

Contribution of Assamese Women in the Freedom Movement of India: An Analysis

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Abstract:

In the Freedom Movement of India, the Assamese Women played an important role by participating actively or passively against the British colonial rule from the year 1920 to 1947. Like other women of various part of the country, the Assamese women were also taking part in various phase of the freedom movement of India against the British. They actively participated in the non-co-operation movement which started from 1920, in the Civil Disobedient movement 1930 and Quit India movement 1942. They actively involved with organized form against the imperialistic British rule. In this paper, an attempt has been made about the role played by Assamese women and how they helped to the men in freedom movement of India.

Keywords: Assamese Women, British, Civil Disobedient, Freedom Movement, Non-Co-Operation, Quit India

1. Introduction:

No any women organization was in India before 1904. After the establishment of Bharat Mahila Parishad in 1904 and Bharat Stri Mahamandal in 1910, the active participation of Indian women in politics gradually increased. The establishment of Women's Indian Association in 1917, Indian women come into organized form. At early stage, no women organization was in Assam, so the elite and conscious Assamese women took part in Asom Association, Riot Sabha, Asom Chatra Sanmilan, Asom Sahitya Sabha. The active politics of women started in India as well as Assam after Mahatma Gandhi stepped down to the political background of India. After joining in India national Congress, Mahatma Gandhi started Non-Co-operation Movement in 1920 against the colonial British in which Indian women actively participated in this movement. In 1921, he came to Assam and appealed to Assamese to take part in non-co-operation agenda against the British. In June 1921, Asom Pradesh Congress was formed and the leaders of Asom Pradesh Congress decided to follow the agendas of India National Congress. The Assamese women also decided to fight against the British for freedom of India. They went to villages and propagated the slogan of non-co-operation movement against the British. In civil Disobedient movement 1930 and Quit India movement 1942, the Assamese women actively involved with organized form against the imperialistic British.

2. Objectives:

The main objectives of this study have been spelt out as follows-

- To discuss the origin of women organizations.
- To explain the effective contribution of Assamese women in the freedom movement.
- To find out the different obstacle phased by Assamese women in different phases of the freedom movement.

3. Methodology:

The entire study is prepared for an investigation through historical methods which are depended on only Secondary Data from reliable books, journals, website etc.

Analysis:

During India's freedom movement, the Assamese women didn't lag behind the other women of India. Emboldened by the call of Mahatma Gandhi, they came out from four walls of their domestic life and took active part in India's freedom struggle. Most of them participated in the non-co-operation movement through the programmes of spinning, weaving and boycotting of foreign goods and their constructive work did much to earn a good name for them. Their organization as well as propagation served as sources of inspiration to the other women of urban and rural area of Assam to aware them about the movement. The prominent women leaders of India's freedom movement of Assam were- Bidyut Prova Devi, Girija Devi, Nalini Bala Devi, Snehalata Bhattacharya, Dharma Devi, Chandraprova Saikiani, Sarala Das, Kiranbala Barkakati, Kiranmoyi Agarwala, Bhadreswari Devi, Lilawati Kakati, Sashiprova Chaliha, Kanaklata Borua, Hemoprova Das, Ratna Bezborua, Guneswari Devi, Bhanumoti Talukdar etc. who actively participated in all phases of India's freedom movement from the Non-Co-operation Movement of 1921.

The Assamese women were the true follower of Gandhiji. They had great faith in the principles of Non-violence. They were led by his principle and joined in India's freedom struggle against the British colonial rule. Like the women of other part of India, the Assamese women loved to free from the British rule and they were ever ready to sacrifice their lives in the non-co-operation movement of India in 1921. Mungru alias Malatimem, a woman of tea garden labour community of Lalmati tea garden of Darrang district was the first woman martyr of Assam who sacrificed her life in non-co-operation movement of 1921. In this connection, it may also be mention about a tribal woman of undivided Assam named Rani Gaidilie of 19 years old did her best to raise the banner of independence and called her people to rally around it.

During the Civil disobedient movement of 1930-1934, the women of Assam became active and participated in the difference programmes of Indian National Congress. In some places of Assam, 'Nari Bahini' (women squad) was formed for carry out the picketing against the British rule. During this period, the Assamese women considered Anti-Opium campaigning as the most important activity against the British. Regarding the Non-violence principle of M K Gandhi, almost all the sections of Assamese women did their best to success their goal.

In the Satyagraha phase of freedom movement of 1940-1941 in India, the Assamese women not only joined in individual Satyagraha but also in the collective Satyagraha. In this regard, it may remember that Swarnalata Borua and Haripriya Dutta of Golaghat were the first women who undergo rigorous

imprisonment for their participation in individual Satyagraha. The women of different places of Assam followed the model of Swarnalata and Haripriya to success the goal.

Mahatma Gandhi started the Quit India Movement in 1942 because the Cripps Mission failed to fulfill the demands of Indians. Gandhiji called the Cripps proposal as “a post-dated cheque in a fast-failing bank.” On 8th August, 1942, in Bombay session of Indian National Congress, under the leadership of M K Gandhi took the Resolution of Quit India by the British and raised the slogan “**Do or die.**” During the Quit India Movement, like women of other part of the county, a galaxy of Assamese women came to the forefront and earned undying fame through martyrdom. They had taken part in each and every programme of the movement like the men.

They had taken part in meetings, processions, organizational and propagating works, distributing leaflets of Congress among the people. They also played a role as peon of Congress Party for delivering secret letters and acted as spies of the Congress. They gave shelter the underground Congress leaders and workers. Amalprova Das, Puspalata Das, Chandraprova Saikiani, Guneswari Devi and many others were at the back of the movement. Puspalata Das took charge of the movement of women in Darrang district. Under her leadership, the Women Voluntary Group was formed in May 1942. She was a true follower of Gandhiji’s philosophy and requested the people to follow the principle of non-violence to make the movement a successful one. She requested the government employees to give up their job and join in the movement.

Darrang district of Assam earned a great name and fame in Quit India movement of India’s freedom struggle. On 20th September, 1942, Kanaklata Boruah was shot to death while she going to hoist the flag at Gohpur Thana. On the same day, Aai Kumali Devi, Khuali Nath, Tileswari Boruah and many others succumbed to death in police firing in front of Dhekiajuli Thana. Padumi, Golapi, Thuniki and Kan Chutiani died in lathi charge of police. Jeuti, Dalimi, Dariki, Madai and Bhogai including many daughters and daughters-in-law became cripple and disable. At Bihali, under the leadership of Tileswari Mahanta, a group of women (Menchi, Kalidai, Hemprova and many other) hoisted the flag at police station by breaking all the barriers of the police. Under the leadership of Swarnalata Mahanta, many women gathered at Satia against the British colonial rule and they formed a women death squad which known as Mahila Mrityu Bahani. Many women took part in the procession against the British. Many women like Barumuit Koch, Padmavati Borah, Golapi Bhuyan, Kamakmaya Baruah copied the secret deeds and letters of Indian National Congress and distributed among the general people to propagate the ideology of freedom.

The women of Nagaon district took active part in all the phases of India’s freedom struggle such as Non-Co-operation Movement, Civil Disobedient Movement and Quite India Movement. Many women suffered much in police firing at Barahampur, Bebezia, Jongbalahu and Barpujia. As a result, some were killed while others were wounded. Among the martyrs, the name of Bhogeswari Phukan shines like a bright star in the history of Quite India Movement. The women of Bebezia also showed their bravery by challenging the British militaries that entered the villages in order to arrest the male strikers on account of breaking the bridge. Under the leadership of Guneswari Devi of Kaliabor in Nagaon district, the men and women of the eastern part of Nagaon district took active part in the movement in a well-organized way. She was arrested and imprisoned by the British military for her anti-British activities.

The women of Bajali and Pattacherkuchi occupied an important place in freedom movement of India against the British colonial rule. On 7th October 1942, under the leadership of Sundari Bala Das, Ambika and Buneswari Patgiri and many others came out to join in procession and attacked the police station Pattacherkuchi. The procession was so large that the police couldn’t venture to oppose it. The women of

Pattacherkuchi took out a protest march on 12th October and the women of Barpeta also took out a similar procession on 25th January, 1943 by disregarding the government orders. Chandraprova Saikiani was the forerunner of the organizational works against the British in Barpeta. She was arrested first and imprisoned at Barpeta jail and later she was shifted to Guwahati jail. Most of the women who joined in freedom struggle came out from villages and their courage, patience, sacrifices and works were really unique.

Most of the women of Assam gave shelter to underground leaders and workers of Congress in their home. They helped and save them (Congress workers) from the notice of British army and spy. They were also collecting fund to help to the leader of the movement along with the supply of essential goods. In violent activities, some Assamese women also involved against the British. Some women were trained up to make them expert so that when needed they would able to burn government offices, police station (thana), breaking bridges and sinking boats of colonial government. Padmavati Rajkumari of Darrang was the main advisor of the women extremist.

4. Conclusion:

The women of Assam played important role and contributed much to the freedom movements of India by following both violent and non-violent ways. They did much to show their love for the country to save our motherland from the hands of colonial British role. Their help and co-operation from the beginning of the freedom struggle led them to be busy with works of the congress as workers. For better and greater interest of the motherland, some Assamese women sacrificed their lives for freedom. They fought equally with men for the independence of India which was declared on 15th August, 1947.

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