



84. THE ROLE OF WOMEN OF HARYANA IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE OF INDIA

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The Role of Women of Haryana in the Freedom Struggle of India

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Women participation in India's freedom struggle began over a century ago before it became independent in 1947. When the history of India's fight for Independence comes to be written, the sacrifice made by the women of India will occupy the foremost place. Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru had remarked, "when most of the men-folk were in prison then a remarkable thing happened. Our women came forward and took charge of the struggle against British government. Their participation in protest meetings, and in the nationwide programmes of boycotting titles, honours, elections, legislatures, schools, colleges, courts and tribunals and foreign goods showed the great sense of patriotism. The purpose of this study is to assess the role of women especially of Haryana in the freedom struggle during the year 1901-1947.

In the issues of 'Young India', of July 26, 1918 and January 14, 1930 respectively Mahatma Gandhi discussed the importance of women in social revolution, reconstruction and in the nationalist struggle. He wanted the women to join the struggle for freedom at the appropriate time. In response to his call, women overwhelmingly participated in non-violent Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience Movement. They also lent their assistance to secretive societies which believed that only armed revolution could bring freedom to their country.

The participation of the women of Haryana in the nationalist movement can be divided into 5 phases from 1901-10, 1911-20, 1921-30, 1931-40, 1941-47. Only important events are taken into account which clearly shows women's participation.

During the years of 1900 to 1910 women were mainly involved in the reformatory works. Various educational institutions, widow ashrams and reformatory organisations were opened in Karnal, Bhivani, Rohtak, Hissar, Panipat, and Kurukshetra etc.. Even in the early two decades of 1900s local reformers and leaders were more inclined to reforms and were working against social customs like female infanticide, widowhood, purdah system, sati system, child marriage and others. Thus, female education was considered the best medium for women emancipation. Various organisations and associations were formed which led the women of Haryana to come out of their homes to contribute in the public sphere. 'Involvement of Women in the public life' made them aware about the other provinces of India; and events happening in these provinces. And most important, print media particularly vernacular press played a significant role. The appeals of local and national leaders through press and journals motivated women to participate in the Nationalist struggle. The Nationalist struggle in India against the British colonial rule brought about the political mobilisation of both men and women.

On Oct 16th 1905 Lord Curzon partitioned Bengal and leaders of Bengal announced that day as a day of national mourning. A general hartal was announced in Bengal and people fasted and went bare foot to take a bath in Ganga. There swaraj, swadeshi and National education became the slogans of the Nationalists. Meetings were arranged by women in streets. Bengali Swadeshi movement infused a feeling of patriotism among women of Haryana. Smt. Puran Devi of Hissar advocated the

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