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# NATIONALISM AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN TAMILNADU (1917- 1947)

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## **Introduction**

The national movement had been the most important cause of women emergence in the Socio -Political life of the country. There emerged a common purpose that was the freedom of the country. All reforms including Mahatma Gandhi emphatically that in order to play her full and destined role in world affairs, in the solution of conflicts by non - violent means, women must extent their hearts and interest beyond the narrow confines of their homes and family and embrace the whole humanity.

## **Home Rule Movement**

As elsewhere in India, the Home Rule and non co-operation, movements brought the women of Tamilnadu to the forefront. Women theosophists like Mrs. Arundale, D/o. Mr.G.S.Arundale, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, SivakamuAmmal and Ambujammal were notable women Home Rule members. At a meeting convened at Madras by the Madras Home Rule League on 9th August 1917. Mrs. Arundale was extended a warm welcome. The first Home Rule League had already been formed by BalaGangadhar Tilak in Maharashtra and so to distinguish from in Annie Besant Christened the former the All India Home Rule League in 1917. Mrs.A. Ambujammal was very popular in Madras city and there was a mass following in all. Her speeches and meetings, she had for propaganda after home Rule League. In one such meeting, Ambujammal along with her aunt Janamma attended and was attracted to the movement and became ardent follower of Annie Besant. The seeds of nationalism were sound in her mind, after witnessing this, but her father (Srinivasa Iyangar) against Annie Besant and her ideals and so for the time both father and daughter differed in their political ideas.

## **Rowlet Act**

In 1919, the Rowlet Act was passed and that was followed by the Jallianwallah Bag massacre. After the civil disobedience movement was called forth by Gandhi and also the collection for Tilak Swarajya fund. Both Ambujammal and Janamma decided to collect funds and thus her learning towards Gandhi's political ideals was first seen on January 1930 when Ambujammal was leading the foreign cloth boycott at Rattan Bazar in Madras. She was arrested by the police Ambujammal political participation was seen in the forefront in those years.

## **Khadi Movement**

In order to include women, Mahatma Gandhi introduced Khadi is an important Congress programme for boycott foreign cloth promoting of Khadi and the picketing of liquor shops. Press also played a leading role in mobilizing women. Prohibition movement had spread in almost all the district of Tamilnadu before the end of February 1921. C. Rajagopalachariar, E.V. Ramasamy and N.S. Rangaswamy Iyer organised Volunteer carps known as 'Thondarpadai' to picket liquor shops throughout Tamilnadu. They were arrested and imprisoned. After their arrest Nagammal and Kannammal wife and sister respectively of E.V. Ramasamy along into the movement. Fearing that the law and order situation would get out of control of all the women were arrested the government lifted the 144 ban order. When the Indian National Congress asked Mahatma Gandhi to stop the movement, he replied that it was not in his hands and it was only in the hand of two women from Erode. Such was the environment that his Nagammal and Kannammal had made in the movement.

## **All India National Conference**

In the year 1927, December all India National Conference was held in Egmore. Mrs. Rukmini Lakshmi Pathy was selected as the president of Congress women's wing in this conference. She had an opportunity to serve Gandhiji, Pandit Nehru was arrived for the conference along with Mrs. Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya. The Simon Commission reached Chennai on 18th February 1929 the Congress leaders Mr. S. Satyamurthy, Mr. Muthuranga Muthaliyar, Mr. K. Bashyam Iyengar, Mrs. Rukmini Lakshmi Pathy along with Mrs. Kamalabai agitated with the slogans "Boycott the Simon Commission", "Simon Go back" etc.

### **Salt Satyagraha:**

Rukmani Lakshmi Pathy actively involved herself in the Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha in 1931 under the leadership of Rajaji which was a reciprocation of Gandhiji's Dandi March. She took the initiative of involving women in civil disobedience movement being members of women's League responding to her call. Mrs. Ambujammal, Mrs. Gnanambal, Dr. Sakuntala Iyer and Kamalabai took part in the movement. Rukmini Lakshmi Pathy was arrested for her active participation in the civil disobedience again 1932 and sentenced to six month imprisonment.

## **Quit India Movement**

At this time of Quit India Movement (1942) when all the top leaders were arrested and the movement became practically labourless, women joined hands with others and carried on the processions, hiding meetings, demonstration and organizing strikes. On 14 August 1942 Kamala Devi was arrested for distribution leaflets. Mrs. Soundaram Ramachandran helped the families of the people who were in jail in connection with this movement. Hundred of labourers from the Buckingham and Karnatic Mills struck work. Anthony Amma and Pichiammal from Coimbatore participated in the Pankajam mill strike which was part of the movement. They were arrested and lodged in Coimbatore and Vellore jails.

Kuttiammal and Cholaiammal from Coimbatore were arrested and imprisoned. When they broke the railway line at Singanallur with nearly 100 women workers. Meena Krishnamurthy from Madurai, Narayana Ammal from Ramnad and Anchalaiaammal from South Arcot were arrested and imprisoned for shouting anti war slogans. The Tamilnadu women participation in the Quit India Movement of 1942 was impressive.

### Indian National Army

In March 1943, a woman section of the Indian National Army was started and Indian women in Malaya, Thailand and Burma enlisted themselves as volunteers. Mrs. M. K. Chidambaran was elected as chairperson and Ms. Saraswathy as secretary of the women's section of the Indian Independence League Lakshmi Swaminathan because the secretary of the headquarters. Lakshmi Swaminathan was born in 1914 in a traditional Tamil family; Laxmi Swaminarayan studied medicine at the Madras Medical College and migrated to Singapore for a career as a doctor. In 1941 the Japanese invaded Singapore and the British who ruled there surrendered. Over 90000 Indian were taken prisoners of which half were Indians. Lakshmi Swaminathan formed the bulk of the INA under Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose which went to war against the British.

One of the first contingents of INA was formed at Waterloo Street in Singapore and it was called the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. Lakshmi Swaminathan was asked to lead it with the Bose asking her to become the new Jhansi Ki Rani. And that's what she has proved to be all her life. She was an important personality of the Jhansi Rani regiment. Subhash Chandra Bose only hundred women volunteers' first to given training in shooting. Govindammal was the one among the hundred. She was a very sincere worker in the regiment. Appreciating her sincerity, Subhash Chandra Bose had given her the title of "Lands Naik". Until 1945, she worked in the army.

### Conclusion

Awareness among women, their participation in social and national issues, sufficiently as a cause and effect of Colonial rule in 20th century in particular had helped to draw the attention of the colonial Government and those who were sympathetic to the cause of women. During the period when the workers and present struggles were launched against the colonial government, the participation of women in such struggles revealed their importance and role in the national real independence.

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