

Contribution of Dalit Women to the Indian Freedom Struggle

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ABSTRACT:

As we all know, the Indian National movement was a series of historical events with the ultimate aim of ending British rule in India. The Indian independence movement was in constant ideological evolution. Essentially anti-colonial, it was supplemented by visions of independent, economic development with a secular, democratic, republican, and civil-libertarian political structure.

Women's participation was a pillar of a national movement. Their participation in the Indian freedom struggle is a significant area of contemporary historical inquiry. Dalit women's roles, opinions, motivations, specificity, and extent in shaping the freedom movement were rarely acknowledged because they were part marginalised group of people who make up part of what is officially known as Scheduled Castes in India. This research will highlight how Dalit women contributed to such a valuable historical legacy of independent India.

INTRODUCTION:

Indian women associated with the freedom struggle took a new dimension with the growth of popular politics of the Gandhian congress mass movements. The women's participation before Gandhi was limited to Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905-11) and Home Rule Movement (1916-17). They also attended sessions of the Indian National Congress. But the involvement of a massive freedom struggle began with Gandhi, who gave notable roles to women.

The memorable during the Indian Freedom struggle spanned 90 years. Still, Before focusing on the contribution of Dalits in the Indian Freedom struggle, it's a need to understand the Dalit feminist perspective that includes questioning caste and gender roles among the Dalit population and within feminism and the more significant women's movement. Dalit women primarily live in South Asia, mainly in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Dalit women face different challenges than women in oppressor castes in these countries. They are more likely to be poor, uneducated and socially marginalized.

Overall, Dalit women make up the "largest socially segregated" group of people at 2% of the world's population. Dalit women also tend to live in poverty, and many are illiterate. Dalit women face oppression not only from men belonging to oppressor castes but also from other Dalit men. In addition, there is a hierarchy among Dalit groups, with some Dalits being higher up on the social scale than others.

Despite this, they had played an essential role in the Indian Freedom struggle. Their participation in the freedom struggle strengthened not only the national struggle for freedom but also provided the forum for women to bring forth the contestation and contractions of the patriarchal society. The freedom struggle saw the participation of women from passive to active to an activist role.

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the paper are:

- An attempt to highlight the National Movement.
- To know the contribution of Dalit women.
- Focus on the relevance of the contribution in the current scenario.
- To find and get involved in the mainstream of the nation
- To motivate others to do work for women's empowerment.

METHODOLOGY:

As the research topic is very close to social science, the paper depends on secondary data collected from the internet, government documents, newspapers, books, various conferences and meetings, etc. Then the data was analysed, evaluated and concluded.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

The research finds that women's participation in the Indian freedom struggle is vital. No one can forget their contribution. On 10th May 1857, the soldiers revolted against British rule and sounded the trumpet of independence in India in Meerut. Many kings, Maharaja, and Emperor Bahadur Shah II, joined in this battle. Many scheduled *Veeranganas* also participated in this fight. Among these *Veeranganas*, Jhalkari Bai from Kauri caste, Uda Devi from Pasi community, Avanti Bai from Lodhi community, Asha Devi from Gurjar community and Mahabiri Devi from Valmiki caste etc. All these scheduled *Veeranganas*, have left their mark in Indian political memory and on the entire society whose excellent example of bravery. Their scarification and national freedom efforts were as crucial as Rani Laxmi bai and Begam Hasrat mahal. But unfortunately, she didn't get a place among people.

1. Uda Devi: She was a warrior in the first Indian Rebellion in 1857, who fought against the British East India Company but unfortunately, while upper caste histories highlight the resistance contributions like Jhansi Rani, the reality was also that the battles for independence from British colonial rule also featured Dalit resistance fighters like Uda Devi. She belonged to a Dalit family. She was married to a soldier Makka Pasi who was in the army of Hazrat Mahal. To prepare for the battle headed their way, the Begum helped her form a women's battalion under her command. When the British attacked Awadh, Uda Devi and her husband were part of the armed resistance. When she heard that her husband had died in the battle, she unleashed her final campaign in full force. She took part in the Battle of Sikandar Bagh in November 1857.

She was so brave. So after issuing instructions to her battalion, she climbed up a pipal tree and began shooting at advancing British soldiers. A British officer noted that many casualties had bullet wounds indicating a steep, downward trajectory. Suspecting a hidden sniper, he ordered his officers to fire at the trees and dislodged a rebel who fell to the ground dead. Upon investigation, the sniper was revealed as Uda Devi. She was armed with a pair of heavy old-pattern cavalry pistols, one of which was in her belt still loaded, and her pouch was still about half full of ammunition, while from her perch in the tree, which had been carefully prepared before the attack, she had killed more than half-a-dozen men."

2. Jhalkaribai: Jhalkaribai was a woman soldier who played an important role in the Indian Rebellion of 1857. She served in the women's army of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi. She was born to Sadava Singh and Jamuna Devi on 22nd November 1830 in Bhojla village in a Koli family. She was trained in

horseback riding and the use of weaponry. In her youth, she is claimed to have stood her ground. A tiger attacked on her. She had killed the tiger with an axe.

During the Rebellion, General Hugh Rose attacked Jhansi with a large army. The queen faced the army with 14,000 of her troops. She waited for relief from Peshwa Nana Sahib's army camping at Kalpi but did not come because General Rose had already defeated Tantia Tope. Meanwhile, Dulha Ju, in charge of one of the fort's gates, had made a pact with the assailants and opened the doors of Jhansi for the British forces. When the British rushed the fort, Laxmibai, on the advice of her courtier, escaped through Bhanderi gate with her son and attendants to Kalpi. Upon hearing of Laxmibai's escape, Jhalkaribai set out for General Rose's camp in disguise and declared herself the queen. This act led to confusion that continued for a whole day and gave Rani Laxmibai's army renewed advantage.

The first biography of Jhalkaribai was written in 1964 by Bhawani Shankar Visharad, with the help of Varma's novel and his research from the oral narratives of Kori communities living in the vicinity of Jhansi. Many writers narrate the story of Jhalkaribai. Efforts have been made to place Jhalkaribai on an equal footing with Rani Laxmibai.

1. Putalimaya Devi Poddar: She was a renowned Gorkha woman within her community for fighting both against the imperial and social order. She was born on 14th January 1920 in Kurseong. In 1942 she was repeatedly sent warnings or called to the Police Station by British officials during this period. However, this did not deter her from organising and leading the freedom movement from Kurseong. It is neighbouring areas of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. In August 1942, she organised a massive Jan Sabha in Kurseong, where British Police officials arrested her.

Even after the Independence of India, Putalimaya Devi continued her activism as a Samaj Sevika. But, unfortunately, she breathed her last on 1st December 1984.

2. Mahabiri Devi Valmiki: She was martyred in the revolt of 1857 and can be taken. She was born in the caste of Valmiki Samaj in Muzaffarnagar. She, from the beginning, insisted on social reforms for the Valmiki society. She was sensitive to every form of exploitation. She formed a women's team with 22 members. She started social work. In 1857 trumpeter of the revolt, Mahabiri Devi, along with her 22-member team, also jumped into the fight for India's independence. This group killed many Englishmen. Mahabiri Devi fought till her last breath till all her members were killed. In the end, she was killed at the hands of the British.

3. Avantibai Lodhi: She was an Indian queen-ruler and freedom fighter. She was the queen of the Ramgarh (Dindori) in Madhya Pradesh. She was born in the Lodhi Rajput family on 16th August 1831 in Mankehadi village, Seoni Madhya Pradesh. When the revolt of 1857 broke out, Avantibai raised and led an army of 4000. Her first battle with the British took place in the village of Kheri near Mandla, where she and her army were able to defeat the British forces. However, stung by the defeat, the British returned with a vengeance and launched an attack on Ramgarh. Avantibai moved to the hills of Devharigarh for safety. However, the British army set fire to Ramgarh and turned to Devhargarh to attack the queen. In that condition, she resorted to guerilla warfare to fend off the British army. She took the sword from the guard's and pierced it into herself, thus committing suicide on 20th March 1858 when facing almost certain defeat in battle.

4. Asha Devi Gurjarani: She was the brave girl of the Kalshan clan of Muzaffarnagar. In her dominance and surrounding areas, she had put the British in a lot of difficulties and established in 1857. The strength of Asha Devi Gurjar, an organization, can be gauged from the fact that only after the

martyrdom of 250 women soldiers of the organization the British army could catch her alive on the battlefield. The barbaric English hanged Asha Devi on the gallows. Her eleven companion women soldiers also hanged with her.

In 1920 Indian Dalit women were active in anti-caste and anti-untouchability movements. These organizations helped pass resolutions against issues such as child marriage and dowries and enforced widowhood.

In 1942, 25,000 Dalit women attended the All India Depressed Classes Women Conference in Nagpur. The President of the conference, Sulochana bai Dongre, advocated for birth control. During the meeting, resolutions were passed that advocated for a women's right to divorce, denounced polygamy, improved labour conditions, enhanced women's involvement in politics and better education for lower-class women.

CONCLUSION:

In the 21st century, they have been used as an icon in Indian politics and come from an oppressed community. Dalit women freedom fighters have given a new message of bravery and courage in India, sleeping with her bravery. In the present time, for women's empowerment in scheduled society, there is a need to research them, so that research is done from their community which can take them out from the feeling of inferiority that has been coming for centuries. We should not forget the contribution of Dalit women to the Indian freedom struggle. It is a symbol of participation in the fight for the women's freedom movement and pride for the women of the scheduled caste community, which should be remembered.

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