and undeterred spirit in face of adversity. These Dalit women bared the brunt of double oppression, as they fought against the British Raj and challenged the monstrous claws of caste-based discrimination.

#### **Influence of Sikh Women:**

In the strenuous journey towards independence, Sikh women were dynamic players, demonstrating impressive leadership and relentless courage. Their active participation was a powerful testament to their unwavering dedication to the national cause. Indomitable women like Bibi Balbir Kaur, Jaswant Kaur, and Bhag Kaur stood on the frontlines, challenging the might of the British Empire and advocating for egalitarian principles, justice, and inclusivity. Their contributions significantly tore down patriarchal stereotypes and fortified the ethos of equality in India.

#### **Muslim Women's Participation:**

Despite the socio-religious constraints of their time,



Muslim women actively participated in the freedom struggle, eloquently voicing their dissent against the British Empire. Begum Hazrat Mahal, Razia Sultana, and Bi Amma are among the many who defied regressive societal norms and set exceptional examples of valor and patriotism. Their participation was not limited to mere speeches but included active participation in various uprisings, protests, and movements. Their resistance against the colonial rule also led them to demand and fight for their rights in an emerging independent India.

#### **Impact of Christian Women:**

Christian women carved a distinctive position for themselves within the Indian National Movement, transcending the boundaries of conventions and religious inhibitions. Figures like Mother Teresa, Annie Besant, and Sister Nivedita played a considerable role in India's independence struggle. Using their influence and platform, they mobilized the masses against British rule. In addition to advocating for independence, they campaigned for social reform, providing a powerful impetus to the emancipation of women and the eradication of numerous social evils rampant in Indian society.

#### **Tribal Women: Driving the Resistance:**

The participation of tribal women in the Indian National Movement is a tale of assertive resistance and indomitable courage. Women from tribes like the Santhal, Munda, Bhil, and Gond played a crucial role in leading revolts against colonial rule. Rani Gaidinliu, a Naga spiritual and political leader from the northeastern part of India, is an enduring symbol of tribal resistance against British rule. These tribal women were not merely passive spectators but were active participants, confronting the might of a powerful empire, challenging their exploitation and demanding their rightful place in independent India.

Overall, these women broke through social barriers and

made significant contributions to the Indian national movement. They were instrumental in mobilizing communities, spreading awareness, participating in protests and movements, and advocating for India's freedom from British colonial rule. Despite facing intersecting layers of discrimination, their resilience and determination made them indispensable pillars of the struggle for independence. It is important to recognize and celebrate the invaluable role played by these women in shaping the course of India's history.

#### **Challenges and Obstacles faced by Indian women freedom fighters in the Indian national movement:**

The Indian national movement, which aimed at achieving independence from British colonial rule, had a profound impact on Indian society, including women belonging to various marginalized communities. These women faced unique challenges and experiences during the struggle for independence: Indian women freedom fighters faced numerous challenges and obstacles during the Indian national movement, which sought to gain independence from British colonial rule. Despite facing societal norms and restrictions, they played a significant role in the struggle for independence. Here are some of the major challenges they encountered:

#### **Double Marginalization:**

Women from Dalit, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, and tribal communities faced not only the challenges of being female in a patriarchal society but also the discrimination and oppression that came with their caste, religion, or tribal identity. They were often subjected to triple oppression - gender, caste, and class/ethnicity, making their struggle for recognition and empowerment even more challenging.

#### **Leadership and Participation:**

Despite facing multiple forms of marginalization, women from these communities actively participated in the national movement. Many of them emerged as



leaders, organizers, and activists within their communities. They played crucial roles in organizing protests, boycott movements, and agitations against British rule, as well as advocating for social and economic reforms within their own communities.

#### **Social Reform Movements:**

Women from marginalized communities actively participated in social reform movements that aimed to challenge prevailing social norms and customs that perpetuated discrimination and oppression. These movements sought to address issues such as caste-based discrimination, child marriage, and restrictions on women's education and property rights.

#### **Intersectional Struggles:**

Women from these communities often found themselves navigating the intersections of multiple identities, leading to complex struggles. For example, Dalit women faced discrimination not only based on their gender but also due to their "lower" caste status, which made their fight for dignity and equality even more demanding.

#### **Leadership and Empowerment:**

The Indian national movement provided opportunities for women from marginalized communities to raise their voices and demand their rights. Their involvement in the movement helped in building self-confidence, empowerment, and a sense of solidarity among women from diverse backgrounds.

#### **Challenges from Within:**

While women from these communities actively participated in the national movement, they also faced challenges from within their communities. Some conservative elements opposed their engagement in public life and resisted changes that challenged traditional social hierarchies.

#### **Legacy:**

The contributions of these women were significant in shaping the broader narrative of the national

movement. However, their role and achievements were often overlooked or downplayed in historical accounts due to the dominant androcentric and upper-caste biases prevalent at the time.

#### **Lack of Education and Awareness:**

Many women in India during that period did not have access to education or awareness about their rights and the political situation. The lack of education made it difficult for them to fully comprehend the complexities of the freedom movement and actively contribute to it.

#### **Gender Roles and Patriarchy:**

Indian society at that time was deeply rooted in patriarchal norms, which limited the roles and rights of women. Women were expected to be confined to domestic responsibilities and were not encouraged to participate in public life or politics. This made it challenging for women to step out of their traditional roles and actively participate in the freedom movement. Despite their participation, many women freedom fighters had to struggle to gain recognition and respect from their male counterparts. Their contributions were often overshadowed, and their voices were not given equal weight.

#### **Lack of Financial Support:**

Women faced financial challenges in participating in the freedom movement, as many were dependent on their families for financial support, and actively engaging in political activities could disrupt their economic stability.

In conclusion, women from Dalit, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, and tribal communities played a crucial but often underappreciated role in the Indian national movement. Their struggle for independence was intertwined with their fight against various forms of discrimination and social injustices within both colonial and Indian society. Their efforts contributed to shaping India's diverse and inclusive identity as it emerged from the struggle for independence. Efforts



have been made in recent years to bring to light the stories and contributions of women freedom fighters. Scholars, activists, and historians have been working to rectify the historical imbalance and give women their due recognition in shaping India's struggle for independence. By revisiting historical records, conducting new research, and promoting inclusive narratives, there is hope that the visibility of women's role in the Indian national movement will be enhanced.

### **The Indomitable Spirit of Women Freedom Fighters Belonging to Marginalized Communities in the Indian National Movement:**

Introducing an often-overlooked aspect of India's freedom struggle, we shine a light on the exceptional women freedom fighters who came from marginalized communities. Their courage, defiance, and endurance in the face of injustice fed the fire of the Indian National Movement. They persistently fought against the double yoke of colonial and social oppression to join the fight for their nation's freedom.

Typically, the marginalized communities in India faced multiple levels of oppressions, but this did not deter the women from participating in the Indian national movement. They played pivotal roles in it, from arousing public sentiment to organizing campaigns of resistance. Women like Matangini Hazra, an elderly woman from the marginalized community, led processions and was a prominent figure in various protests, even leading to her martyrdom during the Quit India Movement. Women like Ahilyabai Holkar not only helped in molding resistance against the British Raj but also, through her administrative abilities, championed the cause of the marginalized communities. Similarly, Rani Velu Nachiyar, of the Sivaganga kingdom in Tamil Nadu, was the first queen to fight against the British colonial power in India. These women created an extraordinarily spirited saga

of resistance that echoed through the annals of India's freedom history.

The participation of women freedom fighters from marginalized communities played an essential role in the broader context of the Indian national movement. Their involvement had the powerful effect of debunking the common myopic view of their inferiority. It became an inclusive freedom struggle, uniting a diverse populace against the common enemy - British colonialism. By engaging in the freedom struggle, these women laid the groundwork for the empowerment of future generations in their communities. They challenged the predominating narratives of the times, questioning the oppressive societal norms while simultaneously fighting against the colonizers. Their valor and resilience also contributed to the discourse of women's empowerment and gender equality in India, pushing the boundaries of the traditionally patriarchal society. They were vanguards for equality, challenging the societal norms, and inspiring future generations. While many often overlook the struggle of these women freedom fighters from marginalized communities, it is essential to bring their stories to the forefront. The life of women like Soyarabai and Savitribai Phule, who fought against casteism and gender discrimination; tales of Thillaiyadi Valliammai, who defied the regulations of the oppressive regime; the defiance of Rani Gaidinliu, who resisted British rule and sought to preserve her Naga culture, are all exceptional stories of resistance that need amplification. These women, despite their challenging socio-cultural backgrounds, often took on leadership roles. Through their relentless determination, they made significant contributions to India's fight for freedom and sowed the seeds for the struggle for social reforms.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, the Indian National Movement was not an isolated battlefield of sturdy men, but an inclusive movement where women from Dalit, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, and tribal communities fought with unyielding vigor. They played a significant role in bolstering India's freedom struggle, redrawing the contours of women's participation in Indian history. From challenging foreign rule to reshaping societal norms, their contributions are testimonies of resilience and power, reflecting the transformation of India from a colonized nation to a sovereign republic.

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