

A Question Concerning Women: Their Role In And Influence On The Indian National Movement

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Abstract:

A resurgence of British domination in this particular Indian culture brought to the introduction of the "women's question," which significantly influenced the debates that the colonial authorities engaged in. Indian reformers freed Bharatmata from colonial sexual abusers by drawing parallels to goddesses, who were seen as symbols of feminine strength and empowerment. Here, things were different from during British control, when the terrible plight of Indian women justified the Civilizing Mission. The colonized people were seen to have an "effeminate" nature, in contrast to "colonial masculinity," which was viewed as an excuse for the colonized people's lack of autonomy. On the other hand, the patriarchal perspective was used to examine women's responsibilities inside the household. Gender and colonialism studies bring together two distinct areas of research, illuminating competing concerns that lead to the ultimate convergence of these two parallel lines of academic inquiry. Gender and colonialism in India, however, have a complex and multi-layered history. Various aspects merged, and competing forces were present throughout the voyage.

This research aims to examine the issue of women's involvement and effect in the Indian National Movement from a historical viewpoint. Despite the constitutional protection of citizenship rights in India, a significant number of women in the country hold the belief that equal societies are non-existent. Regrettably, the law has been ineffective in modifying societal attitudes and views against women. As a result, the women's movement persists in advocating for

fresh concepts, altered perspectives, and the creation of a new society based on equality. The movement should persist until the dilemma is eradicated!

Keywords: Gender Issue, Women , National Movement, Culture, Society.

1. Introduction:

The portrayal of women in Indian civilization was one of internal strife, as the culture wavered between patriarchy and matriarchy. At the heart of Hinduism & the Hinduized way of life were female goddesses in all their manifestations—Sita, Parvati, Durga, and Lakshmi—who were seen as the ultimate providers of power, riches, and knowledge. Sati, on the other hand, was a barbaric practice that negated the existence of women on their own, tying them to the inherent presence of their husbands even after death.^[1] But there were always common threads among the goddesses and the stories they told about their great power, such as reverence for one's spouse, selflessness in the face of adversity, and accountability to one's place in the society. Thus, women's rights were an ever-present topic in this patriarchal society. However, the lady herself never gave the answers to these inquiries; instead, they came from other sources.

The "women's question" was a powerful tool in the colonial administrations' rhetoric during the revival of British rule in this Indian culture. Indian reformers freed Bharatmata from colonial rapists by drawing parallels between female goddesses. British control, on the other hand, used the plight of Indian women as an excuse to perpetuate their position as the Civilizing Mission, which was based on their uncivilized and miserable treatment. As an alternative to "colonial masculinity," which was seen as an excuse for the colonized people's diminished autonomy, the colonized people were said to possess a more "effeminate" character. However, women's roles within the household were examined via the patriarchal lens. Thus, gender and colonialism studies serve as a meeting point for two separate fields of research, bringing to light a number of competing issues before finally merging into a single body of scholarship.^[2] in The intersection of gender and

colonialism in India, however, was nuanced and intricate. The journey was fraught with tension and intersections.

Most historical narratives on nationalism have been written by male authors. The breadth and depth of women's history have been widened by the exploration of new sources like interviews, biographical writings, correspondences, and women's histories. These have been supplemented by the revision of more traditional historical documents like organizational and private files, official reports, and correspondents.^[3] Within a movement, there is a story waiting to be told. Along with participating in the National Struggle for Independence, Indian women battled the patriarchal system of the time to assert their proper social position. It was a unique juggling act where they had to sometimes compromise and take solace in the partial fruits of their long and hard fight, and other times they had to give up completely.^[4] There has been and will be an endless struggle for women's rights in every sphere of society, from the home to the political arena. Participation of women in the Indian independence movement bolstered the groundwork for the Indian women's movement. Not only did women's participation in the independence movement heighten the national struggle for freedom, but it also provided a platform for them to highlight the patriarchal society's limitations and contestations. Over the course of the liberation struggle, women's roles shifted from spectator to participation and activist.^[5]

The core principles of the modern women's movement were laid forth by male reformers in the 1800s. Colonial social reform was an intellectual and political movement in the nineteenth century that sought to improve gender relations and eradicate social inequities. The government created social laws in response to a resurgence of humanitarianism in the wake of a new religious movement that solidified and rekindled earlier humanitarian impulses.^[6] "A new colonial education, which was disseminated through the state and Christian Missionaries, altered and modernized traditional social perceptions," according to the administration.^[7] For instance, there are a number of acts that outlawed certain practices, such as "abolition of sati (1829), widow remarriage (1856), child marriage (1872), and devdasi (1925)." Though there were progressive laws addressing the problem, women still hadn't managed to fix it on their own. Something else that

has to be considered is the fact that the critique of Indian culture often revolved around women and their role in the home.

Women were the beneficiaries of social transformation at the beginning of the nineteenth century, thanks to the efforts of liberal reformers and revivalists. The Brahmo Samaj and the Prathana Samaj, in particular, were notable for their contributions to the education of women and for providing them with their first experiences in public service.^[8] The concept of educating women became a topic of discussion in a variety of cultures; nevertheless, it was not as a means of granting rights but rather as a means of serving the larger male-dominated group. "It wasn't until the end of the nineteenth century that women began to take it upon themselves to play the role of emancipators and fight with their fists for personal reforms and political rights."

2. Women's Participation in the National Movement:

The role of Indian women in the fight for independence evolved as "the Gandhian Congress mass movements" embraced popular politics. The Home Rule Movement and "the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905–2011)" were two movements that saw very little participation from women before Gandhi.^[9] Additionally, they participated in meetings of the Indian National Congress. However, Gandhi was the first person to give women a specific role in the battle for liberation, which led to the participation of a significant number of women in the movement. Within the context of the battle for liberation, it is necessary to examine the nationalist statements of women from the following perspectives:

1. That women participated in nationalist politics despite the limits of social norms such as the purdah regime, backwardness, and poor female literacy.
2. women engaged in INM via two different procedures that occurred simultaneously.
 - a) "The domestication of the public domain, in which women engaged in the streets without surrendering their commitment to their household ideals.
 - b) The politicization of the home domain - women addressed crises in their families when nationalism infiltrated houses via the activity of their husbands and sons." The domestic sphere was politicized.

3. women were able to assist their engagement by using the symbolic repertory of the Indian National Movement (INM) and the political language of Gandhi.^[10]

Gandhi's mobilization of a significant number of women during the Non-Cooperation Movement (NCM) in 1920 "marked the beginning of women's engagement in public domain activities."^[11] "Nevertheless, the involvement of women was far from being active, and they were only able to contribute from the perspective of the home realm. Nevertheless, the degree and severity of this control or segregation inside the home sphere differed from family to household, community to community, class to class, and region to region." This was the case regardless of whether the household was rural or urban. Despite the fact that the home realm and its constraints made it difficult for women to engage in public spaces, the identical segregation that caused them to be excluded from public spaces helped to organize their activities inside the domestic milieu. A woman became the emotional support system in "the absence of the male, who would be imprisoned for his participation in activities associated with the nationalist movement." Women arranged themselves to perform the roles of both information providers and receivers at the national level.

In addition to reading the newspaper, they also read works of literature, like as those written by Premchand (1880-1936). The writings of Mahadevi Verma and Subhadra Kumari Chauhan provided a wealth of knowledge to a number of women, particularly those from the northern region of India.^[12] The chats that their male relatives were having inside the family were also listened to by them. Every once in a while, the ladies would get together at the houses of one another without fail. In a mohalla, the ladies would invite other women to their houses to sing patriotic songs and discuss political happenings. They would also invite other women to their homes.

"Mard bano ,mard bano

sab Hindustani mard bano

Avtaar Mahatma Gandhi huye

Azaad Hindustan Karane Ko"-

An excerpt from poetry performed by Kala Tripathi, a lady from H Nisar, Haryana, who remained confined to the realm of domesticity throughout the 1930s.^[13]

Consequently, Gandhi stirred up the concept of a communal sisterhood. Words and phrases such as "sisters of mercy" and "mothers of entire humanity" exemplify the role that women play in society.

There were five different ways in which women passively engaged in nationalist activities:^[14]

1. Constructive programmers, such as spinning khadi.
2. The sacrifice of the family
3. Being spouses and moms who are supportive of civil rights advocates
4. Being the pillars of support and strength in situations.
5. Engaging in unethical or covert acts

Women were actively engaged in Gandhi's National Congress Movement (NCM) in an effort to establish a connection between their struggle and the fight for national freedom.^[15]

On the other hand, the programs designed for women were designed in such a manner that they could continue to participate while remaining at home. He instilled in women a feeling of meaning and purpose within the realm of domestic work. As a result, the core of the liberation movement was comprised of women who maintained their conventional roles.

Nevertheless, as the fight for independence progressed, even the question and awareness of women were entangled in the whirlwind of political feelings. Despite this, it continued to be included within the contestation and subjection of patriarchal systems. "Both the domestication of the public arena and the politicization of the home sphere are interrelated processes. As a result of these processes, the constraining social practices of purdah and the standards of segregation and respectability were often reimaged and rediscovered in order to facilitate behaviours." In situations when women were unable to address or alter their conditions via official channels, they opposed those confining areas by engaging in activities that were of their choosing. Their political understanding of their capabilities as mothers, sisters, and daughters was created via the process of harmonizing those contestations for the advantage of the nationalist cause. However, this was

accomplished within the confines of patriarchy, which was a restrictive and limiting structure.

During the Civil Disobedience Movement, women's public actions were more prominent than they had been before. Despite the fact that Gandhi envisioned women playing a supporting role, women began to get impatient and sought a more active role. Despite the fact that Gandhi acknowledged the impatience as a "healthy sign," he declined to expand their involvement because he considered that women might play a more significant role in picketing liquor and foreign fabric businesses. Considering the innate propensity of women to refrain from violence, he decided to assign these responsibilities to women. He claimed that the picketing movement was to be "initiated and controlled exclusively by women." He consistently said this. It is acceptable for ladies to accept and receive as much aid from men as they need, but males must remain in a position of complete subjugation to women.^[16] Through the leadership of 37 women volunteers from Sabarmati ashram, Kasturba Gandhi was the one who encouraged the involvement of women in the salt satyagraha. Dharsana Salt Works was the target of an attack that Manilal Gandhi and Sarojini Naidu led. On the way to the Wadala Salt factory, Kamla Devi led a procession of fifteen thousand people. Processions, picketing of foreign businesses and liquor shops, and other forms of protest were thus actively engaged in by women. Bombay was the most militant location for women, while Madras was the least militant. Women were organized in Bombay. "As opposed to the Swadeshi Movement, in which women stood shoulder to shoulder with men armed with firearms and firing pistols at judges and governors," some women in Bengal also engaged in violent revolutionary movements. This was in contrast to the Swadeshi Movement, in which women performed a role comparable to that of domestic assistance.^[17]

One of the most notable aspects of the Quit India Movement was the participation of women in action. The fact that the most influential members of Congress were incarcerated made it necessary for the women who held leadership positions to assume the burden of guiding and advancing the national movement. Sucheta Kriplani was responsible for coordinating "the non-violent Satyagraha, although women also engaged in revolutionary operations that took place underground."^[18]

These initiatives were led by Aruna Asaf Ali, who provided administrative support. The movement also saw a significant amount of engagement from women living in rural areas, as well as women who had previously joined the communist movement. In the year 1942, the Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti, also known as “women's self-defence, was established in Bengal by women” who were communists and who organized the rural women.

To provide “one example, the Tebhaga Movement of 1946 saw the establishment of women and the Nari Bahini Brigade in order to fight against the policies of the colonial government.”^[19] In 1943, Subash Chandra Bose included a women's unit in his Indian National Army (INA), which he referred to as the Rani of Jhansi unit. “His belief in the strength of mothers and sisters was unwavering. Consequently, a new role is assigned to the passive functions of the mythical Sita,” and the Rani of Jhansi is given the role of a heroic and courageous character.

When it came to the home realm, women in Muslim communities engaged in a more intensive conflict. The term “purdah” was the very definition of their civilization, and any statement that was in opposition to it was seen as blasphemy. “The history does, however, chronicle the stubborn attempts of Muslim women leaders such as Bi Amman, who was the mother of Shaukat and Muhammed Ali and who participated in the Khilafat Non-Cooperation Movement during a gathering in Punjab.”^[20] Within the context of a gathering in Punjab, she removed her veil and said that it is not necessary to wear “a veil in front of her children, therefore giving form to the concept of quaam.” When it came to Muslims, the personal regulations seemed to be less troublesome than the social changes that Hindus implemented. They did not include any restrictions on widow remarriage and did not include any demands for the burning of widows. It was the Faraiji reformers of the middle of the nineteenth century who believed that Hindus were responsible for the predominance of such practices among Muslims. As a result, they urged Muslims to make widow remarriage more common. Along the same lines, Muslim women were encouraged to eliminate the feminine rituals and practices that Hindus and Muslims shared. This occurred concurrently with the expansion of education.

On the other hand, the Muslim women activists quickly outpaced the initial purpose, and they began to criticize the practice of complete and total female isolation. In addition, they began to seek inheritance rights by the year 1930, and by the year 1939, Muslim women were granted the ability to commence divorce proceedings. The expansion of “communalism often worked in favour of women,” resulting in the creation of a competitive mobilization that led to the emergence of women as a prominent constituency. The Muslim League established a women's sub-committee in 1938 with the purpose of involving Muslim women. As a result of the formation of the "Pakistan Movement," an increasing number of Muslim women were involved in political activity. Through their involvement in these public places, they experienced a moment of liberation and emancipation in and of themselves.

3. Women's Organizations and Groups

There were several women's organizations that emerged in “the early part of the twentieth century. These organizations were not only active in the public arena, but they also concentrated on the political and legal rights of women.”

1. “The Rashtriya Stree Sangha, also known as the Das Devika Sangha, was first established as an offshoot of the Congress.”
2. In the year 1910, Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, who was known as "Bharat Stree Mahanandala," endeavoured to promote education.
3. “The Women's Indian Association was established in Madras in 1917” by a group of intelligent young women from both Europe and India. Margaret Cousins and Annie Besant finish the list.
4. In 1925, the International Council of Women established a section in India that would later become known as “the National Council of Women in India. A member of this society, Lady Mehribai Tata was an active participant.”
5. In the year 1927, “the All India Women's Conference was established. This conference advocated for a variety of women's rights, including the ability to vote,” the reform of marriage, and the rights of women who worked in the labour force.

6. In the year 1920, the Bangiya Nari Samaj was “fighting for the right of women to vote in the state of Bengal.” the All Bengal Women's Union advocated for legislation that would prohibit the trafficking of women.

The group that represents women requested help from both the government and the nationality. Nevertheless, the backing of the government “was often a compromise. The nationalists, on the other hand,” exhibited a greater degree of empathy towards the women's issue, beginning in the year 1920, solely due to the fact that they required their involvement in the process of nation-building. These "pieces of universalization" were preferred by women as well since they allowed nationalism to take precedence over women's concerns. According to “the Government of India Act of 1935, the battle for women's suffrage was granted. This act increased the ratio of female voters to one to five, and it also provided women with reserved seats in legislative bodies. Likewise, several social legislations and ordinances attempted to promote gender equity in their respective fields. One example is the Sarda Act of 1929, which established the minimum age of marriage for females at fourteen years old and for males at eighteen years old.” Additionally, this act enacted rules that defined women's rights to property, inheritance, divorce, and the restriction of dowry, as well as the control of status.^[21]

4. Regarding Women and the Partition

When the Indian National Movement reached its zenith, women from all walks of life, regardless of their social class, caste, or religious affiliation, began to take part in the democratic and anti-imperialist movement. There has always been a hierarchy of priorities, with national freedom, community dignity, and economic struggle taking precedence over the emancipation of women. This was true irrespective of the faith of the women involved (Hinduism or Islam). According to Sumit Sarkar, the most idealized representation of a society free from the corruption of modernity and Western education may be seen among rural women and peasants.^[22] Somehow, this idealized depiction of the feminine form has been associated with nation-states. Women have long been seen as the embodiment and repository of a community's collective or communal identity for reasons like these. Women experience

two forms of control over their labor, fertility, sexuality, and movement as a result of the relationship between communal honor and control. The first kind of control is an internal kind that is practiced by the group itself. This is because the loss of power over women is seen as a threat to their manhood, family, and community. In the second place, women are more likely to be victims of violence committed by members of other communities. Because they are seen to be the keepers of their community's honour, "the use of rape, domination, and other types of violence against them is considered to be a more effective method of humiliating and subjugating that group." Because of this, women are more likely to be victims of violence during community disturbances. An analogous narrative was exposed during the partition of India in 1947 when women from both sides of the conflict were victims of sexual assault and domination in an effort to exact revenge for the harm and damage that had been inflicted upon the group in question. "The involvement of women in communal violence is evidence that women are not necessarily a collective but are deeply rooted in their individual caste and community identities. This is shown by the fact that women have been involved in communal violence."^[23]

The divider made it far more obvious than it already was. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin noted that these women were caught in a "continuum of violence" where they were either subjected to sexual assault, mutilation, and humiliation at the hands of men from the opposing community or were encouraged to take their own lives by members of their own family and kin in order to protect their community's honour from the enemy.^[24] "This is supported by empirical evidence, which shows that within a short period, between seventy-five and one hundred thousand women were kidnapped or sexually assaulted."^[25]

5. Conclusion

Modern ideas about women's rights in India's public sphere have their roots in the public-private division, which has served to both legitimize and amplify Indian women's subjection and private disempowerment. The official histories of the colonial powers state this. Colonial reforms were progressive, but they did nothing to challenge entrenched patriarchal power dynamics. It was, in a nutshell, a new standard for male

supremacy in the field. Even after the country gained its independence, the reality is still rather severe. The majority of women in India believe that equitable societies do not exist, despite the fact that the Indian constitution states that citizenship rights are protected. Unfortunately, legislation has not been successful in altering the attitudes and beliefs that society has toward women. Consequently, the women's movement continues to battle for new ideas, "new perceptions, and a new society" that is founded on egalitarianism to be established. The movement will and ought to continue until the conundrum is removed from existence!

The land that is responsible for providing food and clothing is often referred to as the "motherland." In contrast, the cow that is responsible for producing milk, ghee, and other dairy products is referred to as the mother cow (gau mata). As opposed to being referred to as "father land" in the Western world, the nation is known as "motherland" in India.

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