

## Role of the Women in National Movement in Bihar (1857-1947)

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**Abstract :-**The women of Bihar have walked steps to steps in national movement and also have been part of communist, socialist, trade union and peasant movements. Overruling various social traditions and stereotype mindset, the women of Bihar have stepped out during National movement. They have not only matched pace with men in the struggle for freedom but also have provided successful leadership to it. Mahatma Gandhi employed Satyagraha for the first time in Champaran district of Bihar in 1917 in order to protect people from the atrocities of Nilaha Gora. At that time, the number of women was comparatively negligible than men in public service. Mahatma Gandhi appealed women to participate in national movement. The women of Bihar at his call, defied their stereotype image and jumped into the battlefield of Satyagraha. Before the Gandhian age in Bihar, the Purdah system had confined the women within their home. Mahatma Gandhi observed this status of women very closely and was ardent to bring about women awakening. The history of woman awakening in Bihar starts with the freedom movement of Mahatma Gandhi. It was attempted to bring woman awakening even before Gandhi but it became meaningful only after him. The women got more opportunities in freedom movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The nature of movements before Mahatma Gandhi was violent but he provided non-violent nature to the freedom struggle. Women are comparatively successful then men in employing truth and non-violence. Thus, the women of Bihar showed great enthusiasm in the freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. After the end of Satyagraha in 1921, Gandhiji tried to organise people on a platform and focused on creative programme to propell their energy. At that time, a peaceful Satyagraha was adopted at wine shop and women from eminent households took part. On one hand,

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during the tardy phase of movement, the women from Bihar hand charkhas and on the other hand when the movement gained momentum they came forward as a flag-bearer. Inspired by brave women like Smt. C.C. Das, Smt. Prabhavati Devi, Smt. Urmilla devi, Rajvanshi Devi, Kasturba Gandhi etc. the women of Bihar showed their inclination towards freedom movement. In this way, the women of Bihar gave significant contribution in different movements of freedom struggle like non-cooperation movement boycotting Prince of Wales, Civil Disobedience Movement, organising large meeting in Ara against death punishment of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev, Individual Satyagraha and Quit India Movement etc. In this way, many brave women of Bihar defied the four walls to give full support to movement time to time and had been successful. They proved that women are not weak but they may fight for their motherland in need.

**Key Word :**National movement, Women, Bihar, Purdah system, Four walls, Social traditions and stereotype, Gandhiji, Champaran Satyagraha, Creative programme, Woman awakening, Role of Women and Contribution.

**Introduction :-**Bihar has always been discussed for its proud past. The women of Bihar have walked steps to steps with men not only in national movement but also have been part of communist, socialist, trade union and peasant movements. Overruling various social traditions and stereotype mindset, the women of Bihar have stepped out during National movement. Coming out of their home, they have not only matched pace with men in the struggle for freedom but also have provided successful leadership to it.

**The Revolt of 1857 and the Women of Bihar :-**The first struggle for the freedom of India started in 1857. The first organised effort to free India started in 1857 as a Sepoy mutiny. Women got a few chance to participate in this struggle. Many brave women like Lakshmi Bai, Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar, Hazrat Mahal, Jhalkari Bai, Azizan Bai, Vaija Bai, Avanti Bai etc. had sacrificed everything for their motherland. A few women from Bihar also took part in this struggle. The Haji Begum of Sasaram fought for Kunwar Singh against British. A single call of Haji Begum aroused the people of Sasaram to attack on British and compelled them to fled away. In the same way, Dharman Biwi and Dancer Gulabi also give significant contribution in the revolt of 1857. (Kumar, 2012; PP. 127-128)

**Arrival of Mahatma Gandhi and a call from the women of Bihar for National movement :-** Mahatma Gandhi employed Satyagraha for the first time in Champaran district of Bihar in 1917 in order to protect people from the atrocities of Nilaha Gora. At that time, the number of women was comparatively negligible than men in public service. Mahatma Gandhi appealed women to participate in national movement. The women of Bihar at his call, defied their stereotype image and jumped into the battlefield of Satyagraha. (Gandhi, 1954; PP. 166-167)

Before the Gandhian age in Bihar, the Purdah system had confined the women within their home. Mahatma Gandhi observed this status of women very closely and was ardent to bring about women awakening. The history of woman awakening in Bihar starts with the freedom movement of Mahatma Gandhi. It was attempted to bring woman awakening even before Gandhi but it became meaningful only after him. The women got more opportunities in freedom movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The nature of movements before Mahatma Gandhi was violent but he provided non-violent nature to the freedom struggle. Women are comparatively successful than men in employing truth and non-violence. Thus, the women of Bihar showed great enthusiasm in the freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. (Sahay, 1962; PP. 309-310)

At the end of 1917, the Montague Mission came to India and presented an administrative reform plan to Indians, which later became a part of the Government of India Act, 1919. This plan failed to fulfil the national objectives of India. Consequently, Indians grew hopeless. Indian National Congress decided to send a representative Council under the Chairmanship of a prominent barrister, Shri Hasan Imam from Bihar. In this Committee accompanied Mrs. Hasan Imam and his daughter Shami. Perhaps, she was the first woman from Bihar to go to England for political issue. But all these efforts went in vain. The British government remained firm on her policies. Montague Mission fuelled national discontentment. (Sahay, op.cit.; p. 310)

Mahatma Gandhi called for a countrywide strike against Rowlett Act. The same day, there was a big strike in Patna and women took part in large numbers. Mahatma Gandhi visited Ara on 4 December, 1920 and addressed a small gathering of woman at the home of Shri Dharmendra Prasad. Gandhiji advocated to adopt Charkhas and Swadeshi cloth. (Kumar, op.cit.; p. 130-131)

**Non-Cooperation Movement and the Women of Bihar :-** During non-cooperation, Sarla Devi appealed the Bihari students to boycott government schools. At the arrival of Prince of Wales to India, Smt. Savitri Devi called to boycott the ceremony. Smt. Urmilla Devi and Smt. C.C. Das of Patna took part in campaigning for Charkhas and Swadeshi. When Gandhi arrived Bihar in 1921 to collect fund for Deshbandhu memorial fund then the women of Bihar donated ornaments that they donned. Smt. Prabhavati Devi, the wife of Jai Prakash Narayan was pioneer among the women who travelled along with Mahatma Gandhi in Bihar. (Sinha, 2000; pp. 4-12)

After the end of Satyagraha in 1921, Gandhiji tried to organise people on a platform and focused on creative programme to propel their energy. At that time, a peaceful Satyagraha was adopted at wine shop and women from eminent households took part. On one hand, during the tardy phase of movement, the women from Bihar hand charkhas and on the other hand when the movement gained momentum they came forward as a flag-bearer. Inspired by brave women like Smt. C.C. Das, Smt. Prabhavati Devi, Smt. Urmilla devi, Rajvanshi Devi, Kasturba Gandhi etc. the women of Bihar showed their inclination towards freedom movement. In this way, the women of Bihar gave significant contribution in different movements of freedom struggle like Non-Cooperation Movement, Boycotting Prince of Wales, Civil Disobedience Movement, organising large meeting in Ara against death punishment of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev, Individual Satyagraha and Quit India Movement etc. (Sahay, op.cit.; p. 310-312)

**Salt Movement and the Women of Bihar :-** During Civil Disobedience movement, the women of Bihar participated in Salt movement of 1930 with great enthusiasm. Many women from eminent families took part in agitation to dissolve Salt Act. (Singh and Singh, 2013; p. 298). It was people from Champaran and Saran who were the first to participate in Salt Satyagrah movement. Salt was prepared at more than 500 places in Champaran. Smt. Shivdhari Pandey and other women took part in this movement. Influenced by the effective speeches of Smt. Sahilbala Rai of Santhal Paragana, many women took part in order to dissolve Salt Act. The wife of Shri Rambabhadur (bar-at-law) of Shahabad district prepared Salt in front of Sasaram Police Station. Meanwhile, Secretary of Hazaribagh Congress Committee Smt. Saraswati Devi along with Smt. Sadhna Devi were arrested and imprisoned for six months (Sahay, op.cit.; p. 312)

Smt. Mira Devi of Giridih was the third Bihari women to be arrested during Satyagrah. Mrs. Hasan Imam and Smt. Vidhyavasini Devi led an agitation in which women protested in front of foreign shops. Observing the intensity of movement, contemporary magistrate had to recruit women police in large numbers. Despite strong efforts by British government, Mrs. Hasan Imam and Smt. C.C. Das along with their daughters Miss Shami and Kumari Gauri Das remained a puzzle for the British. (Kumar, op.cit.; p. 137)

In order to boycott foreign Clothes, women organised three large demonstration and more than three thousand women took part Smt. Shah Muhammad Zubair of an eminent Muslim family of Munger district took part in the movement. Ram Swarup Devi is noted for the way she inspired people during Civil Disobedience movement. She gave a slogan—"Wake up sisters, Wake up! When problem hovers over country, it is not good to rest at home." The British government remained amazed at the trumpet of Ram Swarup Devi and she was imprisoned in 1931 at Bhagalpur Central Jail only to be released after Gandhi-Irwin pact. The women Satyagrahi under the leadership of Smt. Sadhna Devi in Santhal Pargana had troubled for British Government because children also took part in this agitation. These agitations nullified every efforts of the British Government officials. (Sahay, op.cit.; p. 312-315)

During, Salt Satyagraha people started another protest meanwhile which was against Chowkidar tax. People hated chowkidars because they were spy of Britishers and were loyal to Zamindars. A strong protest was started against Chowkidar tax and the members of chowkidar panchayat were asked to resign. A prominent female leader from Gaya, Smt. Chandrawati Devi was arrested for protesting against Chowkidar tax. This movement was successful in Bhagalpur, Saran and Munger district of Bihar. (Patna Commissioner Fortnightly Report, Government of Bihar, State Archives, Patna (unpublished), August 27, 1930); (Chandra, Mukherjee, Mukherji, Panikar and Mahajan 2003; p. 216)

A large gathering was organised in Ara on 30 March, 1931 to protest against the death punishment of Sardar Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru and Smt. Kusum Kumari Devi led this protest. She challenged youths and told "why are they lagging behind? Why are you not coming forward and sacrificing like Bhagat Singh, Bismil, Khudi Ram Bose for the cause of your motherland. The funeral pyre of Bhagat Singh is still burning, come forward and lit it." (Kumari, 2005; pp. 80-

81). Gnadhiji also with other leaders were arrested on 4 January 1932 though the events of protests and demonstration kept on going. Seven women along with the wife of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Smt. Rajwanshi Devi and Chandrwati Devi were arrested for celebrating 26 January as Independence Day. Moreover, Chandravati Devi and Rajwansi Devi were imprisoned for one and half year. (Sahay, op.cit.; p. 316-317)

**The movement of the women of Bihar against Divide and Rule policy of British Government :-**The British Government encouraged communal forces in 1941 and adopted the 'Divide and Rule' policy to keep their dominancy over India. Mahatma Gandhi initiated individual Satyagrah in 1941 against the policy of British Government. Women of Bihar also initiated Satyagrah movement in the support of it. During Satyagrah, several women were arrested Smt. Priyamvada Devi, Jagat Rani Devi and Janaki Devi were arrested in Gaya. These women were imprisoned for three months. (Sahay, op.cit.; p. 319)

**Role of the Women of Bihar in Quit India Movement :-**The revolution of 1942 and Quit India movement began due to strike of Bihari students. The women of Bihar, especially the member of Mahila Charkha Samiti tried hard to ignite the fire and gave effort to make it countrywide. (The Searchlight, August 16, 1942; p. 1) The slogan of Gandhijee 'Do or Die' affected these women deeply. Women marched moving walk and demonstrate poster in Patna. (Arya, Menon and Loknita, 2006. p. 166); (Kumar, 2009, p. 197-198) Bagwati Devi, the sister of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, led a huge protest on 9 August 1942 in Patna. As a result, she was arrested. When Smt. Saraswati Devi was being brought from Hazaribagh to Bhagalpur jail, a group of students attacked and got her free. But in 14 August, she was arrested again during delivering a speech in meeting.

Smt. Maya Devi was leading revolution in Bhagalpur district. Jiriyavati Devi, the wife of Shree Narsingh Gop, shot 16 English constables. A huge procession was organised in the presidency of Shanti Devi in town hall Chhapra on 15 August. In her speech, she appealed to the people of Chhapra to make alone August revolution. Sharda and Sarasvati, the daughter of late Ram Binod Singh from Malkhachak, aged 14 and 11 years respectively, were punished for hoisting flag at Dighwara Block in Chhapra. A great procession was marched to Dumka on 19 August that was led by Jambavati Devi and Srimati Prema Devi. As a result police arrested both of the women. The police murdered

Birzi Devi, wife of Hariher Mirdha from Santhal Pargana. The Sub-Inspector, Ramadhar Singh, beat to death to Keshav Paswan, husband of Devlagan Devi from Arwal village of Jehanabad Subdivision in Gaya on 22 August. Pyari Devi village of Mohammadpur in Gaya was arrested and sent to jail for the cause of participating in movement where she died. Akali Devi, wife of Shiv Gopal Dusad, was also became victim of the bullet of the English Constables in Jehanabad on 15 September 1942. Kumari R.C. Das handled revolution in Palamau. She united labourers of Japla Cement factory. She was taken against them under the Defence of India Act. (Kumar, op.cit.; p. 147-151)

Rampyari Devi, Manorma Devi, Shail Kumari, Binda Devi, Chandramani Devi etc. were imprisoned for three months due to procession against the British Government in Danapur on 27 April. Smt. Sunita Devi, wife of Kishori Prasann Singh and Smt. Radhika Devi, wife of Baikunth Shukla, from Vaishali disturbed the British Government by riding bicycle for miles in male dressed and awakening people. Many women's in the Bihar were martyred with the bullet of police in 1942 during Quit India Movement. Those persecuted women were mainly Smt. Viraji Madhiyain from Ghodamara village, Kumari Dhaturi Devi from Rohiyar in Munger, Sudha Sharma, the daughter of Sukhdev Sharma from the village of Belchhi in Patna. (Sahay, op.cit.; p. 320-322)

The women of Bihar were considered as India level in beginning of 1947, Rajkishori Devi, Bindhyawasini Devi, Ramtanook Devi, Chandrawati Devi, Saraswati Devi etc. contributed incredibly for the work of Congress Committee in Bihar.

**Conclusion :-** Bihari women played vital role for the national movement in Bihar. Those women mainly belonged to middle class. Percentage of middle class women took part in freedom movement and the creative programme of Mahatma Gandhi. The wife of freedom fighters continued to take part in freedom movement. Some of the high class women also took part in it. We got freedom on 15 August 1947 by the help of their great courage and incredible sacrifice. Moreover, it was a result of active participation of the women of Bihar that the Congress managed to get freedom and achieved success on the path of social and economic. Apparently, several women of Bihar came out from houses and got succession movement by contributing step-by-step. They proved that women are not helpless even they can also fight for the country.

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