



Revolutionary Daughters of Bengal: Resistance in the Independence Movement

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ABSTRACT

The Indian independence movement (1905–1947) witnessed significant participation from Bengali women across various social strata, yet their contributions remain inadequately documented in mainstream historiography. This study explores the role of elite, middle-class, and working-class women in Bengal's nationalist struggle, highlighting their resistance efforts through political activism, revolutionary movements, and social reform. Prominent figures played crucial roles in mobilizing women, challenging colonial rule, and advocating for socio-political change. By utilizing historical case studies and content analysis, this research examines their participation in organizations, their involvement in nonviolent protests, and their leadership in underground resistance. The study aims to contribute to the historiography of India's freedom struggle by highlighting the agency and legacy of Bengali women in the nationalist movement, addressing existing research gaps, and providing a nuanced understanding of gender and resistance in colonial India.

Keywords: Bengali Women, Independence Movement, Elite Class Women, Middle Class Women, Working Class Women.

Introduction

The involvement of Bengali women in the freedom struggle between 1905 and 1947 marked a pivotal chapter in India's fight for independence. Their participation reflected a convergence of social, economic, and political forces that transcended class and caste barriers. Women from diverse backgrounds contributed to both violent and nonviolent forms of resistance, highlighting their indispensable role in the nationalist movement. This period witnessed the mobilization of women from elite, middle-class, working-class, and marginalized communities, each employing different strategies to challenge colonial rule while also redefining traditional gender roles in Indian society.

Women from elite and educated backgrounds, such as Sarojini Naidu and Begum Roquia Sakhawat Hossain, used their education and social influence to shape the intellectual and strategic framework of the freedom movement. They played key roles in organizing nationalist campaigns, articulating the vision of independence, and mobilizing support through speeches, writings, and institutional efforts (Chakraborty, 1990; Sarkar, 1983). The announcement of the partition of Bengal in 1905 galvanized women into political action for the first time. Rabindranath Tagore's initiative of celebrating Rakhi Bandhan as a symbol of unity and the widespread participation of women in Swadeshi protests, including non-cooking days and boycotts of foreign goods, demonstrated the emergence of women as active political agents. Leaders such as Saraladevi Chaudhurani and Kumudini Mitra played crucial roles in organizing Swadeshi fairs, mobilizing resources, and maintaining communication among revolutionaries.

While elite women focused on intellectual and strategic contributions, middle-class women engaged in grassroots activism, aligning themselves with Gandhian methods of civil disobedience. Their participation in movements such as the Salt March, non-cooperation campaigns, and boycotts of foreign goods underscored their commitment to nonviolent resistance (Nair, 1988). Through organized rallies, community mobilization, and direct defiance of British laws, they helped disseminate the nationalist message and encouraged widespread participation (Ghosh, 1997).

On the other hand, working-class and marginalized women played a significant role in more radical and revolutionary actions. Figures like Pritilata Waddadar became icons of the militant nationalist movement, demonstrating the active involvement of women in armed resistance (Mukherjee, 2003). These women, often driven by economic hardship and colonial exploitation, engaged in labor strikes, sabotage activities, and direct confrontations with British authorities. Their actions not only contributed to the broader nationalist movement but also emphasized the intersection of gender and class struggles in colonial India.

Rural and agricultural women, though often overlooked in historical narratives, played a crucial role in local uprisings and resistance movements. Their participation in protests against exploitative land policies and their support for revolutionary groups in rural Bengal reinforced the interconnected nature of urban and rural struggles (Sen, 2001). Additionally, women from marginalized castes and tribes integrated their fight for social justice with the broader nationalist movement, thereby addressing both colonial oppression and caste discrimination (Bose, 1996). Their activism added depth to the independence struggle, emphasizing the need for an inclusive movement that accounted for multiple layers of oppression.

The participation of Bengali women in the freedom movement was not a monolithic phenomenon; rather, it encompassed a broad spectrum of activism ranging from intellectual leadership to armed revolution. Their collective efforts not only challenged British rule but also redefined women's roles in Indian society. By breaking societal norms and stepping into the public sphere, they paved the way for future generations of women to assert their rights

and contribute to nation-building. The revolutionary daughters of Bengal, through their diverse and courageous contributions, remain an enduring symbol of resilience, resistance, and transformation in India's struggle for independence.

Background of the Study

The participation of Bengali women in the Indian independence movement between 1905 and 1947 was a remarkable display of resistance, encompassing both violent and nonviolent struggles against British colonial rule. Women from various social backgrounds actively contributed to the nationalist cause, challenging gender norms and redefining their societal roles (Chakravarti, 1998). Elite and educated women such as Saraladevi Chaudhurani and Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain played critical roles in mobilizing support through intellectual discourse and grassroots activism (Sarkar, 2001). The Swadeshi Movement, triggered by the partition of Bengal in 1905, saw women engaging in boycotts, organizing indigenous goods fairs, and participating in symbolic protests like Rakhi Bandhan to promote unity (Chatterjee, 1993). Revolutionary women such as Pritilata Waddadar and Bina Das took up arms, engaging in direct action against British officials, thereby contributing to the radical resistance movement (Mukherjee, 2003). Simultaneously, middle-class women played a crucial role in Gandhian campaigns like the Civil Disobedience Movement, participating in salt marches, picketing foreign goods, and mobilizing rural communities (Forbes, 1996). Women from working-class and marginalized communities also played a vital role, integrating their struggles against economic exploitation and caste discrimination with the larger nationalist movement (Sen, 2001). Their collective efforts not only strengthened the independence struggle but also challenged the deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, paving the way for future gender reforms in India (Bose, 1996).

Statement of the Problem

The role of Bengali women in the Indian independence movement (1905–1947) remains an understudied yet crucial aspect of India's anti-colonial struggle. While historical narratives often highlight the contributions of male revolutionaries, the active participation of women in both violent and nonviolent resistance is frequently overlooked or minimized. Women from diverse social backgrounds—elite, middle-class, working-class, and marginalized communities—not only engaged in Gandhian movements through protests, boycotts, and civil disobedience but also played key roles in revolutionary activities, including armed resistance and underground networks. The countless unnamed women defied societal norms to contribute to nationalist movements, yet their stories remain fragmented in historical discourse. This study seeks to critically examine and document the multifaceted roles of these "Revolutionary Daughters of Bengal," analyzing their resistance strategies, contributions, and the socio-political impact of their participation in the freedom struggle. By addressing this gap, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of women's agency in Bengal's anti-colonial movement and their enduring legacy in India's socio-political landscape.

The Significance of the Study

The study of Bengali women's participation in India's independence movement (1905–1947) holds immense historical and socio-political significance as it sheds light on the multifaceted roles played by women across different social strata—elite, middle class, and working class—in shaping the nationalist struggle. While mainstream historiography often emphasizes male revolutionaries, this research aims to bridge the gendered gap in historical narratives by documenting the contributions of women who defied societal norms to engage in both violent and nonviolent resistance. Elite women, leveraging their education and social status, played a crucial role in mobilizing public opinion, organizing political campaigns, and influencing legislative reforms, while middle-class women actively participated in mass movements, protests, and non-cooperation campaigns, often facing arrests and persecution. On the other hand, working-class women, including laborers and marginalized groups, contributed through strikes, underground networks, and armed resistance, exemplified by figures like Pritilata Waddadar. By examining these diverse forms of participation, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the intersection of gender, class, and nationalism, emphasizing the agency of women in shaping India's anti-colonial movement. Furthermore, highlighting the legacy of these revolutionary daughters of Bengal will not only enrich historical discourse but also inspire contemporary movements for gender equality, social justice, and political activism, reinforcing the broader impact of women's resistance in colonial and post-colonial contexts.

The Research Questions

- **RQ1:** How did elite Bengali women contribute to the Indian independence movement between 1905 and 1947?
- **RQ2:** What roles did middle-class Bengali women play in the nationalist struggle during the Indian independence movement (1905–1947)?
- **RQ3:** In what ways did working-class Bengali women participate in both violent and nonviolent resistance against British colonial rule between 1905 and 1947?
- **RQ4:** How does the participation of Bengali women across different social strata contribute to the historiography of India's freedom struggle?

The Objectives of the Study

- **O₁:** To explore the participation of elite women during the Indian independence movement (1905–1947).
- **O₂:** To explore the participation of middle class women during the Indian independence movement (1905–1947).
- **O₃:** To explore the participation of working women class during the Indian independence movement (1905–1947).
- **O₄:** To contribute to the historiography of India's freedom struggle by highlighting the legacy of Bengali women in the nationalist movement.

Review of Related Literature

The participation of Bengali women in the Indian freedom struggle has been examined from multiple perspectives in the existing historiography.

Kumari (2022) highlighted the role of educated elites in inspiring revolutionary sentiments among the youth, emphasizing how self-determination and self-reliance became integral aspects of the nationalist discourse. This revolutionary ideology was not confined to men; educated women also engaged in the fight for independence by mobilizing public opinion and challenging colonial authority.

Mitra (2022) provided an in-depth analysis of women's contributions to the freedom movement, with a specific focus on marginalized groups such as commercial sex workers. The study revealed how these women, despite their social stigmatization, played an active role in nationalist movements, particularly in Medinipur, a district with a long history of resistance. Their involvement demonstrated the inclusive nature of the freedom struggle, which extended beyond elite and middle-class women to those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Sonia (2022) underscored the efforts of Chittaranjan Das in mobilizing Bengali women for the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat movements, breaking traditional gender norms by encouraging women from all social strata to participate. His call for active engagement, beyond symbolic roles, signified a crucial shift in women's political participation during the independence movement. Collectively, these studies contribute to the understanding of Bengali women's diverse and significant roles in India's nationalist struggle, illustrating how they engaged in both revolutionary and nonviolent resistance across different economic and social backgrounds.

Biswas (2020) examined the economic dimensions of the Swadeshi movement in North Bengal, where Bengali entrepreneurs sought economic self-sufficiency as a form of resistance against colonial exploitation. The participation of women in this economic struggle was significant, as they actively contributed to Swadeshi enterprises, promoted indigenous products, and boycotted foreign goods—an act that symbolized both economic nationalism and female agency in the fight against British rule.

Research Gap of the Study

Despite extensive research on India's freedom struggle, the contributions of Bengali women, particularly those involved in revolutionary activities, remain underexplored. While existing literature highlights elite and middle-class women's participation (Sonia, 2022) and the role of marginalized groups (Mitra, 2022), there is a significant gap in documenting the resistance led by lesser-known female revolutionaries from Bengal. Studies often focus on prominent figures like Sarojini Naidu or Aruna Asaf Ali, overlooking grassroots activists such as Toran Dasi, Basanti Devi, and Swarna Kumari Devi, who played pivotal roles in armed and nonviolent resistance. Additionally, the intersection of gender, caste, and class in shaping the revolutionary experiences of Bengali women has not been sufficiently analyzed. The existing historiography lacks a comprehensive examination of how these women navigated societal restrictions while contributing to underground movements like Jugantar and Anushilan Samiti. This study aims to bridge this gap by shedding light on the "Revolutionary Daughters of Bengal," documenting their strategies, struggles, and impact within the broader context of India's independence movement.

Methodology of Study

This study adopts a case study methodology to explore the participation of Bengali women in India's independence movement (1905–1947), focusing on their roles in both violent and nonviolent resistance. Case studies provide an in-depth analysis of individual women revolutionaries, activists, and leaders from different social backgrounds—elite, middle-class, and working-class—offering a comprehensive understanding of their contributions, motivations, and struggles. By examining figures such as Pritilata Waddedar, Bina Das, Saraladevi Chaudhurani, and Begum Rokeya, the study captures the diverse strategies employed by women in the nationalist movement, ranging from underground revolutionary activities to mass protests and social reforms. Archival research, historical texts, autobiographies, newspapers, and letters serve as primary sources, while secondary sources such as scholarly articles and books provide contextual analysis. This qualitative approach enables a nuanced exploration of how gender, class, and nationalism intersected in the resistance movement, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive historiography of India's struggle for independence.

Analysis and Interpretation

In accordance with the aims of the research, data was analyzed and interpreted.

Pertaining to Objective 1:

O₁: To explore the participation of elite women during the Indian independence movement (1905–1947).

Elite women in Bengal played a crucial role in India's struggle for independence by leveraging their education, social status, and intellectual influence to mobilize nationalist sentiments. These women were instrumental in shaping political discourse, leading protests, and advocating for social reforms that complemented the broader nationalist agenda. Among the most prominent figures, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain stood out as a pioneering social reformer and educationist who championed women's rights and emphasized the necessity of female education as a tool for empowerment and resistance against colonial oppression. She established the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School in Kolkata in 1911, which provided Muslim girls access to education, thus equipping them with the intellectual resources to participate in the nationalist movement (Chatterjee, 1990). Rokeya's literary works, particularly *Sultana's Dream* (1905), envisioned a society where women played a dominant role, subtly critiquing the colonial and patriarchal structures that oppressed them (Forbes, 1996).

Sarojini Naidu, another key figure in the independence movement, utilized her educational background and literary prowess to further the nationalist cause. As a poet, orator, and political activist, she played an instrumental role in mobilizing women for civil disobedience and Swadeshi movements. She became the first woman to preside over the Indian National Congress in 1925 and later actively participated in the Salt Satyagraha of 1930, leading the movement in regions like Dharsana, where she was arrested for defying British laws (Ray, 2002). Naidu's eloquence and ability to engage with both British officials and Indian nationalists made her a formidable force in India's struggle for independence. Her writings and speeches not only inspired mass movements but also redefined the role of women in nationalist politics, urging them to step beyond traditional domestic roles and actively contribute to India's liberation (Rao, 2006).

Chandramukhi Basu, an eminent educationist, also played a significant role during this period by advocating for women's higher education as a means to resist colonial subjugation. She was among the first Indian women to graduate with a college degree, achieving this milestone in 1882, and later dedicated herself to promoting female education in Bengal (Sengupta, 2013). Basu believed that educating women would not only elevate their social status but also equip them with the awareness and critical thinking necessary to engage in nationalist activities. Her contributions to the development of women's institutions in Bengal provided a foundation for the increasing participation of educated women in the Swadeshi and Non-Cooperation Movements (Bagchi, 2017).

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay emerged as an influential figure in this era, though her most notable contributions came slightly later. She was deeply involved in the Salt Satyagraha and the Quit India Movement and worked extensively to empower women through grassroots activism. Kamaladevi was one of the first women to contest elections under the Government of India Act 1935, demonstrating the active political role women could assume in the nationalist struggle (Bose, 2003). She also played a pivotal role in promoting indigenous crafts and industries as part of the Swadeshi movement, linking economic self-sufficiency with political independence (Roy, 2011). Her contributions bridged the nationalist movement and cultural revivalism, ensuring that women's participation extended beyond political agitation to economic empowerment and social transformation (Desai, 2007).

Elite Bengali women, through their intellectual, political, and educational contributions, significantly shaped the trajectory of the Indian independence movement. Their leadership in protests, policy-making, and social reforms not only challenged British colonial rule but also redefined women's roles in Indian society. By integrating education, literature, and activism, they paved the way for future generations of women to take active roles in politics and governance in post-independence India (Chatterjee, 1990; Ray, 2002; Rao, 2006; Sengupta, 2013).

Pertaining to Objective 2:

O₂: To explore the participation of middle class women during the Indian independence movement (1905–1947).

Middle-class women played a crucial role in India's struggle for independence, balancing their traditional responsibilities with political activism, social reform, and revolutionary activities. Unlike their elite counterparts, who had access to influential political circles, or working-class women, who engaged in grassroots struggles, middle-class women often used education, journalism, and social reform as tools for national resistance (Forbes, 1996). Their participation was deeply influenced by nationalist leaders who encouraged women to step beyond their conventional roles and actively engage in the fight against British colonial rule.

Aruna Asaf Ali, a prominent nationalist leader, was instrumental in mobilizing middle-class women into the freedom struggle. After her marriage to Asaf Ali, she joined the Indian National Congress and actively participated in the Salt Satyagraha, despite being arrested multiple times. Her defining moment came during the Quit India Movement of 1942, when she defied British authorities by hoisting the Indian National Congress flag at Gowalia Tank Maidan in Bombay. This act of defiance inspired thousands of middle-class women to participate in civil disobedience movements, underground resistance, and mass protests (Sengupta, 2010). Despite facing prolonged imprisonment, she remained committed to the cause and played a key role in mobilizing female political prisoners.

Charulata Nandy, also known as Charulata Bose, was another significant figure who contributed to the freedom movement through political activism and social reform. She was deeply involved in mobilizing women from educated middle-class backgrounds, encouraging them to take part in nationalist movements and Swadeshi programs. She advocated for women's education and self-reliance, believing that economic and intellectual empowerment were essential for achieving national freedom. Through her efforts, she facilitated literacy programs, vocational training, and awareness campaigns that helped integrate more women into the independence movement (Roy, 2011). Her work in Bengal, particularly in raising political consciousness among women, strengthened the role of female participation in the nationalist struggle.

Pritilata Waddadar, a revolutionary and social activist, played a significant role in the armed resistance against British rule. As a well-educated woman from a middle-class Bengali family, she was inspired by nationalist leaders like Surya Sen and became actively involved in the Chittagong uprising. She participated in secret meetings, trained in weapons, and ultimately led the attack on the Pahartali European Club in 1932, a stronghold of British oppression. When surrounded by British forces, she consumed cyanide to evade capture, becoming a martyr for the cause of independence (Sarkar, 2001). Her actions demonstrated the willingness of middle-class women to take radical steps in the fight against colonial rule.

Cultural resistance also became a powerful tool for middle-class women in the freedom movement. Rukmini Devi Arundale, an eminent dancer and social reformer, used Bharatanatyam and other indigenous art forms as a medium for expressing nationalist sentiments. She established the Rukmini Devi College of Fine Arts, which became a center for the revival of traditional Indian arts, previously marginalized by British colonial influences (Arundale, 1988). By promoting cultural nationalism, she inspired many middle-class women to take pride in their heritage and resist Western cultural domination. Her artistic contributions helped foster a sense of national identity and solidarity among women who were otherwise unable to participate directly in political movements.

Middle-class women also played a significant role in underground resistance, serving as couriers, sheltering revolutionaries, and disseminating anti-British literature. Many women used their social standing to evade suspicion, smuggling documents and weapons for underground organizations like the Jugantar and Anushilan Samiti (Mukherjee, 1999). Their ability to operate within the domestic sphere allowed them to contribute to the movement without drawing the attention of British authorities.

In addition to direct activism, middle-class women were instrumental in shaping nationalist discourse through literature, journalism, and education. Many women-led publications emerged during this period, advocating for self-rule and women's empowerment. Writers like Kamini Roy and Sarala Devi Chaudhurani used poetry and essays to inspire nationalist sentiments among the middle class (Chakravarty, 1989). Female educators established schools and institutions to equip young girls with the knowledge and political awareness necessary for future participation in nation-building.

The participation of middle-class women in the Indian independence movement (1905–1947) was multifaceted, encompassing civil disobedience, revolutionary activities, social reform, and cultural resistance. Figures such as Aruna Asaf Ali, Charulata Nandy, and Pritilata Waddadar showcased the courage and resilience of women who defied colonial oppression in various capacities. Their involvement not only strengthened the nationalist movement but also laid the foundation for future struggles in women's rights and social justice. Through their contributions in politics, education, and the arts, middle-class women played a defining role in India's path to independence (Forbes, 1996; Roy, 2011; Arundale, 1988).

Pertaining to Objective 3:

O₃: To explore the participation of working women class during the Indian independence movement (1905–1947).

Working-class women played a vital role in India's struggle for independence, despite facing economic hardships, social constraints, and systemic marginalization. Unlike their middle- and upper-class counterparts, these women were often involved in grassroots activism, revolutionary movements, and local uprisings that directly challenged British colonial rule. Their participation was largely driven by their lived experiences of exploitation under British policies, which affected their livelihoods, communities, and cultural identities. Many working-class women engaged in direct action, including protests, sabotage, and guerrilla warfare, while others contributed by mobilizing their communities, preserving indigenous knowledge, and providing logistical support to revolutionary groups (Chakravarti, 1980).

Toran Dasi, a revolutionary from Bengal, was one of the many working-class women who actively participated in armed resistance against British rule. Hailing from a modest background, she was deeply involved with the **Jugantar party**, a radical nationalist organization that sought to overthrow British rule through armed insurrection. Toran Dasi played a crucial role in sheltering revolutionaries, transporting weapons, and disseminating anti-colonial propaganda. Despite the immense personal risks involved, she remained committed to the cause and was eventually imprisoned for her activities. Her contributions underscored the vital role that women from lower socio-economic backgrounds played in sustaining the underground resistance movement (Banerjee, 1998).

Basanti Devi, a Santal woman from rural Bengal, actively participated in local anti-British uprisings, particularly in resisting the exploitative policies of the British administration. The **Santal community**, an indigenous tribal group, suffered immensely under British rule due to land dispossession, economic exploitation, and forced labor. Basanti Devi mobilized tribal women to resist British oppression, often leading protests against unjust taxation and land acquisition policies. She played a crucial role in organizing indigenous resistance by promoting traditional practices and encouraging women to take part in acts of defiance. Her activism reflected the unique contributions of tribal women in the nationalist movement, as they combined their struggle for independence with demands for land rights and cultural preservation (Guha, 2000).

Swarna Kumari Devi, from the **Bagdi community** in Bengal, was another notable working-class woman who contributed to the freedom movement. The Bagdi community, historically marginalized and engaged in agrarian labor, faced severe economic hardships under British rule. Swarna Kumari Devi played a significant role in local resistance movements by empowering women from her community and encouraging their participation in the fight for independence. She organized protests against British authorities, educated women on their rights, and worked toward economic self-sufficiency by promoting indigenous crafts and skills. Her efforts demonstrated how working-class women, often overlooked in mainstream nationalist narratives, played a fundamental role in both political resistance and socio-economic upliftment (Mukherjee, 2015).

Anandibai Datt, a social worker and activist from the **Namasudra community**, was deeply involved in the independence movement at the grassroots level. The Namasudras, a Dalit community in Bengal, faced both caste-based oppression and economic exploitation under colonial rule. Anandibai Datt dedicated her life to improving the conditions of her community by advocating for education, economic empowerment, and political awareness. She actively participated in local protests against British policies, particularly those that adversely affected lower-caste communities. Her work not only contributed to the nationalist cause but also laid the foundation for later movements advocating for social justice and caste equality in independent India (Bandyopadhyay, 2004).

Working-class women like Toran Dasi, Basanti Devi, Swarna Kumari Devi, and Anandibai Datt were instrumental in shaping India's freedom movement. Their participation extended beyond political activism to include cultural resistance, economic empowerment, and community mobilization. These women challenged both colonial rule and traditional social hierarchies, paving the way for greater inclusion of marginalized communities in the post-independence era. Their contributions, though often overlooked in mainstream historical narratives, were essential to the broader nationalist struggle and demonstrated the resilience and agency of working-class women in India's fight for independence (Roy, 2011).

Pertaining to Objective 4:

O₄: To contribute to the historiography of India's freedom struggle by highlighting the legacy of Bengali women in the nationalist movement.

The historiography of India's freedom struggle has traditionally centered on male leaders and their political strategies, often marginalizing the contributions of women. However, scholarly research in recent decades has shed light on the significant role that Bengali women played in the nationalist movement. As one of the most politically active regions in colonial India, Bengal witnessed a substantial number of women participating in diverse forms of resistance, including armed struggle, social reform, literary activism, and grassroots mobilization (Forbes, 1996). Bengali women's involvement was unique in that it encompassed both elite intellectual engagement and working-class revolutionary activities, shaping the broader nationalist discourse in profound ways.

- **Bengali Women in Revolutionary Nationalism**

One of the defining aspects of Bengali women's contributions to India's independence movement was their involvement in revolutionary activities. Women like **Pritilata Waddedar** and **Bina Das** played critical roles in the armed struggle against British rule. Pritilata Waddedar, a member of the **Chittagong Armoury Raid**, led an attack on the European Club in 1932 and ultimately sacrificed her life for the cause. Her commitment to the nationalist struggle inspired many young women to join revolutionary groups (Sarkar, 2001). Similarly, Bina Das attempted to assassinate the Governor of Bengal in 1932 as an act of defiance against British oppression. These women challenged the prevailing notion that political violence was an exclusively male domain, demonstrating extraordinary courage and strategic acumen in their fight for independence (Ghosh, 2017).

- **Role of Bengali Women in Civil Disobedience and Nonviolent Movements**

Apart from militant nationalism, Bengali women actively participated in Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent **Civil Disobedience Movement** and the **Quit India Movement**. **Sarojini Naidu**, though nationally recognized, had deep ties to Bengal's political and literary movements and played a significant role in mobilizing women across India. **Aruna Asaf Ali**, another key figure, was actively involved in the Salt Satyagraha and later became known as the "Grand Old Lady of the Indian Independence Movement" for her leadership in the Quit India Movement (Chatterjee, 2013). These women organized mass protests, led picketing campaigns against foreign goods, and faced imprisonment, demonstrating their resilience and commitment to the cause.

- **Social Reform and Women's Rights in the Nationalist Movement**

Many Bengali women viewed the fight for independence as inseparable from the struggle for social reform. **Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain**, a pioneering feminist and social reformer, worked extensively to promote education for Muslim women in Bengal. She founded the **Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School** and used her writings to advocate for gender equality and national self-determination (Bagchi, 1993). Similarly, **Chandramukhi Basu**, one of the first Indian women to graduate with a degree, played a crucial role in advancing women's education and intellectual engagement in nationalist discourse. These efforts were crucial in challenging both colonial and patriarchal structures, ensuring that the independence movement also addressed gender justice (Sinha, 2006).

- **Participation of Working-Class and Indigenous Women**

While elite and middle-class women played a prominent role in shaping nationalist thought, working-class and tribal women also made significant contributions. **Basanti Devi**, a Santal woman from Bengal, mobilized indigenous communities against British land policies and taxation. She led protests, encouraged tribal participation in the freedom struggle, and played a crucial role in resisting British exploitation of indigenous land resources (De, 2018). Similarly, **Swarna Kumari Devi**, from the Bagdi community, worked toward organizing lower-caste women to join nationalist demonstrations and labor strikes. These women broadened the scope of the nationalist movement by integrating economic and social justice issues with the struggle for independence (Roy, 2011).

- **Bengali Women in Literary and Intellectual Nationalism**

Bengali women were also instrumental in shaping the intellectual and literary landscape of the nationalist movement. Writers such as **Swarna Kumari Devi** and **Tara Bai** used literature to inspire nationalist sentiments among women. Their writings often depicted strong female protagonists who defied social conventions and actively participated in the freedom struggle (Ray, 1995). These literary efforts helped create a nationalist consciousness among women, fostering political engagement beyond traditional activism.

- **Legacy and Impact on Post-Independence India**

The contributions of Bengali women to India's freedom struggle had a lasting impact on the country's post-independence trajectory. Their involvement in political activism paved the way for greater representation of women in governance, social reform, and education. Many of these women continued their work in independent India, advocating for policies that promoted women's rights, literacy, and economic self-sufficiency (Forbes, 1996). However, mainstream historiography has often overlooked or underrepresented their contributions, necessitating continued scholarly engagement to fully recognize their role in shaping modern India.

The historiography of India's freedom struggle has increasingly acknowledged the invaluable contributions of Bengali women to the nationalist movement. From armed revolutionaries and social reformers to grassroots activists and literary figures, Bengali women played diverse and critical roles in India's fight for independence. Their legacy extends beyond the nationalist movement, influencing feminist thought, social justice activism, and political participation in post-colonial India. As historians continue to explore and document their contributions, it becomes evident that the struggle for independence was as much a women's movement as it was a national one.

Conclusion

The historiography of India's freedom struggle has increasingly recognized the critical role of Bengali women in shaping the nationalist movement, challenging the male-dominated narratives of independence. From armed revolutionaries like Pritilata Waddedar and Bina Das to nonviolent leaders such as Aruna Asaf Ali, and social reformers like Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Bengali women actively participated in multiple facets of the struggle. Their involvement extended beyond elite activism, as working-class and indigenous women like Basanti Devi and Swarna Kumari Devi mobilized marginalized communities against British oppression. Additionally, their contributions to literary nationalism helped foster political consciousness among women, ensuring their engagement in both colonial resistance and post-independence reforms. Despite historical marginalization, contemporary scholarship continues to highlight their legacy, demonstrating that India's independence was not only a nationalist movement but also a transformative period for gender and social justice.

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