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## The Role of Women in the Indian National Movement

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Indian national movement, spanning from the Revolt of 1857 to the attainment of independence in 1947, was not solely the achievement of male political leaders but a collective endeavour in which women played an indispensable and transformative role. This paper examines the participation of women across the major phases of the freedom struggle, including the Revolt of 1857, the Swadeshi Movement, the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement, and the Quit India Movement. It situates women's activism within the broader context of colonial India, where prevailing social structures such as purdah, child marriage, and restricted access to education limited female public participation. Despite these constraints, women emerged as revolutionaries, satyagrahis, organisers, underground operatives, and symbols of national resistance. The study profiles prominent women freedom fighters, including Rani Lakshmbai, Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Kasturba Gandhi, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Usha Mehta, while also acknowledging the countless unnamed women whose contributions remain underdocumented. Adopting a qualitative, historical, and descriptive methodology grounded in secondary sources, the paper analyses the challenges women confronted, the impact of their participation on the trajectory of the movement, and their continuing contribution to nation building after independence. The findings indicate that women's involvement not only strengthened the mass character of the nationalist struggle but also catalysed long-term advances in gender equality, female political representation, and social reform in independent India.

**Keywords:** Indian National Movement, Women Freedom Fighters, Colonial India, Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience, Quit India Movement, Gender and Nationalism

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The struggle for Indian independence stands among the most significant anti-colonial movements in modern world history. Conventional historiography has long privileged the contributions of male leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, often relegating the role of women to the margins of the nationalist narrative. Yet a closer examination of the freedom struggle reveals that women were active and indispensable participants at every stage. They marched in processions, courted arrest, picketed liquor and foreign-cloth shops, organised relief, ran underground networks, and



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in some cases took up arms. Their involvement was both a response to the call of nationalist leaders and an expression of their own aspirations for dignity, freedom, and equality.

This paper seeks to recover and foreground the contribution of women to the Indian national movement, examining the conditions under which they participated, the forms their activism took, the obstacles they faced, and the legacy they left for independent India. By doing so, it aims to present a more complete and balanced account of the freedom struggle, one that recognises the agency of women as historical actors in their own right.

The recovery of women's history within the nationalist narrative is not merely an exercise in restoring forgotten names; it compels a reconsideration of how the freedom struggle itself is understood. When women's participation is taken seriously, the movement appears less as a sequence of negotiations among elite male politicians and more as a vast social transformation that reached into the household, the village, and the everyday lives of ordinary people. Women's involvement also reveals the interconnection between the political struggle for independence and the social struggle for the emancipation of women, two processes that, while distinct, repeatedly intersected and reinforced one another. This paper proceeds from the conviction that an account of Indian nationalism that overlooks women is not only incomplete but fundamentally distorted.

## **Historical Background of the Indian National Movement**

The Indian national movement evolved over nearly a century, beginning with the Revolt of 1857, frequently described as the first war of Indian independence, and culminating in the transfer of power in August 1947. The establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885 provided an organised platform for articulating nationalist demands. The early phase, dominated by the Moderates, relied upon constitutional petitions and appeals to British liberalism. The partition of Bengal in 1905 triggered the Swadeshi and Boycott movements, marking a more assertive phase of mass mobilisation. The entry of Mahatma Gandhi into Indian politics after 1915 transformed the movement into a broad-based mass struggle anchored in the philosophy of satyagraha, or non-violent resistance. Successive campaigns, the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920 to 1922, the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 to 1934, and the Quit India Movement of 1942, progressively widened the social base of nationalism and drew in peasants, workers, students, and crucially, women.

## **Status of Women in Colonial India**

To appreciate the magnitude of women's participation in the freedom struggle, one must understand the constrained social position they occupied in colonial India. Nineteenth-century Indian society was largely patriarchal, with women subject to practices such as child marriage, enforced widowhood, the seclusion of purdah, and limited access to formal education. Social reformers including Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Jyotirao Phule had initiated movements against sati, for widow remarriage, and for female education, gradually creating space for women's emergence into public life. The spread of girls' schools,



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the founding of women's organisations, and the influence of reformist ideas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced a generation of educated and politically conscious women. It was against this backdrop of incremental reform and persistent restriction that women stepped into the nationalist arena, frequently challenging both colonial rule and the patriarchal norms of their own society.

## Need and Significance of the Study

Although a substantial body of scholarship documents the Indian national movement, the specific contribution of women has often been treated as a supplementary theme rather than a central concern. Many women who organised, sheltered fugitives, produced nationalist literature, and sustained the movement at the grassroots remain unnamed in mainstream histories. A focused study of women's participation is therefore necessary to correct this imbalance, to acknowledge the agency of women, and to understand how the freedom struggle simultaneously advanced the cause of women's emancipation. The significance of the study also lies in its relevance to contemporary debates on gender equality and women's political representation, for the seeds of these later developments were sown during the nationalist period.

## Objectives of the Study

The principal objectives of this study are: to examine the nature and extent of women's participation across the major phases of the Indian national movement; to assess the contributions of prominent women freedom fighters; to analyse the social, cultural, and political challenges women confronted during the struggle; to evaluate the impact of women's involvement on the course and character of the movement; and to trace the continuity between women's wartime activism and their role in nation building after independence.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Scholarship on women and the Indian national movement has expanded considerably since the late twentieth century, drawing on feminist historiography and subaltern studies. Kumar (1993) offered a foundational survey of women's movements in India, tracing the interweaving of nationalism and feminism and demonstrating how the struggle for independence opened new avenues for female political agency. Forbes (1996), in her influential study of women in modern India, argued that the nationalist movement both empowered women and contained their activism within socially acceptable boundaries, a tension that recurs across the literature.

Thapar-Bjorkert (2006) examined the everyday forms of resistance practised by women in the United Provinces, highlighting the contributions of ordinary women whose activism rarely entered official records. Basu (1976) analysed the relationship between Gandhi and Indian women, contending that Gandhian satyagraha provided a moral framework particularly suited to women's mass participation. Chakravarty (1980) and Sarkar (1983) situated women's involvement within the wider political economy of nationalism, while later scholars such as



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Sen (2002) explored the gendered dimensions of nationalist iconography, including the symbolic representation of the nation as mother.

A further strand of scholarship, represented by Jayawardena (1986), situates the Indian experience within the comparative framework of feminism and nationalism in the colonised world, demonstrating that the entanglement of women's emancipation with anti-colonial struggle was a recurrent pattern across Asia and Africa. Pearson (1981) and Kaur (1985) drew attention to the organisational dimensions of women's activism, examining the women's associations and volunteer corps that channelled participation. More recent work, including that of Sinha (2006), has analysed the cultural and symbolic construction of Indian womanhood within nationalist discourse, showing how competing images of the ideal woman were mobilised by reformers, nationalists, and the colonial state alike.

Collectively, this body of work establishes that women's participation was extensive, multifaceted, and consequential, yet frequently constrained by patriarchal expectations. The present study builds upon these insights, synthesising existing scholarship to present a comprehensive account of women's role across all major phases of the movement and its aftermath.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and historical research design. It seeks to interpret and analyse the participation of women in the Indian national movement rather than to quantify it, recognising that the historical record concerning women is often fragmentary and uneven. The descriptive-analytical approach permits the integration of narrative, biography, and thematic analysis within a coherent framework.

The study relies primarily on secondary sources, including scholarly monographs, journal articles, biographies, and authoritative historical surveys of the Indian freedom struggle. Where relevant, published autobiographies, memoirs, and speeches of women participants are used to illuminate first-hand experience. The reliance on secondary literature reflects both the nature of historical research and the practical constraints of accessing primary archival material.

#### Scope of the Study

The temporal scope of the study extends from the Revolt of 1857 to the attainment of independence in 1947, with a concluding examination of women's contribution to nation building in the immediate post-independence period. Geographically, the study encompasses the whole of British India, while acknowledging that regional variation in women's participation was considerable. The study focuses on participation in organised nationalist activity, both constitutional and revolutionary.



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## 4. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Women's involvement in the freedom struggle was neither uniform nor static; it evolved in response to changing political circumstances and the strategies of nationalist leadership. The following sections trace this participation across the principal phases of the movement.

### **Women in the Revolt of 1857**

The Revolt of 1857, though predominantly a military and feudal uprising, witnessed the remarkable participation of women who assumed leadership of armed resistance against the East India Company. The most celebrated among them was Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi, whose defiance of British annexation under the Doctrine of Lapse made her an enduring emblem of patriotic courage. Begum Hazrat Mahal of Awadh led the rebellion in Lucknow after the exile of her husband, organising the defence of the city and rallying support among the populace. Other women, such as Rani Avantibai of Ramgarh and Jhalkari Bai, a soldier in the Jhansi forces, also distinguished themselves. Although the revolt was ultimately suppressed, the participation of these women established a powerful precedent of female heroism that later nationalists invoked to inspire mass mobilisation.

It is important to recognise that these women belonged largely to the ruling and warrior classes, and their resistance was rooted in the defence of dynastic sovereignty rather than in a modern conception of the nation. Nevertheless, their conduct acquired a wider symbolic significance in the decades that followed. Nationalist writers, poets, and orators reinterpreted their struggles as early expressions of a patriotic spirit, transforming Rani Lakshmibai in particular into a national heroine whose name became synonymous with sacrifice and valour. The memory of 1857 thus functioned as a reservoir of inspiration, furnishing the later movement with potent images of female courage. In this way, the women of the revolt contributed not only through their immediate actions but also through the enduring legend that subsequent generations of nationalists, including the women of the Gandhian era, would draw upon to legitimise and energise their own participation.

### **Women in the Swadeshi Movement**

The partition of Bengal in 1905 provoked the Swadeshi and Boycott movements, which marked the entry of women into organised nationalist politics on a significant scale. Women participated by boycotting foreign goods, promoting indigenous products, and spinning and weaving domestic cloth. They observed days of mourning, tied rakhis as symbols of unity, and contributed ornaments and savings to the national cause. In Bengal, women such as Sarala Devi Chaudhurani actively promoted physical culture and nationalist consciousness among the youth. The Swadeshi phase demonstrated that women could be mobilised in support of nationalist economic strategy, and it laid the organisational groundwork for the far broader participation that the Gandhian era would bring.

The Swadeshi movement was significant for the manner in which it integrated nationalist activity with the domestic sphere, a domain in which women exercised considerable authority.



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The boycott of foreign cloth and the adoption of indigenous textiles transformed everyday acts of consumption and household management into expressions of political resistance, thereby enabling women to participate without necessarily transgressing the boundaries of respectability. At the same time, the period saw the founding of women's associations and the spread of patriotic literature and song, which nurtured a sense of collective identity. The symbolic representation of the nation as a mother figure, popularised through nationalist iconography and the imagery of Bharat Mata, lent the movement an emotional resonance that mobilised women's sentiments. While the participation of this phase remained limited largely to Bengal and to women of the educated middle classes, it constituted an essential rehearsal for the mass mobilisation of the subsequent decades.

## **Women in the Non-Cooperation Movement**

The Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920 to 1922 represented a watershed in women's nationalist participation, for it was during this campaign that Mahatma Gandhi issued an explicit appeal to women to join the struggle. Gandhi regarded women as especially suited to non-violent resistance, attributing to them qualities of patience, endurance, and moral strength. Women responded by surrendering foreign cloth, promoting khadi, picketing shops selling liquor and imported goods, and contributing funds. Kasturba Gandhi set a powerful example of personal sacrifice and steadfastness. The movement brought thousands of women out of the seclusion of the home and into the public arena of political action, normalising female participation in nationalist activity and challenging entrenched social conventions.

Gandhi's conception of satyagraha proved particularly conducive to women's involvement. By valorising self-suffering, moral courage, and disciplined non-violence over physical force, he reframed the qualities conventionally ascribed to women as political virtues, thereby opening a legitimate space for their public action. The promotion of the charkha, or spinning wheel, was central to this vision, for it linked the humble domestic labour of spinning to the grand project of national self-reliance and dignified the contribution that women could make from within their own homes. Across the country, women donated jewellery, organised volunteer corps, and addressed gatherings, gradually expanding the scope of what was deemed socially acceptable. Although the movement was suspended in 1922 following an outbreak of violence, the participation it generated had lasting consequences, embedding the expectation of women's involvement in the nationalist mainstream and preparing the ground for the still larger mobilisations to come.

## **Women in the Civil Disobedience Movement**

The Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 to 1934, inaugurated by Gandhi's Salt March to Dandi, witnessed an unprecedented surge in women's participation. Although Gandhi initially hesitated to include women in the salt satyagraha, the determination of figures such as Sarojini Naidu ensured their prominent involvement. Naidu led the raid on the Dharasana Salt Works after Gandhi's arrest, demonstrating extraordinary courage in the face of brutal police



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repression. Across the country, women manufactured and sold salt in defiance of the law, picketed shops, led processions, and courted arrest in large numbers. Provincial leaders such as Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay organised women's participation and themselves suffered imprisonment. The movement marked the maturation of women's activism, with women participating not merely as supporters but as leaders and strategists.

The scale of women's involvement in the Civil Disobedience Movement marked a decisive break from earlier phases. In cities such as Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras, women formed their own organisations, the Desh Sevika Sangh among them, to coordinate picketing and propaganda. The picketing of shops selling foreign cloth and intoxicating liquor became, in many places, a predominantly female activity, conducted with a discipline and persistence that frequently exasperated the colonial authorities. Thousands of women were imprisoned during these years, and their willingness to endure incarceration alongside men signalled a profound shift in the public standing of women. Significantly, participation now extended beyond the educated elite to include women of more modest means, broadening the social composition of the movement. The Civil Disobedience phase thus represented the high-water mark of organised female activism, demonstrating conclusively that women had become an indispensable force within the nationalist struggle.

## **Women in the Quit India Movement**

The Quit India Movement of 1942, launched amid the upheaval of the Second World War, called for the immediate end of British rule and unleashed a spontaneous and often militant uprising. With most senior male leaders imprisoned at the outset, women assumed crucial roles in sustaining the movement, frequently operating underground. Aruna Asaf Ali achieved iconic status by hoisting the national flag at the Gowalia Tank ground in Bombay and subsequently directing underground resistance while evading arrest. Usha Mehta operated a clandestine radio station, the Congress Radio, broadcasting nationalist messages and maintaining communication among scattered activists. Women acted as couriers, organisers, and shelter-providers, demonstrating that the movement could endure even under the most repressive conditions. The Quit India phase thus revealed the depth of women's commitment and their capacity for autonomous political leadership.

## **5. CONTRIBUTIONS OF PROMINENT WOMEN FREEDOM FIGHTERS**

While women's participation was a mass phenomenon, the leadership and example of certain individuals proved especially influential. The following profiles highlight a representative selection of prominent women freedom fighters.

### **Rani Lakshmibai**

Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi remains the most iconic woman of the early resistance to British rule. Refusing to surrender her kingdom under the Doctrine of Lapse, she led her forces in the Revolt of 1857 and died in battle in 1858. Her courage, military leadership, and ultimate



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sacrifice transformed her into a legendary symbol of patriotic valour, celebrated in poetry, folklore, and nationalist iconography for generations thereafter.

## **Sarojini Naidu**

Sarojini Naidu, often called the Nightingale of India for her poetic accomplishment, was among the foremost women leaders of the nationalist movement. A close associate of Gandhi, she became the first Indian woman to serve as President of the Indian National Congress in 1925. She played a leading role in the Civil Disobedience Movement, notably directing the Dharasana satyagraha, and represented Indian interests at the Round Table Conferences. After independence she became the first woman Governor of an Indian province, serving in the United Provinces. Her career exemplified the union of literary, oratorical, and political distinction.

## **Annie Besant**

Annie Besant, of Irish origin, devoted much of her life to India and became a central figure in early twentieth-century nationalism. Through the Theosophical Society and her advocacy of education, she contributed to the cultural revival of the period. In 1916 she launched the Home Rule League, demanding self-government for India, and in 1917 she became the first woman President of the Indian National Congress. Her energetic campaigning popularised the demand for home rule and brought new constituencies into the nationalist fold.

## **Kasturba Gandhi**

Kasturba Gandhi, wife of Mahatma Gandhi, was a freedom fighter in her own right whose quiet steadfastness inspired countless others. She participated in satyagraha campaigns in South Africa and India, endured repeated imprisonment, and embodied the ideals of simplicity and sacrifice. Her work among women and the poor, and her unwavering commitment during the Quit India Movement, during which she was imprisoned and ultimately died in detention in 1944, made her a revered figure in the national struggle.

## **Aruna Asaf Ali**

Aruna Asaf Ali earned the title of the Grand Old Lady of the Independence Movement for her fearless leadership during the Quit India Movement. By hoisting the national flag at Gowalia Tank in 1942 and subsequently leading the underground resistance, she became a symbol of defiance. Evading arrest for years, she sustained nationalist activity through clandestine organisation and publication. After independence she continued to engage in public life, championing social causes and women's welfare.

## **Usha Mehta and Other Women Leaders**

Usha Mehta is remembered for operating the underground Congress Radio during the Quit India Movement, broadcasting news and nationalist messages at great personal risk until her arrest in 1942. Her ingenuity demonstrated the importance of communication in sustaining resistance. Numerous other women, including Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, who pioneered women's organisation and later the revival of Indian handicrafts; Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, who



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became a distinguished diplomat; Matangini Hazra, an elderly peasant woman martyred while leading a procession in Bengal; and Captain Lakshmi Sahgal of the Indian National Army's Rani of Jhansi Regiment, made indelible contributions. Together they illustrate the breadth of backgrounds, from aristocrats and intellectuals to peasants and soldiers, from which women's nationalist leadership emerged.

## **6. CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN DURING THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE**

Women who entered the nationalist struggle confronted formidable obstacles that distinguished their experience from that of their male counterparts. Foremost among these were the patriarchal constraints of contemporary society, which confined many women to the domestic sphere and viewed public political activity as improper for them. The practices of purdah and early marriage, together with limited access to education, restricted the pool of women able to participate and required those who did to defy familial and social disapproval.

Women activists also faced the full weight of colonial repression, including arrest, imprisonment, and physical assault, frequently under harsh conditions. Those who operated underground, as during the Quit India Movement, endured constant danger and the strain of clandestine life. Within the nationalist movement itself, women sometimes encountered ambivalence, being welcomed as participants yet expected to remain within socially acceptable roles and seldom admitted to the highest echelons of decision-making. Balancing domestic responsibilities with political commitment imposed an additional and gendered burden. That so many women overcame these obstacles is testament to their courage, conviction, and resilience.

The challenges, moreover, were not evenly distributed across the female population. Women from educated, urban, and relatively privileged backgrounds found it easier to enter public life than their rural and working-class counterparts, whose participation, though substantial, was constrained by poverty, illiteracy, and the pressures of subsistence labour. The historical record itself reflects this inequality, preserving the names and deeds of prominent leaders while consigning the contributions of ordinary women to obscurity. For many participants, the decision to join the movement entailed real personal risk, including the possibility of social ostracism, the disruption of family life, and the loss of reputation in a society that policed female conduct closely. The capacity of women to navigate these intersecting pressures, asserting their political agency while contending with both colonial authority and patriarchal expectation, represents one of the most remarkable features of their participation in the freedom struggle.

## **7. IMPACT OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION ON THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT**

The participation of women had a profound and multifaceted impact on the Indian national movement. Most immediately, it vastly expanded the movement's social base, transforming it into a genuine mass struggle. The visible involvement of women lent moral authority and legitimacy to nationalist campaigns, both domestically and internationally, and complicated the



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colonial administration's task of suppression, for the imprisonment of women provoked public sympathy and outrage.

Women's participation also reinforced the non-violent character of the Gandhian movement, as their disciplined and dignified conduct during satyagraha campaigns embodied the ideals of peaceful resistance. Beyond its immediate political effects, women's activism initiated a profound transformation in social attitudes. By stepping into the public arena, women challenged entrenched notions of female seclusion and dependence, advancing the cause of gender equality. The experience of organisation, leadership, and sacrifice cultivated a generation of politically conscious women who would shape the contours of independent India. In this sense, the freedom struggle and the women's emancipation movement were mutually reinforcing currents of a single historical process.

The impact extended into the realm of political rights and representation. The visibility of women in the national movement strengthened the case for female enfranchisement and for the inclusion of women in legislative bodies, demands that gained ground during the constitutional negotiations of the 1930s. Women's organisations, emboldened by their members' nationalist credentials, pressed for legal reforms concerning marriage, inheritance, and education. The struggle also altered women's own self-perception, instilling confidence and a sense of entitlement to participate in public affairs. While it would be mistaken to claim that the movement dismantled patriarchy, it undeniably loosened its hold and created precedents and expectations upon which later generations would build. The long-term significance of women's participation therefore lay not only in what it contributed to the attainment of independence but in the enduring transformation it set in motion within Indian society.

## **8. WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO NATION BUILDING AFTER INDEPENDENCE**

The attainment of independence in 1947 did not bring an end to women's public engagement; rather, it inaugurated a new phase in which the political consciousness forged during the freedom struggle was channelled into the tasks of nation building. Women who had been activists assumed positions of responsibility in government, administration, education, social reform, and diplomacy. Sarojini Naidu became Governor of the United Provinces, while Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit served as a leading diplomat and became the first woman President of the United Nations General Assembly.

The constitutional framework of independent India, shaped in part by the participation of women in the Constituent Assembly, enshrined the principle of gender equality and granted women the right to vote on equal terms, a right achieved without the prolonged struggle witnessed in many Western democracies, owing in large measure to women's prominence in the nationalist movement. Women leaders championed legislation for social reform, the expansion of female education, and the welfare of marginalised communities. The legacy of women's wartime activism thus extended well beyond independence, providing both the



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personnel and the moral foundation for the advancement of women's rights and the broader project of national development.

Several women who had risen to prominence during the freedom struggle devoted themselves after 1947 to specific domains of national reconstruction. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, for instance, turned her energies to the revival of Indian handicrafts, handlooms, and theatre, helping to preserve cultural heritage and to provide livelihoods for artisans, many of them women. Others worked in the fields of refugee rehabilitation in the aftermath of partition, cooperative organisation, and rural development. The reservation of seats for women in local self-government, introduced in later decades, and the steady expansion of women's presence in education, the professions, and political life can be traced, in part, to the precedents and aspirations established during the nationalist era. The participation of women in the freedom struggle thus furnished independent India not only with a cohort of capable leaders but also with a normative commitment to the inclusion of women in public life, a commitment that continues to inform debates on gender justice in the present day.

## 9. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis undertaken in this study yields several key findings. First, women's participation in the Indian national movement was extensive, sustained, and consequential, spanning every major phase from the Revolt of 1857 to the Quit India Movement. Second, this participation was facilitated by the gradual social reforms of the nineteenth century and by the inclusive strategy of Gandhian nationalism, which explicitly invited women into the struggle. Third, women contributed in diverse capacities, as armed resisters, satyagrahis, organisers, underground operatives, and symbols of national resistance, and they came from a wide range of social backgrounds.

Fourth, women confronted distinctive challenges arising from patriarchal social structures and colonial repression, which they overcame at considerable personal cost. Fifth, their participation transformed the movement into a mass struggle, reinforced its non-violent ethos, and advanced the cause of gender equality. Sixth, the political consciousness cultivated during the struggle translated into significant contributions to nation building after independence. The discussion confirms the central argument of this paper: that women were not peripheral but integral actors in the freedom struggle, and that any complete account of Indian nationalism must accord them their rightful place.

## 10. CONCLUSION

The role of women in the Indian national movement was both substantial and transformative. From the heroic resistance of Rani Lakshmibai in 1857 to the underground daring of Aruna Asaf Ali and Usha Mehta in 1942, women participated in the freedom struggle with courage, dedication, and ingenuity. They marched, spun, picketed, organised, broadcast, and sacrificed, often in defiance of the patriarchal conventions of their own society as well as the repression



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of the colonial state. Their involvement broadened the social base of nationalism, lent it moral legitimacy, and reinforced its commitment to non-violence.

Equally important, the freedom struggle served as a crucible for women's emancipation, cultivating a generation of politically conscious women who would shape independent India and advance the cause of gender equality. To recover the history of women's participation is therefore not merely to add names to the nationalist narrative but to recognise the freedom struggle as a shared achievement in which women were full and equal participants. Their legacy endures in the democratic institutions, the constitutional commitments, and the ongoing pursuit of gender justice in contemporary India. A fuller acknowledgement of their contribution remains both a scholarly responsibility and a tribute to their enduring courage.

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