



AGNIKANYA BINA DAS: AN OBSCURE PATRIOT OF INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE

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ABSTRACT:

Like men, women too shouldered several critical responsibilities in the freedom struggle, bravely faced the baton of the police and even went behind bars and jails but are deprived of actual praise and glory they deserve in return of their selfless effort and dedication for the cause of motherland. The binary opposition of "tradition and modernity" have attempted to dislodge women's attempt for liberation. The vertical chronology of colonisation and modernisation ruptured the independent gendered identity in the light of comparison between Victorian morality and indigenous traditionality. The image of the "Bhadramahila" as constructed by the nationalists was one who was a "repository of the inner spirituality of indigenous social life".ⁱ This 19th century radical nationalism gave birth to revolutionary Bina das who was as bold as brass and as fierce as fire. On 6th February 1932, in the crowded convocation Hall at Calcutta university, she fired 5 continuous gunshots at Governor Stanley Jackson. Her life was completely dedicated to the cause of emancipation of her compatriots in a dual capacity of a nonviolent freedom fighter and an armed revolutionary. Her trial was extensively covered by the international media, with one of British newspaper calling her the "Joan of arc of India". But she is being deprived of actual praise and glory she deserve in return of her selfless effort and dedication for the cause of her motherland. Despite of all her dedication, courage and patriotic zeal she never got any share of limelight because nineteenth century modern western patriarchy never allowed her to share the spotlight.

KEY WORDS: VICTORIAN MORALITY, INDIGENOUS TRADITIONALITY, WESTERN PATRIARCHY, REVOLUTIONARY, OBSCURE PATRIOTS, WOMEN EMANCIPATION

INTRODUCTION :

The troubles, traditions and turmoils in the late 19th and early 20th century plays an important role for literary theory to undermine 'Gender' as a category that had been rendered invisible in various aspects.

Historically and conceptually goes back into nationalism as well as social reform the significance of women's protest becomes 'disinterested' and has no place in the organized political process. However, as a powerful strand of nationalism asserts, it is the women who are entrusted with the task of saving the nation.

Like men, women have pelted stones, barked orders and sung praises of their motherland. But the binary opposition of 'tradition and modernity' have attempted to dislodge women's attempt for liberation. The Chronology of Colonisation and modernisation ruptured the independent gendered identity in the light of comparison between Victorian morality and indigenous traditionality.

Revolutionary Bina Das was the product of that early 20th century revolutionary nationalist phase in which; with the advent of time and progress of society the Britishers wanted English educated wives of Indian civil servants to continue the ensured loyalty. Similarly on the other hand the nationalists wanted their 'Bhadramahilas' not only to be educated in the western philosophies but also to follow the doctrines of the Ideal Indian womanhood. This dichotomy of demands created a generation of women in the latter half of the 19th century who were educated as well as politically conscious and were eager to participate in the socio-political movement against British hegemony.ⁱⁱ

The image of the 'Bhadramahila' as constructed by the nationalists was one who was a 'repository of the inner spirituality of Indigenous social life'. The narratives of women written during these transitional times of conflict between modernity and traditionality not just because women's activities in public but also in private.ⁱⁱⁱ

Bina Das's memoir 'Srinkhal Jhankar' in around 1st half of 20th century is the first political autobiography in the regional language which reflects the association of woman between home and the world which majorly contributed to her becoming an integral part of the nationalistic struggle. She also penned down a novel commemorating her father, the Brahmo scholar Beni Madhal Das who also happened to be the teacher and influence of Netaji Subash Chandra Bose at Ravenshaw Collegiate School. Bina Das had also contributed to the journals like Mandira and Jayashree. This new age women not only partook in the affairs of the state but also safeguarded their literary creativity which became catalyst for organisational mobilisation .^{iv}

Even though Bina Das was against the colonial raj, yet she had a great regard for the western system of education and had expressed in the courtroom confession statement her deep gratitude towards the Christian nun teachers of her institutes who too harbour deep affection towards her.^v

Revolutionary Bina Das was imprisoned in an attempt to shoot Stanley Jackson, the governor of Bengal during the University's convocation ceremony held on 6th february, 1932. In an instance Bina das's father while meeting her daughter in the prison had remarked that

both his daughter's had inherited their courage and fortitude from their mother who had constantly inspired them to be determined about their political endeavour. ^{vi}

The purpose of the nineteenth century women education reform was to build mothers who would inspire their children to literate their nation and Bina's mother was an outcome of this "new women" who is educated and being able to import the true values of patriotism in her daughters.

This 19th century radical nationalism gave birth to revolutionary Bina Das who was as bold as brass and as fierce as fire. Revolutionary Bina Das was a name that implicitly vowed to give back the identity of India as a free Nation. Despite of her contribution and sacrifice, she abandoned from suitable honour as compared to the male revolutionaries of her time.

Every rebel faces has their own battles, but the best things about it is the revolution never goes in vain. The patriotic spirit of Bina Das as the fire within her never cooled, but grew infusing the spirit of India until it couldn't grasp freedom.

To see the dear native soil free from British Raj was of dream that ran in every revolutionary eyes. There is a long list off prominent revolutionaries from the Bengal land who contributed their life for the pause of Nation, but there were some who sacrificed their lives why being Abandoned from of suitable honour. ^{vii}

Bina Das was one such unheard freedom fighter who had..... As she grew up, she witnessed the occupation off her home land, The loss off the independence she sought, and the countless stories she heard off British atrocities- all this things filled her with a fire. Initially she had joined Chhatri Sangh, a women –led, semi- revolutionary group developed in Calcutta throughout this journey, she devoted herself to eliminate British from the country with every word she peached And every actions see did.

As a part of this group, Das had organised her first student protest against the Simon commission 1928, as a student, Das had attended St. John's Diocesan High school after which see attended Bethune college. It was at this point that a college class met, the revolutionary Suhasini Ganguly asked if she was interested in doing 'something real' for the freedom offer motherland. Bina answered affirmatively and introduced to the Bengal revolutionary party. Anuja Charan Sen and Dinesh Chandra Mazumdar of this party made a failed attempt to kill Calcutta's police commissioner Charles Tegart, ill famed for torturing captured revolutionaries.

A Colonial law enforcement cracked down in the wake of that assassination attempt, the revolutionary group scattered. Bina Das decided to attempt to assassinate the Governor of Bengal. She approached Kamala Dasgupta of the Jugantar party, another revolutionary group opened in Calcutta to get her a gun.

Bina had almost no experience with fire arms. She had no practices at all. When she expressed these apprehensions to Kamala Dasgupta, the later assured Bina that she can do it as Binaya Basu had no practices before he attacked to kill N.S. Simpson, the Inspector general of prisons. Bina was well aware of the consequences of her action, and despite this , she remain resolute and determined. On 6th feb 1932, In the crowded convocation hall at Calcutta

University, she fired 5 gunshots at Governor Stanley Jackson while he was addressing the audience.

Through her attempt to kill Governor failed, her heroic deeds and bravery sparkle the prairie fire of revolution across the nation. She was sentenced to imprisonment for nine year's ; Despite of being rigorously tortured by British police she never revealed the names of her associates. After her release, She joined the congress committee in Calcutta and organised various strikes and protests during the quite India movt. Because of which she was imprisoned again from 1942-45.

Her life was completely dedicated to the cause of emancipation of her compatriots in a dual capacity of a non-violent freedom fighter and an armed revolutionary. Bina writes in her memoir, "the youth of Bengal came forward...." With deadly weapons and fire rebellion in their eyes, they emerged with death defying arrogance.... The purpose was to make the tyrant aware of its tyranny.

From 1946-47, She was a member of the Bengal Provincial legislative assembly and, from 1947-51 she became a member of West Bengal legislative assembly. In 1947 Bina Das married Jatish Chandra Bhaumik, fellow nationalist of the Jugantar group.

Previously women's participation for the in the nation cause was solely restricted to the literary space or through their practise of Swadeshi but from 1919 with the advent of non-cooperation movt. Women actively participated in picketing on streets which ushered their arrests. With time as women started to join the Gandhi led movements or sided with the revolutionaries and their number in the prison also started to increase. The prison life was an integral part of the political women and Bina Das's prison experience constitutes a significant episode in her memoir, exposing the oppressive, arbitrary nature of the state apparatus. When Bina's parent's were brought to the I.B officer, he persuade Bina's father to collect the source of that revolver so that his daughter could be release from jail. But Bina had protested strongly by saying that her father had never taught her to be a traitor. ^{viii}In actual that pistol was provided to her by Kamala Dasgupta which was mentioned in the autobiography "Rakhter Akshare" of Dasgupta. Bina had no provision for target practice so when her first bullet was missed, she fired consecutive four more shots from her bullet because of which the title "Agnikanya" had conferred upon her.

Inside the prison also Bina was humiliated for turning the cell in to placing flowers of bael and rajanigandha inside her ward . ^{ix}Das also remembered in her memory that how the prisoners of 'c' category had to wear short gowns instead of sarees which left them uncomfortable. When she helped another political prisoners with her short kurta, the jailer took it away calling it a fashionable blouse and made her wear the prison attire. ^x Despite of all these hardships came in the way, women found their own way to survive in the unkind prison atmosphere and with scarce amenities available. Women created a domestic atmosphere within the prison. Inside the jail women prisoners shared bonding with each other. The public and private space amalgamated into one as prison arena was refurnished with the doctrines of the private.

The abysmal prison life also gave the opportunity to enhance oneself. Bina had mentioned in her memoir that the prison was the best place to nurture one's mind to understand one's quest in life. It gave ample time for reading, writing, meditation and teaching which ultimately leads to look deeper into one's own self.

After her release from jail, she became a congress activist. She won the election to become MLA in 1946 and after independence she became legislator in West Bengal assembly. She married a Congress leader Mr. Jyotish Bhowmik. For social work, she got a Padmashree in 1960. Later after the death of her husband, she came out of public life. She started teaching as a teacher but faced difficulties there for lack of graduation certificate as she shot the British Governor. On her convocation ceremony. After being frustrated by all these circumstances, she led a solitary life in Rishikesh, Utter Pradesh. On 26th dec 1986, Bina was discovered by the side of the road as dead. Her body was in such a state of decomposition that it would take the police more than a month to establish her identity.

What we are left with are the echoes of Bina's voice in her autobiography Shrinkhal Jhankar (Rattling in chains) (1947), in which she wrote how deeply she felt the suffering of her people. Even today I hear their cries the groans of the hungry, the silent suffering of the poor. The journey has not yet ended. In my heard I still hear he drum beats of my God and it urges me forward, forward, forever forward.^{xi}

Addressing the women's section of the Indian Independence league in Singapore in 1943 Netaji Subash Chandra Bose said "I know the capabilities of our womanhood well.

I can, therefore, say with certainly that there is no task which our women cannot undergo." S.C. Bose. Despite being oppressed by the societal pressures women too shouldered several critical responsibilities in the freedom struggle, bravely faced the baton of the police and even went behind bars and jails but are deprived of actual praise and glory they deserve in return of their selfless effort and dedication for the cause of motherland. As like other revolutionary nationalists i.e : Jatin Das, Surya Sen, Chandra Sekhar Azad, Bhagat Singh etc Agnikanya Bina Das also made tiresome efforts, sacrifice, dedication and showed courage, confidence and patriotic real by firing five continuous shots to British Vice Governor Stanley Jockson. Despite of all her dedication, courage and patriotic zeal she never got any share of the lime light, because nineteenth century moder western patriarchy never allow her to share the spotlight and all her courageous deeds , intense patriotism remain in dark just as her deceased body discovered from the road side in its advanced state of decomposition.

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