

# The Role of Women in National Movement

## Unit I

### Historical Context and Early Contributions

#### A. Introduction to Women's Role in the Indian National Movement

- **Overview of the Indian National Movement and its key phases.**
- **Importance of women's participation in social and political reforms.**

The Indian National Movement was a significant struggle against British colonial rule in India, from the late 19th century to 1947. It can be divided into several key phases, each marked by distinct strategies and leadership:

1. **Early Phase (late 19th century):** This phase saw the emergence of early nationalist leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendranath Banerjee, and others who initiated the demand for self-governance and political reforms.
2. **Moderate Phase (late 19th to early 20th century):** Leaders such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Dadabhai Naoroji advocated for constitutional reforms and representation within the British system.
3. **Extremist Phase (early 20th century):** Led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Lala Lajpat Rai, this phase emphasized more assertive demands for self-rule and used tactics like mass agitation.
4. **Gandhian Phase (1920s to 1947):** Mahatma Gandhi's leadership brought a mass movement characterized by non-violent civil disobedience and mass mobilization against British rule.

Throughout these phases, women played crucial roles that evolved from involvement in social and political reforms to active participation in the nationalist struggle. Here's an overview of their contributions:

#### Importance of Women's Participation in Social and Political Reforms

1. **Social Reform Movements:** Women were involved in various social reform movements of the 19th century, such as the reform of widow remarriage (led by pioneers like Pandita Ramabai), education for girls, abolition of child marriage, and promoting women's education. These movements laid the groundwork for greater gender equality and empowerment.
2. **Political Awakening:** Women's participation in the national movement was catalyzed by the spread of education and exposure to nationalist ideas. They began to participate in political gatherings, protests, and joined political organizations.
3. **Leadership Roles:** Despite societal restrictions, several women emerged as leaders in the nationalist movement. Notable figures include Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Kamala Nehru, and Aruna Asaf Ali, among others. They played crucial roles in organizing protests, boycott movements, and spreading nationalist ideologies.
4. **Non-Cooperation Movement:** Women participated actively in Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922), boycotting foreign goods, picketing liquor shops, and organizing bonfires of foreign cloth as a protest against British policies.
5. **Salt March and Civil Disobedience Movement:** Women took part in significant events like the Salt March and the Civil Disobedience Movement, facing arrests and repression alongside their male counterparts.
6. **Symbolic Actions:** Women's involvement was not just practical but also symbolic. Their participation challenged traditional gender roles and norms, inspiring others and demonstrating the breadth of support for independence.

In conclusion, women's participation in the Indian National Movement was integral to its success. They not only contributed to social and political reforms but also played vital roles in mass movements that ultimately led to India's independence in 1947. Their efforts and sacrifices continue to inspire generations and underscore the importance of gender inclusivity in historical narratives of national struggles.

#### B. Early Women Leaders and Reformers

- **Contributions of early women leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, and Kamala Nehru.**
- **Their roles in shaping nationalist discourse and mobilising support.**

## **Sarojini Naidu**

### **Contributions:**

#### **1. Oratory and Poetry:**

- Sarojini Naidu was celebrated as the "Nightingale of India" due to her poetic brilliance and oratorical skills. Her poetry often reflected themes of patriotism, freedom, and social justice, resonating deeply with the aspirations of the Indian people.
- Through her poetic works and speeches, Naidu inspired and mobilized masses, effectively conveying the sentiments of nationalism and resistance against British colonial rule.

#### **2. Leadership in Movements:**

- Naidu actively participated in the Indian National Movement, particularly during the Non-Cooperation Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920.
- She traveled extensively across India, addressing public gatherings, organizing protests, and advocating for non-violent resistance against British policies.
- Her leadership role was crucial in galvanizing public support and mobilizing women to participate actively in the nationalist struggle.

#### **3. International Representation:**

- Naidu represented India at various international forums, including the Round Table Conferences in London, where she eloquently presented India's case for independence.
- Her international engagements helped garner global sympathy and support for India's struggle against colonial oppression.

### **Role in Shaping Nationalist Discourse:**

- **Articulating Nationalist Ideals:** Sarojini Naidu played a pivotal role in articulating the ideals of freedom, self-determination, and cultural revival through her poetry and speeches. She infused the nationalist discourse with emotional fervor and intellectual depth, making it accessible and compelling to a wide audience.
- **Mobilizing Support:** As a prominent leader, Naidu effectively mobilized support for the nationalist cause, particularly among women and youth. Her ability to connect with people through literature and oratory contributed significantly to the mass mobilization efforts during the independence movement.

## **Annie Besant**

### **Contributions:**

#### **1. Theosophical Society and Indian Nationalism:**

- Annie Besant's involvement with the Theosophical Society brought her to India in 1893, where she developed a deep affinity for Indian culture and spirituality.
- She became a staunch advocate for Indian self-rule and social reform, aligning herself closely with the Indian National Congress and its leaders.

#### **2. Home Rule Movement:**

- Besant played a pivotal role in the Indian Home Rule Movement, which sought self-governance for India within the British Empire.
- She founded and led the All-India Home Rule League, which mobilized widespread support for the demand for home rule and constitutional reforms.

### 3. Educational and Social Reforms:

- Besant was instrumental in promoting education, especially for girls, and advocating for social reforms such as women's rights and caste equality.
- She established several educational institutions that aimed to empower Indians through modern education and cultural revival.

#### Role in Shaping Nationalist Discourse:

- **Advocacy for Home Rule:** Annie Besant's advocacy for home rule and constitutional reforms provided a clear political agenda for the nationalist movement. Her leadership in the Home Rule League galvanized public support and expanded the scope of political activism in India.
- **Promotion of Social Reform:** Besant's efforts in promoting education and social equality aligned with the broader nationalist goals of creating a more just and equitable society. Her emphasis on education laid the groundwork for a future generation of educated Indians who would actively participate in the struggle for independence.

### Kamala Nehru

#### Contributions:

##### 1. Support for Mahatma Gandhi:

- Kamala Nehru actively supported Mahatma Gandhi's leadership and his ideology of non-violence and civil disobedience.
- She participated in various protests and movements organized by Gandhi, including the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Civil Disobedience Movement.

##### 2. Women's Participation:

- Kamala Nehru played a crucial role in mobilizing women to join the nationalist movement. She encouraged women from diverse backgrounds to participate in political activities and protests against British rule.
- Her involvement inspired many women to challenge traditional gender norms and actively contribute to the struggle for independence.

##### 3. Symbol of Sacrifice:

- Kamala Nehru, along with other nationalist leaders, endured hardships including imprisonment and personal sacrifices for the cause of Indian independence.
- Her courage and resilience made her a symbol of sacrifice and dedication to the nationalist movement.

#### Role in Shaping Nationalist Discourse:

- **Mobilizing Women's Participation:** Kamala Nehru's advocacy for women's participation in the nationalist movement was instrumental in broadening the base of support. By actively involving women in protests and civil disobedience campaigns, she challenged societal norms and expanded the role of women in India's political landscape.
- **Symbol of Courage:** Kamala Nehru's sacrifices and unwavering commitment to the cause of independence inspired generations of Indians, highlighting the crucial role of women in the struggle for freedom.

#### Collective Impact and Legacy

These early women leaders and reformers, including Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, and Kamala Nehru, collectively played indispensable roles in India's struggle for independence:

- **Broadening the Movement:** Their leadership and advocacy expanded the scope of the nationalist movement, making it more inclusive and representative of diverse sections of Indian society, including women.

- **Shaping Nationalist Ideals:** Through their speeches, writings, and organizational efforts, they articulated and popularized the ideals of freedom, equality, and social justice, which became the cornerstone of India's struggle against colonial rule.
- **Legacy of Empowerment:** Their efforts laid the foundation for women's empowerment and social reform in post-independence India, influencing policies and attitudes towards gender equality and social justice.

In conclusion, Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Kamala Nehru, and other early women leaders not only contributed significantly to India's quest for independence but also left a lasting legacy of courage, leadership, and social reform. Their contributions continue to inspire and resonate with people striving for justice and equality around the world.

### C. Participation in Social Reforms and Movements

- **Women's involvement in social reform movements (e.g., abolition of Sati, education reforms).**
- **Impact on societal norms and gender perceptions during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.**

Women's involvement in social reform movements during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in India marked a transformative period where they actively participated in advocating for change and challenging societal norms. Here's a detailed exploration of their participation in key social reform movements and their impact on societal norms and gender perceptions:

#### Women's Involvement in Social Reform Movements

##### 1. Abolition of Sati

###### Background:

- Sati was a traditional practice where widows self-immolated on their husbands' funeral pyres, seen as a mark of honor and fidelity in some communities.
- The British government officially banned Sati in 1829, but social reformers continued to campaign against it due to its inhumane nature and its violation of women's rights.

###### Women's Role:

- **Raja Ram Mohan Roy** and **Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar** were prominent male reformers who led the anti-Sati movement. However, women played crucial roles in supporting and promoting the cause:
  - **Ramabai Ranade** and **Pandita Ramabai:** They were vocal critics of Sati and advocated for its abolition through their writings and speeches. Ramabai Ranade, in particular, was instrumental in mobilizing public opinion against the practice.

##### 2. Education Reforms

###### Background:

- Education for women was extremely limited in traditional Indian society, with literacy rates among women being significantly lower compared to men.
- Reformers emphasized the importance of education for women as a means of empowerment and social reform.

###### Women's Role:

- **Pandita Ramabai:** Besides her work against Sati, Pandita Ramabai was a staunch advocate for women's education. She established schools for girls and widows and promoted literacy among women.
- **Kamini Roy** and **Sarojini Naidu:** These leaders were not only involved in the nationalist movement but also campaigned for women's education, arguing that educated women could contribute more effectively to social and political reforms.

##### 3. Women's Rights and Social Equality

###### Background:

- Various reform movements aimed at improving the status of women and advocating for their rights in society.

- Issues such as child marriage, purdah (seclusion of women), and the lack of property rights for women were significant concerns.

### **Women's Role:**

- **Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay:** She was a prominent leader who campaigned for women's rights, focusing on issues such as the abolition of child marriage and the promotion of women's employment and economic independence.
- **Annie Besant:** Besides her nationalist activities, Annie Besant advocated for women's rights, including the right to education and the right to participate in political activities.

### **Impact on Societal Norms and Gender Perceptions**

#### **1. Challenging Traditional Norms**

- Women's active participation in these reform movements challenged traditional patriarchal norms that restricted women's roles to the domestic sphere.
- The advocacy for education and social reform highlighted the potential contributions of women to society beyond traditional household duties.

#### **2. Changing Gender Perceptions**

- These reform movements contributed to changing perceptions of gender roles and capabilities. Women leaders and activists demonstrated their intellectual and leadership abilities, challenging stereotypes about women's inferiority and incapacity.
- The emphasis on education for women laid the groundwork for future generations of educated women who would play active roles in various spheres of life, including politics, education, and social reform.

#### **3. Legislative Changes**

- The advocacy and activism of women in social reform movements eventually led to legislative changes that improved women's legal status and rights. For example, reforms against Sati and child marriage were eventually supported by legal bans and regulations.

### **Conclusion**

Women's participation in social reform movements during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in India was instrumental in advocating for change, challenging societal norms, and shaping gender perceptions. Through their activism in movements like the abolition of Sati, education reforms, and campaigns for women's rights, they paved the way for significant social and legal reforms that continue to impact India's societal fabric today. Their efforts not only contributed to women's empowerment but also laid the foundation for a more inclusive and progressive society in post-independence India.

## **Unit II**

### **Women in the Freedom Struggle**

#### **A. Women in Mass Movements**

- **Role of women in mass movements like the Non-Cooperation Movement and Civil Disobedience Movement.**
- **Examples of women leaders and their contributions (e.g., Aruna Asaf Ali, Kasturba Gandhi).**

Women played pivotal roles in India's mass movements, such as the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922) and the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1934), which were crucial phases in the struggle for independence against British colonial rule. Here's a detailed exploration of their roles and contributions, along with examples of prominent women leaders:

#### **Role of Women in Mass Movements**

## **Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922)**

### **1. Active Participation:**

- Women actively participated in protests, marches, and boycotts of British goods, demonstrating their commitment to the nationalist cause.
- They organized and led demonstrations, picketed liquor shops, and encouraged villagers to boycott government schools, courts, and British-made goods.

### **2. Impact on Society:**

- Women's involvement helped mobilize large sections of society, including women from rural areas who were traditionally less involved in political activities.
- Their participation challenged traditional gender roles and empowered women to take on leadership roles within their communities.

## **Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1934)**

### **1. Salt March and Protests:**

- Women participated in significant events like the Salt March led by Mahatma Gandhi, where they joined in making salt in defiance of British salt laws.
- They also participated in protests against salt taxes, liquor shops, and British textile imports, showcasing their commitment to civil disobedience.

### **2. Leadership and Symbolism:**

- Women leaders emerged as symbols of courage and resistance. Their willingness to face arrest, imprisonment, and violence inspired others to join the movement.
- Their involvement highlighted the breadth of support for independence and the unity of Indians across different regions and backgrounds.

## **Examples of Women Leaders and Their Contributions**

### **1. Aruna Asaf Ali**

#### **• Role and Contributions:**

- Aruna Asaf Ali played a crucial role during the Quit India Movement (1942), which was a mass civil disobedience movement demanding an end to British rule in India.
- She hoisted the Congress flag at the Gowalia Tank maidan in Bombay (now Mumbai) during the Quit India Movement, signaling the start of the movement despite the risk of arrest.
- Her act symbolized defiance and became a rallying point for the movement, inspiring thousands to join in acts of civil disobedience across India.

### **2. Kasturba Gandhi**

#### **• Role and Contributions:**

- Kasturba Gandhi, the wife of Mahatma Gandhi, played a significant role in the Indian freedom struggle alongside her husband.
- She actively participated in campaigns, including the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Civil Disobedience Movement.
- Kasturba Gandhi's involvement in protests, marches, and acts of civil disobedience demonstrated her commitment to social justice and independence.

## **Impact and Legacy**

### **1. Empowerment and Leadership:**

- Women's participation in mass movements empowered them politically and socially, challenging traditional gender roles and norms.
- They emerged as leaders and activists who played crucial roles in mobilizing communities and sustaining momentum during challenging times.

## 2. Representation and Symbolism:

- Women leaders like Aruna Asaf Ali and Kasturba Gandhi became symbols of courage, sacrifice, and resilience in the struggle for independence.
- Their actions and leadership contributed to the broader narrative of India's freedom struggle, highlighting the inclusive nature of the movement.

## 3. Social Transformation:

- The involvement of women in mass movements contributed to significant social transformation in India, paving the way for greater gender equality and participation in public life post-independence.
- Their contributions continue to inspire generations of Indians, emphasizing the importance of women's agency and activism in shaping the nation's history.

In conclusion, women's roles in mass movements such as the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Civil Disobedience Movement were integral to India's struggle for independence. Through their participation, leadership, and sacrifices, women contributed significantly to the momentum and success of these movements, leaving a lasting impact on India's social and political landscape.

## B. Challenges and Contributions

- Challenges faced by women in the freedom struggle (gender discrimination, societal expectations).
- Their contributions to the political and underground movements.

Women in the freedom struggle faced numerous challenges stemming from entrenched gender discrimination, societal expectations, and the complexities of participating in political and underground movements. Here's a detailed exploration of the challenges they faced and their significant contributions:

### Challenges Faced by Women in the Freedom Struggle

#### 1. Gender Discrimination:

- **Limited Opportunities:** Women faced limited opportunities for education and employment, which restricted their participation in public life and political activities.
- **Societal Norms:** Traditional societal norms relegated women to domestic roles, placing barriers on their involvement in political activism and decision-making processes.

#### 2. Societal Expectations:

- **Gender Roles:** Women were expected to prioritize family duties and domestic responsibilities, which often conflicted with their desire to participate in political movements.
- **Stigma:** Women who engaged in public protests or political activities risked social stigma and ostracism from conservative elements within society.

#### 3. Legal and Political Restrictions:

- **Legal Constraints:** British colonial laws and regulations often discriminated against women, limiting their rights to participate in public gatherings, protests, or political organizations.
- **Political Exclusion:** Despite their contributions, women were often marginalized within political organizations and faced challenges in gaining leadership roles or decision-making positions.

## Contributions to Political and Underground Movements

### 1. Participation in Mass Movements:

- **Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements:** Women actively participated in protests, marches, and boycotts during these mass movements, challenging British authority and advocating for independence.
- **Leadership:** Women leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Nehru, and Aruna Asaf Ali played pivotal roles in mobilizing communities and inspiring mass participation.

## 2. Political Activism and Organizing:

- **Organizational Roles:** Women organized underground networks, distributed pamphlets, and organized secret meetings to coordinate resistance activities against colonial rule.
- **Risk-Taking:** Despite the risks of arrest, imprisonment, and violence, women engaged in acts of civil disobedience, including salt marches and protests against unjust laws.

## 3. Contribution to Gandhian Movements:

- **Satyagraha:** Women embraced Gandhi's principle of non-violent resistance (Satyagraha), participating in salt marches, spinning campaigns, and other acts of civil disobedience.
- **Symbolic Actions:** Women leaders like Kasturba Gandhi and Kamala Nehru symbolized the moral and ethical strength of the movement, inspiring thousands to join the struggle for freedom.

## Examples of Remarkable Contributions

### 1. Aruna Asaf Ali

- **Role:** Aruna Asaf Ali played a pivotal role in the Quit India Movement (1942), where she hoisted the Congress flag at the Gowalia Tank maidan in Bombay, signaling the start of the movement despite the risk of arrest.
- **Contribution:** Her brave act galvanized the masses and became a symbol of resistance against British rule, encouraging widespread civil disobedience across India.

### 2. Pritilata Waddedar

- **Role:** Pritilata Waddedar was a revolutionary who participated in the Indian freedom struggle against British rule.
- **Contribution:** She led an attack on the Pahartali European Club in Chittagong in 1932 to protest against British colonialism, sacrificing her life in the process.

## Legacy and Impact

- **Empowerment:** Women's participation in the freedom struggle empowered them politically and socially, challenging traditional gender roles and norms.
- **Inspiration:** Their courage, sacrifice, and resilience continue to inspire generations of Indians, emphasizing the importance of women's agency and activism in shaping the nation's history.
- **Social Change:** The contributions of women in the freedom struggle laid the foundation for greater gender equality and women's rights in post-independence India, influencing policies and attitudes towards gender discrimination.

In conclusion, despite facing significant challenges, women in the freedom struggle made remarkable contributions through their active participation in mass movements, political activism, and underground resistance efforts. Their courage and determination played a crucial role in India's journey towards independence and continue to inspire movements for justice and equality globally.

## C. Legacy and Impact

- **Legacy of women's participation in the national movement.**
- **Impact on post-independence India: women's rights, political participation, and societal change.**

Women's participation in India's national movement left a profound and lasting legacy that continues to influence post-independence India in various ways. Here's a detailed exploration of the legacy of women's participation and its impact on women's rights, political participation, and societal change:

## Legacy of Women's Participation in the National Movement

### 1. Symbol of Resistance and Sacrifice:

- **Inspiration:** Women like Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Aruna Asaf Ali, and many others became symbols of courage, sacrifice, and resilience during the struggle for independence.
- **Mobilization:** Their active participation inspired millions of women to join the movement, challenging societal norms and contributing to the mass mobilization against British colonial rule.

### 2. Assertion of Political Agency:

- **Empowerment:** Women's involvement in the national movement empowered them politically and socially, breaking barriers and asserting their right to participate in public and political spheres.
- **Leadership:** Women leaders emerged at various levels of the nationalist movement, demonstrating their capability and readiness to lead and shape the future of the nation.

### 3. Expansion of Women's Rights Agenda:

- **Advocacy:** Women reformers and activists within the movement advocated for women's rights, including education, abolition of social evils like Sati and child marriage, and legal reforms.
- **Legal Reforms:** Post-independence, legislative changes were initiated to improve women's legal status, including the Hindu Code Bills that aimed to reform personal laws and promote gender equality.

## Impact on Post-Independence India

### 1. Women's Rights and Legal Reforms:

- **Constitutional Protections:** The Constitution of India, adopted in 1950, guarantees fundamental rights and equality before the law, laying the foundation for women's rights.
- **Legislative Reforms:** Laws were enacted to address issues such as dowry, domestic violence, inheritance rights, and protection of women's rights in marriage and property.

### 2. Political Participation:

- **Representation:** Women's participation in politics increased, leading to the rise of women leaders in various political parties and positions of power.
- **Reservation:** Constitutional amendments introduced reservations for women in local governance bodies (Panchayats and Municipalities), enhancing their political representation at grassroots levels.

### 3. Societal Change and Empowerment:

- **Education and Employment:** Initiatives were undertaken to promote women's education and employment opportunities, leading to greater economic independence and social mobility.
- **Social Norms:** Women's participation in the national movement challenged traditional gender norms and contributed to changing societal attitudes towards women's roles and capabilities.

## Examples of Enduring Influence

- **Legacy of Leadership:** Women leaders like Indira Gandhi, who became India's first female Prime Minister, and subsequent leaders have drawn inspiration from the pioneering women of the freedom struggle.
- **Activism and Advocacy:** Organizations and movements continue to advocate for women's rights and gender equality, building on the foundation laid by earlier generations of women activists.

## **Conclusion**

Women's participation in India's national movement had a profound impact on post-independence India, shaping policies, laws, and societal attitudes towards women's rights and political participation. Their legacy of courage, sacrifice, and leadership continues to inspire efforts towards gender equality and social justice, reinforcing the importance of women's agency in shaping the nation's history and future. As India progresses, the contributions of these women remain integral to the ongoing quest for inclusive development and empowerment for all.