



Mains Practice Question

Q. The role played by women in Indian freedom struggle has been that of 'helpers' rather than 'crusaders'. Critically examine. (250 words)

08 Mar, 2019 GS Paper 1 History

Approach

- Explain the significance of Women in the freedom struggle.
- Give some examples to prove that women were not just the 'helpers' but Crusader.

Introduction

- The history of Indian Struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of women. The sacrifice made by the women of India will occupy the foremost place. When most of the men freedom fighters were in prison, the women came forward and took charge of the struggle. They fought with true spirit and unafraid courage and faced various tortures, exploitations, and hardships to earn us freedom.

Body

The role played by women in Indian freedom struggle- 'Crusaders' not just 'helpers' -

- **Early struggles:** Woman's participation in India's freedom struggle began as early as in 1817. Bhima Bai Holkar fought bravely against the British colonel Malcolm and defeated him in guerilla warfare. Many women including Rani Channama of Kittur, Rani Begam Hazrat Mahal of Avadh fought against British East India company in the 19th century; 30 years before the "First War of Independence 1857".
- **The First War of Independence (1857-58):** Even though the British succeeded in crushing it within a year, it was certainly a popular revolt in which the Indian rulers, the masses and the militia participated so enthusiastically. Rani Lakshmi Bai was the great heroine of the First war of India Freedom. She showed the embodiment of patriotism, self-respect and heroism. She was the queen of a small state, but the empress of a limitless empire of glory.
- **Non-cooperation movement launched (1920):** Gandhi ji returned to India from South Africa in 1915 and took up the demand for self-rule and non-cooperation movement. Sarla Devi, Muthulaxmi Reddy, Susheela Nair, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Sucheta Kripalani and Aruna Asaf Ali are some the women who participated in the non-violent movement. Kasturba Gandhi, the wife of Mahatma Gandhi, and the women of the Nehru family, Kamla Nehru, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Swarup Rani, also participated in the National Movement. Lado Rani Zutshi and her daughters Manmohini, Shyama and Janak led the movement in Lahore.
- **Civil Disobedience and the Dandi Salt March (1930):** The women started their march on the road to liberty by breaking salt laws, forest laws, taking out "Prabhat Pheries", processions picketing schools, colleges, legislative councils and clubs. Sarojini Naidu was specially nominated by Gandhiji to initiate raid upon Dharasana Salt Works in May 1930. During the movement, Kamla Devi addressed meetings, prepared salt and picketed foreign cloth and liquor shops. Nari Satyagraha Committee, Mahila Rashtriya Sangha, and Ladies Picketing Board played important role during the period.

- **Revolutionary Activities:** The organization of the revolutionaries was very active in Dhaka, Comilla and Chittagong and young college girls came into its fold. The famous group of the women revolutionaries consisted of Samiti and Suniti, Bina Das, Kalpana Dutta and Preetilata Waddedar
- **The Quit India Movement (1942):** The Quit India resolution, taken against British, directly addressed women "as disciplined soldiers of Indian freedom", required to sustain the flame of war. Usha Mehta, a committed patriot set up a radio transmitter, called The "Voice of Freedom" to disseminate the "mantra" of freedom-war. News of protest and arrests, deeds of young nationalists, and Gandhi's famous "Do or Die" message for the Quit India movement were circulated amongst the masses. Usha Mehta and her brother persisted with their task of broadcasting until their arrest.

Conclusion

Women shouldered critical responsibilities in India's struggle for freedom. They held public meetings, organized picketing of shops selling foreign alcohol and articles, sold Khadi and actively participated in National Movements. They bravely faced the baton of the police and went to jails. Hundreds and thousands of Indian women dedicated their lives for obtaining freedom of their motherland.

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