Chapter-VII

Conclusion

The national movement of India has a rich legacy of both eminent nationalist men and women who did a lot through different streams in the country’s long lasting and decisive struggle fought against the British colonial rule. Being equal lovers of freedom and liberty with those of men, women initially played a supportive-passive role in the movement as mothers, sisters and wives. However, soon after the beginning of the struggle, women also started plunging into it as activists after breaking all the barriers and boundaries of traditions and patriarchy bound classical family system.

Undoubtedly, the First War of Independence fought in 1857 went futile, however, some Indian women like Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Rani of Ramgarh, Tace Bai of Jalour, Rani Digambar Kaur etc. evidently proved their worth of martiality in this struggle.

Various socio-religious reform movements like Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Prarthna Samaj, Ram Krishan Mission etc. and establishment of various educational institutions literature, press, means of communication and transportation started creating political awakening in India in 19th century. Consequently, a young generation of educated middle class including women began to emerge in the last decades of nineteenth century. The new education made them embolden and started participating in several
streams of India's national movement. The era of formation of several organisations started. *Sakhi Samiti* by Swarna Kumari in Calcutta and *Sarda Sadan* by Pandit Ramabai Saraswati at Poona, *Sewa Sadan* by Rama Bai Ranade at Poona etc. were founded in different parts of India. Apart from socio-religious development some women such as Annie Besant, Margret Cousin. Sarojini Naidu, Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya etc. also formed women organisations like *Women's Indian Association* in 1917, *National Council of Women in India* in 1925 and *All India Women's Conference* in 1927 which became a potent platforms for their multiple activities during India's national movement.

Bengal partition initiated the participation of women in political activities with new offshoots of *Swaraj*, *Swadeshi*, Boycott programmes and propagation of National Education. The women's demand for suffrage at the first instance to be included in the Govt. of India Act in 1919. 3% of Indian adults had duly voting rights in provincial assemblies but later on their number swelled in the first two decades. Some Indian women such as Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Anusuyabhen, Manibhen Patel and Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur etc. emerged in the stream of the Congress. Their energies were channelised at first instance in their roll in the constructive programmes of non-cooperation movement like spinning of *Charkha*, *Khadi*, picketing and boycotting of foreign clothes, etc. Different movements started by the Indian National Congress under Gandhi such as Non-Cooperation movement, Civil Disobedience movement, Individual Satyagraha, Quit India movement brought a large number of women in nationalist stream politics.
During the Non-Cooperation movement, a handful of women participated but their number increased in Civil Disobedience movement. The women marked their presence with the defiance of Gandhiji's decision of their exclusion from active politics under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu who led the raid at Dharsana Salt Depot twice on 15 May 1930 and 21 May 1930 along with 2500 volunteers. Similarly, Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya led a raid at Bombay along with 50,000 volunteers followed by a good number of Gujarati women.

Apart from Salt Satyagraha, boycott and picketing programmes of foreign cloth, liquor shops and popularization of khaddar and Charkha were popularised by the volunteers of Des Sevika Sangh, Banar Sena and Rashtriya Stri Sabha. The other prominent women who joined Gandhian movements were Jaishri Rayi, Hansa Mehta, Perin Captain, Sofia Somjee, Lilavati Munshi, Maniben Patel and Khurshed Behn, etc.

In Madras presidency, both the Salt Satyagraha and the Constructive Programme were carried out mainly by Hindustan Sewa Dal along with Banar Sena under the leadership of Smt. Rukmani Lakshmipati and Smt. Durgabai Desmukh. Other organizations. In Calcutta Presidency, several women organizations including Nari Satagraha Committee, Rashtriya Mahila Sangh, Nikhil Jatiya Nari Sangh were formed by the women for picketing and broking the salt laws. Picketing and boycott programmes also went side by side. In Orissa, the salt
breaking activities were accelerated by Gandhian women like Rama Devi, Malati Devi, Gauri Devi, Sarla Devi, etc. in villages and towns. Such centres were Inchudi at Balasore district, Kujang in Cuttack and Tundra, Koligam, Rasulpur etc. where salt laws were broken with dauntlessness by Congress workers.

The boycott of Chowkidari tax was also included in the programmes of boycott movement of foreign clothes liquor shops and other foreign goods. Spinning Charkha and popularization of Khaddar were also taken at hand by the volunteers.

The women of Nehru family took lead in carrying out the Civil Disobedience Movement in Uttar Pradesh. Among the main centres of this Gandhian movement were Allahabad, Lucknow, Agra, Muzaffarnagar, Dehradun, Buland Shahar, Saharanpur, etc. Apart from other all activities of Constructive Programme, the women leaders circulated letters addressed to the zamindars not to allow the salt to be manufactured.

In Punjab, the activities of movement were taken by Gandhian women volunteers in small towns and some villages also. They manufactured salt in pans and picketed as well as boycotted foreign goods with a great enthusiasm. The prominent centres of movement were Lahore, Sialkot, Amritsar, Jullundar, Ambala, Karnal, Hissar, Rohtak, etc. Among the pioneer women were Lado Rani Zutshi, Smt. Puran Devi, Parvati Devi of Shimla, Smt. Gyan Devi, Smt. Durga Devi, Smt. Kartar Kaur, Mrs. Hansraj, Smt. Vidya
Devi and Smt. Raghbir Kaur. The Punjabi women along with female students played a significant role in arousing the national sentiments and feelings of rage against colonial rule by observing *hartals* against the arrest of Gandhiji. They also took out big processions to protest against the conviction and death punishments of the three revolutionaries Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev. Beside, they carried on picketing programmes at the houses of cloth merchants and Assembly at Shimla, they also developed a new method of protest known as *Siapa* against the British Raj.

The visit of Viceroy Lord Irwin at Shimla in regard to inauguration of Assembly session on 9 July 1930 the Congress women including Man Mohini Zutshi, Shakuntala Devi, Mrs. Dunichand and Satyawati, etc. strongly agitated and opposed the British government with revolutionary slogans. The election process of Legislative Council was also disrupted in Punjab. In Delhi, the movement was carried on under the leadership of Satyawati, grand daughter of Swami Shardhanand, along with some Marwari ladies who remained busy in boycotting foreign clothes and other foreign goods throughout the movement.

The leaders of prominent women organizations like W.I.A., N.C.W., A.I.W.C., etc. who generally belonged to wealthy and intellectual class of India and western countries took the works of extension of women's education and social reforms at hand from second decade of twentieth century onward. Among the reforms mainly included Hari Bilas Sharda's Bill for the prevention of child...
marriage, the removal of legal disabilities in the law of inheritance and marriage and the right of women to vote. Significantly, the Suffragette movement (among all such programmes) developed as a decisive step which uplifted the women on equal footing with the men to some extent as far as the emergence and growth of democratic institutions was concerned.

Margaret Cousin along with two other theosophist women namely Annie Besant and Dorothy Jinarajadasa, took the issue of women’s Franchise and submitted a memorandum to E.S. Montague, Secretary of State for India, who toured in India in 1917. In the delegation other women organizations involved were Seva Sadan, Mahila Seva Samaj, the Senate of Indian Women’s University and women’s branch of the Home Rule League with Sarojini Naidu as their principal spokesman. Several representations along with hundreds of women submitted petitions to the concerned committees in the same context.

Though the Govt. of India Bill (1919) did not consider the franchise for women but did empower the provincial legislatures to remove the sex barrier at their discretion. Consequently, the assemblies of Madras, United Province, Bombay and Central Provincial, Bengal and Punjab enthusiastically passed resolutions in women’s favour in the year 1921, 1923, 1926 respectively.

In the Gandhian movements, the Individual Satyagraha played a decisive role in inculcating and arousing the nationalist sentiments among all sections of
Indian people through the strategy of seditious speeches and court arrest by Congress men and women leaders. In addition to this, Quit India movement, popularly known as August Revolution, launched by Gandhi on 8 August 1942 in compliance with historical resolution passed at Bombay Congress accelerated the freedom struggle so largely that every section of society throughout nation plunged into it in thousands of number with the motto of "Do or Die".

The industrial labourers went on hartals on mass scale in several industrial cities such as Ahmedabad, Bombay, Kanpur, Indore, Bangalore, Mysore, etc. The Congress women, students and volunteers of various women organisations poured there all their strength in carrying out processions holding tricolour flags and raising nationalist slogans in the air. They hoisted tricolour flags on the government buildings like Courts and other offices after burning Union Jack. The picketing and boycotting programmes went side by side.

The movement spread over the entire country as a consequent of which the administrative machinery got paralysed in several districts in Bihar, Central Province, Andhra, Uttar Pradesh, Gujrat, Karnataka, Assam, Orissa, parts of Bengal and Punjab.

Usha Mehta, a women leader with an extra courage, started a secret Radio Station (14 August 1942) in Bombay in the name of "Voice of Freedom". She used to broadcast the news of all Gandhian and Revolutionary activities and also played the nationalist songs like Bande Mataram. Ram
Manohar Lohia was a frequent speaker from this radio station. Some prominent leaders like Aruna Asaf Ali, after opting revolutionary secret activities went underground evading their arrest so that the activities could continue till the goal achieved. The government, in response, took all type of repressive methods to crush the movement wherein even the events like Chimur (M.P.) took place in which the women including minor girls of the whole village had to suffer merciless rape and physical tortures and molestation at the hands of 200 European and 50 Indian police constables.

In the movement, women leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, etc. alongwith thousands of women leaders and volunteers instilled the nationalist sentiments among the masses. Many a time, they were imprisoned even in 'C' class jail, humiliated tortured and even some of them were killed in action but did not compromise at any cost.

Apart from Gandhian stream, the militant politics also invited those daring men and women to contribute their due. They loved the language of revolutionary literature and training in arms and ammunition. Having started their activities on almost individual levels, the revolutionaries of Maharashtra including three Chapekar brothers, Damodar, Balkishan and Vasudeo who were inspired by the revolutionaries activities of Vasudeo Balwant Phadke first time shot Sir Charles Rand, Plague Commissioner on 22 June 1897. Though their sacrifices (hanged in 1898) proved to be the harbinger of the impending
revolutionaries movement but their wives living in orthodox Hindu widowhood faced the silent sufferings including tortures and victimization throughout their lives. Similarly Yesubai Savarkar (wife of Ganesh Savarkar who was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Andmans along with younger brother Veer Savarkar) died in silent sufferings. She not only kept the pledge of boycott of Swadeshi but also caused many times the failure of police to take in possession of pistols, bombs and secret literature by hiding these just before the police raided the house. She was also instrumental in developing the activities of Atmanistha Yuvati Sangh as she was the founder of this organisation.

It was after a few years that Bengal eagerly came out in nationalist scenario to register its presence with the revolutionary activities. Based on the ideology of Irish revolutionary, Dan Breen and also marxist view points, several revolutionary organizations like Anushilan Samiti, Surhid Samiti, Yugantar Samiti, Deepali Sangh, Sree Sangh, Bengal Volunteers, Chattogram Revolutionary Party, Chhatri Sang, Barisal Sakti Bahini etc. originated in 20s and 30s of 20th century. Though women hardly played a supportive role as mother and sisters in early phase in such revolutionary organisations but, later on, started to be recruited also as members.

What is significant to note is that almost 90 percent of the revolutionaries came into these organizations from the high castes of Bengal such as Brahman, Vaidya and Kayasth. These revolutionaries were between 16 and 30
years old drawn from schools and colleges. They usually made dacoities and looted arms and ammunitions from gun stores and divided the pistols, rounds and other weapons among different organizations. Their activities were at peak in 30s. The most prominent revolutionary actions made by them included Chittagong Armoury Raid (18 April 1930) by C.R.P. team under Surya Sen popularly known Masterda and Pahartali Club Raid (24 September 1932) wherein the Commander Preeti Waddadar consumed potassium cyanide to evade arrest as she was badly wounded in breast by bullets.

Captain Dr. Laxmi Sehgal (a committed revolutionary) also pioneered (1943) the movement in a guerrilla platoon of INA through an elevated position of Rani Jhanshi Regiment. Similarly, Rajkumari Gupta and Savitri Devi of U.P. helped and supported the revolutionaries of HSRA who were involved in Kakori robbery operation.

In Punjab, the daring women Durga Devi and Sushila Mohan along some others contributed possible ways to the revolutionary movement carried on by Naujawan Bharat Sabha and H.S.R.A. Among numerous revolutionary women like Durga Devi, Sushila Devi and Prakasho Devi were engaged in Bomb making secretly in the factories at Lahore and Delhi respectively. Similarly, Nikko Devi of Peshawar was a trained supplier of arms to the male revolutionaries.

The Communist women accelerated their programmes in late 30s and 40s of 20 century by organising peasants and working class which had already started participating
in their programmes since 1928. They championed the cause of working class including the abolition of the *zamidari* system and establishment of peasant proprietorship in land through other organizations like Workers and Peasant’s Party (WPP), The Krishak Praja Party (KPP). Significantly, the ban imposed on the Communist Party of India in 1934 compelled its workers to migrate to the remote rural areas in order to evade their arrest wherein they raised their base in village people.

The formation of Bengal Kishan Sabha (1936) and All India Students’ Federation in 1940 at Lucknow also swelled their numbers rapidly. A significant move on the release of leaders in jail and of the Andman prisoners was also carried on by the Communist in 1941 through demonstrations and conferences like Delhi demonstration with 20,000 students and Patna Student’s Conference with 50,000 girls students. In 1942, after arrest of Gandhi and other leaders when the Quit India Movement turned into leaderless, various Communist leaders came out on roads to play a significant role in making nation vide strikes which took place spontaneously.

The Communist women even surpassed their counterparts (men leader) as playing an instrumental role in organising Tebhaga movement (1946-50) in 24 Pargana areas in Bengal where it was developed through Kishan Sabha with red flags and Hindu-Muslim unity.

Similarly, women in leftiest stream played a significant role in Telengana movement (from 1945 to
1951) spread over the areas of Nalgonda, Warangal, Khamman, Adilabad and Medak in Andhra Pradesh. It was developed against the Vetti system i.e. forced labour by the zamindari system exactions imposed on all peasant sections etc. The women of Kirti Kisan Party (KKP) formed in Punjab also worked for the commonweal of workers and peasantry. Besides, the Communist women were also engaged in solving the food problems in famine stricken areas of Punjab in 1943.

In Maharashtra, the leftist women raised their voice against the exploitation of timber labourers and for the rise of their wages. Besides, mill workers and railway workers were not only agitating through trade unionism but went on strikes in 1928-29, 1939, 1942, 1947 etc. which were also organised by them. They got an opportunity to play a decisive role in bringing both Hindus and Muslims close together in Kerala during Quit India movement.

Some Muslim social reformers and freedom fighters also pioneered in the national cause. Having started from educational institutions and campaign against purdah, polygamy, etc. they plunged into both the Khilafat movement and also marked their presence in Non-Cooperation movement. Among the prominent Muslims women were Bi-Aman, the mother of Ali brothers Abru Begum, sister of Abdul Kalam Azad, Begum Muhammed Ali, Begum Harsat Mohini etc. who took part in those movements.
Besides, some women contributed their due through organised efforts under the banner of an eminent organisation named Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam founded in 1914 at Aligarh by Begum of Bhopal, Nafis Dulhan, Rahmatuanissa etc. They held All-India Conference in 1928 in Delhi and later on in Madras, then faded into oblivion. Its Punjab branch was incorporated into the women branch of Muslim League in 1936. Their activities confined apart from their presentation to Suffragette movement mainly towards women's issue revolving around Islamic traditions.

What is significant to note that most of the prominent Muslim women who were either from elite class or sisters and wife of leaders of Muslim League while crossing the boundaries of walls and purdah accomplished their mission so far as the consciousness among Muslim women was concerned.

In the peroration, it may fairly be said that in the long lasting freedom struggle of India, the women not only marked their significance presence by their participation but also played many a times a vital role in shaping, accelerating and also making its various phases a success. Having started with their uplift programmes in accordance with the formation of socio-religious and educational institutions, they joined the pre-Gandhian movement as supporters to male activists and then actively joined the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience movements. The prominent among the Congress women were like Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi. some Ashramite sisters alongwith various provinces.
The women in Gandhian movements inculcated sufficient enthusiasm not only in the Congressmen but also in the women when the boycott of foreign goods, propagation of *Khadi* and *Charkha*, organising processions and holding meetings, etc. were taken against the British regime. Besides, the result oriented suffragette movement was also carried out side by side by intellectual ladies like Margaret Cousin, Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu, etc. who fought for the rights of woman to vote in provincial assemblies as recommended by Government of India Bill in 1919.

In the second phase of Civil Disobedience Movement associated with first time mass participation, the women successfully participated in Salt Satyagraha despite the refusal of Gandhi. While participating at equal footing with those of men, they played a decisive role in boycotting and picketing programmes and popularisation of *khadi* and *charkha* at all India bases. They continued the similar enthusiasm and commitment in Individual Satyagraha and Quit India movement also and faced *lathi* charge and imprisonment.

Apart from Gandhian movement, the revolutionary women who equally loved freedom and liberation of the nation adopted the method of arms and ammunition mainly in Bengal and Punjab provinces. They played an instrumental role in arousing the revolutionary sentiments among the youth ranging between 16 to 30 years of age against colonial rule. The young girls like Kalpana Dutt, Preeti Waddadar, Leela Nag in Bengal and Durga Devi,
Sushila Mohan, Nikko Devi, etc. in Punjab proved that the women were no less in any way than Chapekar brothers, Savarkar brothers, Chander Shekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh and his compatriots.

Besides, the women engaged in leftist stream championed the cause of peasant, working class including industrial labourers and landless village labourers through various Kisas Sabhas and trade unions. Though some Muslim women from educated elite class also joined the early phase of Gandhian Movement but merged with their main organisation Anjuman-i-Khawatin-i-Islam and later in Muslim League which started the movement for the partition of the country.

Apart from various positive aspects of women's participation in India's freedom struggle, there were some drawbacks of women's participation in different streams of nationalist struggle. First factor was the non-availability of the mass educations among women folk. Lackness of interest among parents, poverty, non-availability of the textual material, expansive education, laps of the government, little interest shown by the other agencies or individuals were such factors for the educational backwardness in the country. Infact, the education was not valued by the masses during the colonial rule in India.

So far as the female education was concerned, the progress was far from the satisfactory. The highest literacy rate among the women was around 1 percent in 1900 throughout India. Infact, despite efforts on the part of government and other agencies, no progress was made.
The second factor was the social structure of the Indian society which the womenfolk to come out from the walls of their houses for lid. They were treated merely the household creatures by the patriarchal social order. Besides, there were multiple disabilities evils such as Sati, infanticide, age of consent, widowhood, purdah, etc. which hampered their overall growth in the then socio-cultural milieu. The traditional family system as well rigid caste system were such other factors which did now allow their mobility to come out from ongoing watertight compartments situation. The male chaunism alongwith feudal mentality also relegated the women to their subordinate positions in the social structure of India.

The educated middle class and upper sections of the society did not consider the womenfolk to participate with them on equal footings in the beginning of 20th century activities. This class of Indian elite was suffering from the notion of superiority complex. Thy realized their potential at a very vary late stage by the different streams achieve in India's national movement. Consequently, they joined the movement only when Gandhiji made the Congress a mass organisation. Their entry became eminent only during the Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements.

It has been failure of Congress leadership as well as of Revolutionary and leftist streams also that women from underprivileged and downtrodden sections, landless labourers could not join the national politics. By taking part in national movement women tried to prove that they
were quite capable and responsible in making decision, holding responsible positions, organizing and leading movements. While acting as revolutionaries, they proved efficient messengers, couriers, composers of national songs, poems and even smuggling of pistols, bombs, other seditious and secret material. Further, they not only proved their commitment and valour equivalently with those of men participants. Over and above, the participation of women in freedom struggle of India through various streams is a stalwart answer to those who consider woman a weak sex, adamantly prefer to restrict her from participating in public domain and think in terms of placing her at subordinate position.