



Unveiling The Role Of Women's Organization In Uttar Pradesh During The National Movement: Challenges, Contributions And Legacy

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Abstract

The role of women in the Indian freedom struggle is a significant yet underexplored aspect of history. In the context of Uttar Pradesh, a region with a rich cultural and political heritage women's organizations have played a pivotal role in mobilizing support fostering political consciousness, and participating in various forms of resistance against British colonial rule.

This paper explores the multifaceted contributions of women in Uttar Pradesh, highlighting how they mobilized, organized, and participated in the national movement. This paper also delves into the emergence and evolution of women's organizations in Uttar Pradesh during the freedom struggle. It examines their efforts to address social issues such as education, health, and gender equality.

In this abstract, we will discuss how they faced the challenges during establishing these organizations. Through primary and secondary sources, including archival records, personal memoirs, and contemporary accounts, this study offers a comprehensive analysis of the impact of these organizations.

Key organizations like the Kanya Gurukul in Dehradun, The Allahabad Women's Association, The All-India Women Conference, and other associations provided platforms for women to engage in political discourse and activism. It highlights prominent figures such as Sarojini Naidu, Sarala Devi Chaudharani, and others who played pivotal roles in galvanizing support and inspiring future generations.

Ultimately in conclusion, this paper aims to underscore the indispensable role of women's organizations in Uttar Pradesh, not only as supporters but as leaders in the struggle for India's independence, thus contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the national movements.

Key Words: Women, Organization, Movement, Education, independence.

Introduction

The 19th and 20th centuries were pivotal periods for women's rights movements globally. During these centuries women organized mass movements and protests to fight for various rights including suffrage, labor rights, education, and equality. For example, The Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 marked the beginning of the women's suffrage movement in the U.S. Leaders like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony played a crucial role in the U.K. The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), founded by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1903, was instrumental in the fight for women's voting rights.

In India, the 19th and 20th centuries were significant for women's movements and protests, marked by their growing participation in social and political spheres. In India, the fight for the betterment of women's condition in society was started by men's social reformers, such as Rajaram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchand Vidyasagar, Jyotirao Phule, etc. Later on, women started forming organizations at local later national levels.

The role of women's organizations in Uttar Pradesh during the Indian freedom struggle represents a significant chapter in the history of India's fight for independence.

Women leaders such as Sarojini Naidu (who was the first Indian women president of the Indian National Congress), Sucheta Kriplani, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Sarala Devi Chaudharani, and others emerged as influential figures, inspiring many to join the nationalist cause. These leaders and their organizations such as Ladies Society (Calcutta), Arya Mahila Samaj (Pune), Stree Zarthosti Manadal, The Women's Indian Association (Madras), National Council of Women in India, Desh Sevika Sangh, Nari Satyagraha Samiti, Bharat Stree Mahamandal (U.P.), Allahabad Women Association (U.P.), Bharat Mahila Parishad (U.P.), and others were played pivotal roles in mobilizing women, conducting protest and spreading nationalist ideas. They also addressed social issues such as women's education, child marriage, and widow remarriage thus intertwining the struggle for national liberation with social reform.

The strategies employed by these organizations, such as non-violent protests, boycotts, and educational campaigns galvanize support for independence. They faced sociocultural challenges, including patriarchal resistance and limited access to resources, but they overcame them through resilience and solidarity.

Because of these organizations, women knew their rights, and their literacy rates were also improved, so they openly participated in national movements. Such as during the Swadeshi Movement women participated actively in the boycott of British goods and promoted indigenous products. Women organized swadeshi meals and Sarla Devi Chaudharani opened "Lakshmi Bhandar" which sold only indigenous goods. Women gave up the use of foreign clothes and smashed their foreign bangles.¹ When the Non-Cooperation Movement began, women joined in large numbers, participating in protests, boycotts, and picketing liquor shops in Uttar Pradesh for other reasons, and leaders like Sarojini Naidu emerged as prominent figures. Other than this, women played a crucial role in the Civil Disobedience Movement, with many participating in the salt march and other acts of civil disobedience. Some prominent leaders such as Satyavati Devi were actively involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement. She led protests, organized meetings, and mobilized women to participate in the movement. Her efforts were instrumental in spreading the movement in various parts of Uttar Pradesh. The wife of Jawaharlal Nehru, Kamala Nehru was an active participant in the Civil Disobedience Movement in Uttar Pradesh, and many women leaders participated and encouraged other women to participate in this all-national movement.

Women in Uttar Pradesh not only supported the border objectives of the Indian National Congress but also addressed specific issues such as education, social reforms, and rural development, thereby fostering a sense of unity and purpose among women from diverse backgrounds.

¹ Sumit Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, p.288

These organizations and leaders helped bridge the gap between the domestic sphere and the public domain, enabling women to contribute significantly to the freedom movement.

Organizations

Bharat Stree Mahamandal

It was one of the earliest women's organizations in India, founded in 1910 in Allahabad by Sarala Devi Chaudhurani. It played a significant role in the Indian women's movement, focusing on social reform and the education of women.

Sarala Devi Chaudhurani was a prominent Bengali social worker, poet, and writer. She was the niece of Rabindra Nath Tagore and was influenced by the nationalist movement in Bengal. Her vision for Bharat Stree Mahamandal was to empower women and integrate them into the national movement for independence.

Bharat Stree Mahamandal promoting education for women was the primary objective. The organization established schools and colleges for girls and women, emphasizing the importance of literacy and higher education. Other than this, addressing social issues, like, child marriage, the Purdah system, etc. The organization advocated for women's status in society and it also raised awareness about political rights and encouraged women to participate in the national movement.

Allahabad Women Association

It was founded in the early 20th century in Allahabad, this organization was founded by progressive women, including figures such as Mrs. Keskar and Mrs. H.A. Harrison. It focuses on women's empowerment.

The organization works towards the betterment of women's health and hygiene. It organized meetings and rallies to raise political awareness among women and supported nationalist activities. The Allahabad Women's Association played a crucial role in the early 20th century.

Kanya Gurukul in Dehradun

It is a notable institution with a rich history and significant contributions to women's education and empowerment in India.

It was founded in 1922 by Acharya Ramdev, who was a prominent educationist and social reformer.

By educating girls, the institution has positively impacted the communities they belong to, fostering social and economic development.

Bharat Mahila Parishad

It was founded in 1905, and this organization was founded as part of the National Social Conference, which was an offshoot of the Indian National Congress. It was inaugurated to work for the betterment of the social condition of women.

The organization held a meeting in 1905, at which presented papers by twelve women on the topic "Female Education", "Grahsta Dharma", "Matri Puja", "The Place of Women in Modern India", "Relating to Child Birth", "The Hindu Wife and What She Should Be", "Pavitrata", "Brahamcharya and Its Advantages", "Vedokta Sanskar", "Advantages of Hawan", "Injurious Efforts of Child Marriage", and "The Duty of Indian Women in Modern Age".²

These organizations provided a platform for Uttar Pradesh women to voice their concerns and participate in the political process.

² K.B. Pradhan, Women in Indian National Freedom Movement, p.112

The influence of national-level women's organizations was profound in shaping the trajectory of women leaders in Uttar Pradesh. They provided the necessary support, inspiration, and platform for women to emerge as significant contributors to both the national movement and the socio-political development of the state. During the Indian national movement, several national-level women's organizations played pivotal roles in mobilizing women across the country, including in Uttar Pradesh.

1. **Women's Indian Association (WIA):** The establishment of the Women's Indian Association in 1917 was the first attempt to organize women on an Indian basis.³ It encouraged women in Uttar Pradesh to participate in political and take up leadership roles. Prominent leaders like Begum Hamid Ali and Sucheta Kriplani emerged, advocating for women's participation in politics and national movements.
2. **All India Women's Conference (AIWC):** Margaret Cousins, secretary of the Women's Indian Association made efforts to find the All-India Women's Conference in January 1927. It was a non-political organization and in the initial stage, it received the patronage of royalty and members of Pro-British families.⁴ All India Women's Conference established branches in various cities of Uttar Pradesh, which became centers for women's education and empowerment. All India Women's Conference influenced local leaders like Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Rani Lakshmi Kumari Chundawat, who worked tirelessly for women's education and social reform.
3. **National Council of Women in India (NCWI):** It was founded in 1925, and was led by Lady Meherbai Tata. NCWI was affiliated with the International Council of Women. NCWI's campaigns for legal and social reforms resonated with women leaders in Uttar Pradesh, encouraging them to advocate for similar changes at the local level.

The activities and campaigns of national organizations like AIWC and WIA provided inspiration and support to women in Uttar Pradesh. Women leaders in the region were encouraged to mobilize and form their local organizations, addressing issues specific to their communities while aligning with the broader goals of the national movement.

These national-level organizations focus on women's education and led to increased literacy and educational opportunities for women in Uttar Pradesh. This, in turn, helped in the emergence of educated women leaders who could articulate their demands and lead social reform initiatives.

National organizations played a crucial role in advocating for women's political rights, which inspired women in Uttar Pradesh to participate in political activities. This participation ranged from attending meetings and protests to holding leadership positions in local and regional organizations.

The legal advocacy efforts of national organizations influenced women leaders in Uttar Pradesh to campaign for legal reforms at the local level. Issues such as child marriage, women's property rights, and divorce laws were taken up by regional leaders, drawing from the national discourse.

The formation and activities of national-level women's organizations significantly impacted the emergence and development of women leaders in Uttar Pradesh. These leaders drew inspiration from the national discourse and contributed to the regional and national movements, creating a legacy of women's participation and leadership in India's struggle for independence.

³ Margaret E. Cousins, *Indian Womanhood Today*, p.26

⁴ Aparna Basu and Bharathi Roy, *Women's Struggle: A History of the All India Women's Conference 1927-1990*, p.62

Legacy

The legacy of women's organizations in Uttar Pradesh during the national movement is profound and multifaceted. These organizations laid the foundation for women's active participation in social, political, and economic spheres in the post-independence era.

The activism of these organizations influenced government policies at both state and national levels. Policies related to women's education, health, and social welfare often reflect the priorities and demands raised by these pioneering women's groups.

The organization continued to inspire many women activists and played a crucial role in the broader national movement for independence. It highlighted the importance of women's participation in social and political spheres and contributed to the emergence of a more inclusive and progressive society.

The organizations fostered a sense of cultural pride and encouraged women to contribute to the preservation and promotion of Indian culture and heritage. The participation of women in the national movement also influenced literature and arts in Uttar Pradesh. Many women writers, poets, and artists emerged, using their work to highlight social issues and the role of women in society. These organizations contributed to cultural reforms by challenging traditional norms and promoting progressive values. They organized cultural programs, debates, and discussions to foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

Its legacy continues to inspire and shape the discourse on women's rights and gender equality in India.

Challenges

The formation of women's organizations during the national movement in India faced several challenges. These challenges can be categorized into social, cultural, political, and organizational aspects:

Social and Cultural Challenges

- **Traditional Gender Roles:** Women were primarily seen as homemakers, and their involvement in public life was restricted. Overcoming these deeply ingrained societal norms was a significant hurdle.
- **Lack of Education:** The low literacy rates among women limited their ability to participate actively and effectively in organizational work.
- **Patriarchal Resistance:** There was considerable resistance from male-dominated society, including from within the families, against women stepping out and participating in the national movement.
- **Social Stigma:** Women who participated in public and political activities often faced social ostracism and were labeled as deviants from traditional norms.

Political Challenges

- **Colonial Oppression:** The British colonial government viewed any form of organization with suspicion and often suppressed nationalist activities, including those led by women.
- **Limited Political Representation:** Women had very little representation in formal political structures, making it difficult for their voices to be heard and their issues to be addressed within the broader national movement.
- **Skepticism within the Movement:** Even within the nationalist movement, there was skepticism and sometimes outright opposition to women's active involvement, with many male leaders preferring to keep women in supportive roles.

Organizational Challenges

- **Resource Constraints:** Women's organizations often lack access to financial resources, making it challenging to sustain their activities and mobilize large numbers of women.
- **Leadership Development:** Developing effective women leaders who could inspire and organize was a slow process due to the lack of precedents and role models.
- **Communication Barriers:** Poor communication infrastructure and the vast geographical spread of India made coordination and dissemination of information difficult.

Despite these challenges, several factors contributed to the formation and success of women's organizations during the national movement:

Inspirational leadership figures like Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, and Annie Besant played pivotal roles in mobilizing women and leading by example. Women's organizations often started at the grassroots level, addressing local issues which gradually built up to larger movements.

The global women's suffrage movement and the involvement of Indian women in international forums helped in gain ideas, strategies, and support for the cause back home.

Conclusion

The 1935 Act was passed by the name of Government of India Act. This act led to the formation of ministries in provinces after general elections. Women contested and won seats in the elections. Vijayalakshmi Pandit became the first women minister. Ansuyabai Kale and Sipi Milani became deputy speakers of the Central Provinces and Sind assemblies, respectively. The ministries formed under the 1935 act didn't last due to the outbreak of World War 2nd.

The political crisis led to the first individual Satyagraha and the Quit India Movement, in 1942. Key leaders were arrested, prompting women like Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kriplani, and Usha Mehta to take charge and continue the independence movement.

The participation of women in these movements not only contributed significantly to India's struggle for Independence but also led the foundation for future women's right movement. Their involvement challenged traditional gender roles and paved the way for greater social and political empowerment of women in India.

In conclusion, the formation and activities of women's organizations in Uttar Pradesh during the national movement were instrumental in advancing the cause of Indian independence and promoting women's rights. These organizations empowered women, advocated for crucial social and legal reforms, and ensured that women's voices were heard in the national discourse. Their impact continues to be felt today, as their legacy inspires ongoing efforts toward gender equality and social justice in India.

Its efforts in promoting education; social reforms, economic empowerment, and health have left a lasting impact on the lives of countless women and continue to inspire future generations.

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