



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## A CRITICAL VIEW ON ROLE OF WOMEN IN QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

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### ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the role of women, notably student activists, in the Quit India Movement, which Mahatma Gandhi inspired. Subhas Chandra Bose's INA (Indian National Army) actions and the RIN (Royal Indian Navy) Mutiny that followed the Quit India Movement undermined the British Empire's foothold in India even more. Captain Lakshmi Sehgal of Madras was a member of the INA's Rani Jhansi regiment and served as the regiment's commander. Ladies of the era took their home-based virtues and sacrificed them for the good of the entire country. It appears that women in the early 1940s had a desire to prove Gandhi right.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

It has been 74 years since Mahatma Gandhi raised the slogan of 'do or die' at the Bombay session of the All India Congress Committee, thereby initiating India into the mass uprising that would eventually lead to the nation's freedom. Gandhi had been striving for self determination of Indians at different levels for the last several decades. However, the significance of the 'Quit India movement' lay in the broadening of his support base to include peasants, students and the lower middle class. Following Gandhi's call for civil disobedience on August 8, 1942, the Mahatma along with all the leaders were imprisoned, leaving the movement leaderless. In the absence of any organised structure, people engaged in the most daring and spontaneous acts of protest against British rule. Railway lines were disrupted, police stations were burnt down and telegraph services destroyed. The British retaliated in vehement terms using 'lathi charges' and making mass arrests. An aspect of the movement that is rarely spoken about is the way it encouraged women to come out of the thresholds of their homes and raise their voice against British rule. With majority of the men behind bars, women took to the streets, raising slogans, holding public lectures and demonstrations and even making and transporting explosives.

Women were also one of the worst sufferers of British retaliation. It was common for British officials to forcefully enter households and slap, beat up and rape women. While women numbering in hundreds had participated in agitations, there are some women who left a clear mark when one talks about the role of women in the 'Quit India movement'. In 1929, the historic Lahore Congress was held under the presidentship of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The resolution for independence was adopted in that session. There it was decided to celebrate the 26th January 1930 as the first Independence Day of India throughout the country. Accordingly the women of Kaliabor decided to join the celebration in the district head quarter town, Nowgong. More than 400 women proceeded towards Nowgong under the leadership of Guneswari Devi, Darbai Mech, Mohini Gohain and Kiranbala Bora. Women of the wayside villages also joined the procession. On 26th January, when the national flag was about to be hoisted in the presence of a huge crowd, the police started attacking the people. The women were beaten up and the national flag was taken away from them. In Sibsagar, a lady named KamalabalaKakati was arrested and sent to jail for participating in such a procession.

## **WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE**

India's National Congress was compelled to go ahead with its plans to launch Satyagraha, as decided at its Calcutta session in December 1928, when the government refused the Nehru Report and to take note of the demands of the people. Consequently, on December 31, 1929, the Indian National Congress declared that the Congress's goal was full independence rather than Dominion Status. There were therefore new expectations for the New Year as well as a potential for an active conflict. The 26th of January, 1930, was declared Independence Day, and members of Congress were ordered to abstain from voting. Civil Disobedience Movement was Gandhi's responsibility, and he could begin it in any way he saw fit. Gandhiji chose the violation of the Salt Laws as his focal point. Salt tax, he believed, was unjust for the poor in the region because salt was a common commodity.

## **SALTSATYAGRAHA**

Gandhiji began his historic march from Jalalpur to Dandi on the coast on March 12, 1930, officially kicking off the Campaign. On April 6th, he was arrested for breaking the Sal Law. It took the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi to set off the campaign, and soon there were nationwide hartals in response. It energised patriotic zeal in women, giving the cause a double boost of strength and support while also attracting attention and admiration from the outside world. Because Gandhiji feared that women would complicate things, they were initially barred from participating. In the end, the nation's appeal was too strong for the women of the land to ignore. They complained that there should be no watertight chambers of services in these vital days. Women said that "no meeting, congress, or commission dealing with India's welfare should be held without the presence of their king," according to their statements. This also means that no protests, detention or demonstration for the welfare of India should exclude women from

taking part. " In the following stages of the campaign, they were allowed to participate in all aspects of it.

After breaking salt and forest rules and removing "Prabhat Pheries," they began their march to freedom by holding processions outside of schools, colleges, and legislative councils. When it came to the right thing to do in terms of lathi charges and shootings as well as arrests under Section 144 and a host of other laws, the government did exactly what it was supposed to do. Despite the government's many sanctions, women were determined to participate in the movement. According to the Bengal Congress Committee's Provincial Secretary, sex provided no protection. On their bare backs, two women had been caned. When Smt. Swaroop Rani Nehru, the wife of Shri Motilal Nehru, was lathi-charged by police in Allahabad, they committed an even more heinous act. She was knocked unconscious by a lathi strike. One woman was killed and twelve were injured when a lathi charge took place in Delhi, including the mother-in-law of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, while three women were killed in Madhya Pradesh when police opened fire in response to a violation of forest rules.

## **SAROJININAIDU**

On February 13, 1879, Sarojini Naidu, a poet, politician, and peacemaker, was born in Hyderabad. When her father, Dr. Aghonath Chattopadhyaya, founded the Nizam College, he did so as a Bengali gentleman who worked tirelessly to further education until his death. This man's work as a scientist was well-known in the field. Sarojini was sent to England in 1895 on a scholarship from the Nizam after completing her education in Hyderabad. Girton College, Cambridge University and King's College, London. Because of her poor health, she returned to India in 1898. Before returning to India, she visited Switzerland and Italy for a few months. Italy's rich history appears to have piqued her desire for independence. Marriage to Dr. Naidu in 1898 broke through barriers of caste and religion for both of them. Naidu urged the students of the Byramji Jeejabai Institution in Bombay in 1909: 'The highest ideal, climax of modern spirit should be the unification of India, the unity that of mutual industry, of a common education, disinterested work, the breaking down of ancient barriers and the elimination of ancient hatred,' she said.

## **BOMBAY**

## **KAMLADEVICHATTOPADHYAYA**

One of the most notable women of this era was Kamla Devi Chattopandhyaya, a well-known activist for the cause of national liberation. Mangalore-born Kamla Devi was married while she was still in high school, making her one of the youngest brides in Indian history. Kamla became a child's widow after her husband's death. Even though it was against the grain of society at the time, she persisted with her education and eventually enrolled in the Queen Mary's College in Madras. She married Harindranath after her divorce. Inter-caste, inter-provincial, and widow remarriage are all examples that Mrs. Naidu's

younger brother Chattopadhyaya illustrates. As a member of the Congress in 1922, Kamla made her first foray into active politics. She never wavered from her commitment to the cause of freedom. In 1926, she became the first woman to run for office in the Madras Legislative Assembly. At the International Congress of Women's League for Peace and Freedom in Prague, Czechoslovakia, Kamla Devi was present. She informed the audience about the realities of life in India.

## **BENGAL**

Apart from Mahatma Gandhi's Civil Disobedience movement, the women of Bengal were actively involved in revolutionary actions. Sughas Chandra Bose urged them to embrace the revolutionary philosophy, and a large number of young women joined the revolutionary party. "Organized attempts, rarely successful attempts to raise the Congress Flag on Government buildings in the mofussil," claimed an annual report of the Police Administration in 2009. Women took on an increasing share of the task since finding male recruits was becoming increasingly difficult and because the presence of women - folk was expected to humiliate the police."

It's clear that this was an outright deception. It wasn't because they wanted to make the police look bad that women joined the ranks. It didn't concern the police that women were treated differently than males; they were dragged, their procession lathi-charged, and in some cases, life sentences were handed down. Despite this, women continued to picket colleges, schools, clubs, and courts in their chosen path. The Ladies Picketing Board and the Nari Satyagraha Sangha were deemed unlawful by the Supreme Court.

## **ANNIE BESANT AND WOMEN'S INDIAN ASSOCIATION**

In 1847, William Page Wood had a daughter named Annie Besant, who was born on October 1st in London. In 1852, when she was five years old, her father died. As a result, the family was thrust into a difficult situation. As a result, in 1861, at the age of 13, she was forced to leave home. She went to live with Maryat, a strict and devout woman in Paris. Besant also enjoyed reading the works of Plato, Dante, and the Iliad in addition to engaging in religious activities. This may have laid the groundwork for her political career, based on this reading. Her rejection of Christianity and her marriage were the two most devastating events in her early life. It was in 1867, when she married Frank Besant, a clergyman, that the marriage fell apart. Because of this, she had to leave the world. As a result, she was able to gain work experience in a variety of fields in order to support herself. As a means of supplementing her income, she worked as a cook, nurse, and needleworker. Besant worked with Charles Bradhlaugh, a national reformer, in the year 1874. In 1881, she became one of his co-authors. Her first speech was delivered in London, England, at the Co-operative Institute on Castle Street. In this speech, Besant argued that women should be granted political status and equality in all areas of life because being treated as inferior would make it impossible for them to compete in the marketplace. It wasn't long before she was under the tutelage of Theosophist founder Helena Blavatsky in the Theosophical Society. When Blavatsky died in

1892, Besant and Judge shared leadership of the society's confidential section.

As a result of Annie Besant's entry into Indian politics in 1914, men and women throughout the country developed a greater sense of national identity. During a public meeting in Madras in October 1913, she recommended that the House of Commons set up a permanent panel on Indian affairs that would focus on the question of how India could be freed. During her time in England in 1914, she attempted to form an Indian political party, but it failed. "Home Rule League" in London was born out of her efforts in England in favour of India's right to self-government. When Annie Besant decided to help the Indian people gain self-knowledge, self-respect, and self-governance, she took it upon herself. A weekly newspaper called "Commonweal" helped her in her political work, which primarily focused on the public and their problems, when she returned to India in 1914. 6 "Madras Standard" was purchased in 1914 and renamed "New India" for her political work. New India sub-editor Margaret Cousins dubbed this newfound independence "Home Rule" for India. "New India," an English-language daily, was printed by Besant, who was also a registered printer for the "Commonweal," a weekly journal.

It was on July 14, 1914, that 1100 copies of New India were printed, and by August 15, that number had risen to 5,000. Besant's "New India" quickly rose to prominence in Madras, where it had the highest circulation of any paper in the city at 10,500 copies. There were two divisions of the Home Rule League, one in India and the other in England, whose roles were to educate Indians about the Home Rule Movement and educate the English public about the political situation of India in the early twentieth century. At the Indian National Congress in 1914, Annie Besant was a delegate. While she supported India's independence, she also believed it should remain part of the British Commonwealth. Annie Besant travelled to Bombay, India, in December 1915 in order to secure the Indian National Congress's support for the Home Rule League. Dadabai Nauroji, India's grand old man, encouraged the Home Rule League when she met him in Bombay. 1916 saw a surge in activity, with people flocking to "New India" to keep up with the movement's progress and peruse the editorials of Annie Besant.

The Irish coined the phrase "Home Rule," which we now use. The Irish Home Rule Act was signed into law by King George V in 1914 after a long and arduous campaign by the Irish people. Besant found the slogan "Home rule" more suited to a rousing popular cry because it connoted self-governance within the empire in a clearer way. She opted for this term over Swaraj or self-government because it was more widely known in the English-speaking world. The All India Home Rule League's founding in September 1915 was the most significant moment in her career. The Home Rule League of Annie Besant held its first meeting in Madras on September 3, 1915. The league had hundreds of members. The thirty-four founding branches of the All India Home Rule League elected Annie Besant as President and G.S. Arundale as the League's Organizing Secretary for a three-year term. Two other members of the Board of Trustees were also General Secretaries and Treasurers. From the league's headquarters in Adyar, these four officials ran the show.

## POLITICALCONDITIONSOFTHEPERIOD

In Europe, World War II began in the year 1939. On September 3, 1939, England declared war on Germany in the name of democracy and weaker nations. It was still British policy not to free India, which she considered a long-standing enemy. Because it lacked an independent foreign policy, India was forced to follow the British government's lead. Indian then-Governor Gen. Lord Linlithgow declared war on Germany the same day as India's then-Governor General (September, 3 1939). As a show of protest, the Congress ministries in office resigned. The party's electoral manifesto from 1936 stated that it was against taking part in an imperialist war. A statement by the Indian National Congress' working committee in September 1939 reaffirmed this point. War or peace in India must be decided by the Indian people, not by British government, despite unanimous condemnation of Germany's latest aggression against Poland. As an alternative, the Congress Working Committee asked the government to make a promise of Indian independence. There are several conditions that must be accomplished before India will be willing to support the British administration. The demands of Congress, on the other hand, were ignored. As a result, the Congress decided to spread anti-war propaganda and obstruct aid to the war effort. In order to ratchet up the pressure on the government, Mahatma Gandhi launched a personal Satyagraha campaign. It aimed "to teach non - participation with the government in their war operations" and "to carry out nonviolent antiwar propaganda."

Thirty thousand men and women sought arrest as a result of Vinoba Bhave's October 17, 1940, campaign. As the year progressed, more and more political prisoners had to be freed due to the current political climate. The fate of the British was in jeopardy because the Japanese were on the doorstep of India. Upon his arrival in India, Sir Stafford Cripps brought with him a slew of new ideas in an attempt to win over the people. Cripps' proposal, on the other hand, was unanimously rejected. Instead of goodwill and tranquilly, Cripps' Mission left the Indian people bitter and ill-willed because of their distrust of the mission. In a moment of panic, the Congress Working Committee voted in July 1942 to call on the British to leave India. The All India Congress Committee endorsed this decision at its meeting in Bombay on August 7 and 8, 1942. To use its nonviolent strength built up over twenty-two years, it "sanctioned" a "mass struggle on the broadest possible scale." The British defeats at the hands of the Japanese had inspired the people to rise up in defiance. They were further enraged by the war refugees' suffering and the inhuman treatment they received. They were enraged by the fact that force and intimidation had been used. Force and intimidation were used against those who were reluctant to contribute to the war fund, as a matter of fact.

His arrest on August 9, 1942, was followed by a three-word rebuke to the people of India: "It's Do or Die." For millions of individuals, this message became an inspiration and a source of sacrifice as the cost of freedom climbed. Hartals broke out in Bombay, Ahmadabad, and Poona as soon as the news broke that Gandhiji had been arrested. This disease had spread throughout the country by August 11, 1942. People also marched, held rallies, and shut down universities as a result of a lack of students.

Industrial workers in the cities of Ahmadabad, Bombay, Kanpur, Indore, Bangalore, and Mysore, walked out of their work. The effects of the movement reached rural areas as well. People seized courts, offices, and police stations around the country, declaring themselves free. From secretariats to courts, government buildings around the country took on their traditional colours. The government shutdown affected some states, including Bihar and the Central Provinces, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Assam, and parts of Bengal.

## ASSAM

A significant portion of this movement was led by the province's female residents. They may have taken command of the battle for freedom because of a sudden, unrelenting passion for liberty. Mitra and Chakraborty in "Rebel, India" write that "primarily, the Assamese women's independence" is at stake in the revolt against slavery. Gohapon Thana was occupied by the Bengali people on September 20, 1942 when five hundred people, including a girl in her teens, marched there to take over the building. 'If they don't want to act as servants of the people, they must clear out and allow people to take possession of the site,' she said when the police officer asked her to leave. If she didn't comply with the Daroga's threats, she would be fired. She was unfazed and told him to carry out his responsibilities while she did hers. Mukunda, a male comrade of hers who was also killed, took the flag after she was shot in the chest. Six other people were injured in the attack, one of whom was pregnant.

As she made her way to the Congress office to attend a social gathering for her granddaughter RatnaPrbha, BhogasweriPhooKanani carried the national flag. The Congress building was then taken over by the government. Grandmother grabbed another flag and swung it at the official who snatched the flag from the hands of the girl. She was shot and killed in the next split second. In response to abuses by the military and police, Smt. Annupriya Barua and Sudhalata Dutta formed a women's organisation. When the women went to the terrorised areas, they were there to encourage and uplift the local populace. Military and armed police once again confronted women who led the procession in places such as Gohapur, Barapujjia, Thok, and Brahampur. The "Free India's Fighting Force" was formed in Assam during this time period, as well. Women joined this group and assumed responsibility for the provision of services. Thousands of workers and citizens in Assam received warm clothing, bandages, and other supplies from the Red Cross First Aid parties that they organised. The organisation was later disbanded by the government, but the women continued to work. They marched the streets of Tezpur, another Assamese town, singing and shouting slogans, and raising the tri-color flag in celebration. When women refused to reveal the whereabouts of their relatives who were hiding out, they were subjected to harsh treatment in some areas. For two years, Mrs. Anna Prava Barua was subjected to police brutality. All of her belongings, including an image of the family deity, were confiscated by the police after they failed to arrest her husband. Barua's whereabouts were investigated by the police at all hours of the day and night. Anna Prava Barua and the other female members of the group were unable to sleep in a case or in privacy as a result.

## BENGAL

The women of Bengal have been fighting for their country's independence since the beginning of the conflict. In 1942, the residents of Midnapore District had a significant impact. In preparation for the Japanese invasion, the Tamlauk sub-division had formed an anti-invasion force. They enlisted the help of both men and women to form a volunteer army. Several training camps were set up for new recruits. The formation of local relief committees was a result of this. Four thousand spinners worked in a Khadi Center as well. It's safe to say that the majority of those involved were female. The Congress Committee set the parameters for the formation of a National Government. Several Ministries provided assistance to me. Until August 8, 1944, the National Government remained in place. Gandhiji ordered its dissolution. In response to a procession organised by the women of Tamlauk Division, seven women were arrested and each received a two-year prison sentence. A seventy-three-year-old woman named Smt. Manangini Hazra led one such procession. The Thana was on the radar of the percussionists. Her hands were slapped by the police, but she refused to let the flag fall. Her advice to the officials was to stop firing and join the freedom movement instead. Her death was caused by a bullet. The Government employees raped 74 women in this division. As a result of the attack, one of the victims was killed. Women wielding daggers attempted to offer collective resistance, which was successful.

A total of 43 people were killed and 70 injured on November 7th, 1842 in the Tamlauk subdivision. There were arson attacks on the homes of political activists. Women were sometimes prevented from leaving their homes after the fires had been extinguished by the police or military. Rescue efforts necessitated the use of back doors and ladders thrown from the roof to reach the trapped women. On 9 January 1943, 600 soldiers surrounded Mohishadal Thana's three villages of Masuria, Dalmasuria, and Chandipur. In the course of a single day, these soldiers not only pillaged villages but also sexually assaulted 46 women. With the goal of safeguarding their chastity and dignity, the women formed the Bhagini Seva Sangha. Some of them were armed and confronted the military and police. Two women were charged with violating the Arms Act for allegedly defending themselves by drawing daggers.

## KALPANADUTTA

She was arrested in 1932 for doing things that were against the law. When Provincial Autonomy was established in 1937, Kalpana was emancipated. Rabindranath Tagore, C.F. Andrews, and Mahatma Gandhi all spearheaded campaigns to have her released. He had sex with her in the Midnapore Jail, where they met. "Gandhiji came to greet me" when he arrived at the Presidency Jail. The Chittagong Armoury Raid cases will not be released because Nazimuddin is enraged at you, Gandhiji told me. I am not going to give up." She was freed in 1939. She worked on her studies and spread Communist propaganda. Dhobi Para was where she worked. Kalpana began her career as a part-time employee at the Kisan Sabha and eventually transitioned to full-time employment at the Tramway Workers Union. Kalpana signed up for a post-grad class. She had to leave Calcutta within 24 hours because of the Second World War. They kept her at her house in Chittagong. At this point, she was responsible for ensuring that the party's secret work



was running smoothly. All of the documents from the provincial and central committees were sent to various locations across the country. In the town, shelters and dumps were set up, and flyers were distributed to inform residents of the situation. In 1941, the rules she had to follow were changed.

## **UTTARPRADESH**

Police took over the Congress office after the government took repressive steps. Female students stormed the office on August 10, 1942, and took it over. Many female students volunteered their time to assist those in need throughout the city. The government even ordered new mothers to leave their homes under threat of bayonets. They had to give up their decorations in order to move on. They were compelled to remove their body jewellery. At a village in Ghazipur, an Ahir woman was shot and killed by a soldier as she tried to flee, reports the Indian Express. It was said in Banaras that the women who had been abused by the police told sad stories. Her long hair was pulled, and she was made to do sit-ups and not given food. As his mother looked on, one child was roasted to death. The whereabouts of their husbands had to be revealed by some women in order to protect their families from harm. Extra credit was given to nine Banaras Hindu University students because of their participation in the movement.

## **PUNJAB**

Mahatma Gandhi made a call for students in the Punjab to join him in the field. Students, both boys and girls, did not hesitate to join him. On November 10th, 1942, 114 students from Lahore were abducted. A total of twenty-two women performed in this number.. The badges were handed out by the girls because they were brave. Even though the police were there, the girls didn't pay any attention to them. They didn't get into the police van until their principal told them to. When they went to the police station, they were asked a lot of different questions. There was a shocking treatment of the girl's students in Amritsar.

## **RAJKUNARIAMRITKAUR**

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was instrumental in organising protest marches and rallies during the movement. A member of the royal family of Kapurthala State, he was born into a prominent position of power. A: She was Sir Harnam Singh's daughter. Her year of birth was 1886. When her mother was young, she was one of the first social workers. Her daughter learned to fight for social and political freedom, too. When Amrit Kaur was a child, she went to school in England. She was also a good sportswoman. As soon as she returned to India, she began organising sports and games for the people of the Punjab. Amrit Kaur's father's best friend, Gokhale, was always there for him. Her desire to see India free of foreign rule was sparked by him, she says. 10 Martial Law had just ended when Rajkumari Amrit Kaur first met Gandhi in 1919. This progressed into a sixteen-year career as his secretary, which he held. Here's how it all goes down: The All India Women's Conference, which Amir Kaur helped found in 1926, owes its existence in large part to her. For many years, she served as the group's secretary. As a representative of the Women's Organization, she appeared before the Joint Select Committee on Indian

Constitutional Reforms in 1932. She explained to the committee how Indians could cast their ballots. Rajkumari was arrested in Bombay for participating in the Salt Satyagraha, a protest against the way salt is produced. The Communal Award was made public a few years later. "This conference stands united in its protest against the Communal Award as it affects Indian women," she said at a later All Indian Women's Conference meeting on December 23, 1932. While in Bannu, in North-West Frontier Province, the Rajkumari helped the Congress fight for what they believed in. On July 16, 1937, Bannu's Assistant Commissioner brought charges of sedition against her. She was fined 50 rupees and sentenced to prison until the Court adjourned. During the 1942 Quit India movement, Amrit Kaur was the most important person in the group. She led a procession every day, and she did it over and over again. One procession in Simla was brutally lathi-charged by a group of people. A lathi charge was used on her 15 times from August 9 to 16.

## CONCLUSION

Students who followed Gandhi's example by participating in the Quit India Movement were included in this study's focus on women. Captain Lakshmi Sehgal of Madras was a member of the INA's Rani Jhansi regiment and served as the regiment's commander. Ladies of the era took their home-based virtues and sacrificed them for the good of the entire country. It appears that women in the early 1940s had a desire to prove Gandhi right.

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