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**AN ANALYSIS ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN
SWADESHI MOVEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF
INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE**

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An Analysis on Women's Participation in Swadeshi Movement: A Case Study of India's Freedom Struggle

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Abstract – The history of Indian Freedom Movement would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of women. The sacrifices made by the women of India will occupy the foremost place. They fought with true spirit and undaunted courage and faced various tortures, exploitations and hardships to earn us freedom. Swadeshi movement was one of the major events in the History of Indian Freedom Movement. It was started in 1905 as an agitation against the partition of Bengal and it spread to other parts of the country including Maharashtra. The Slogans of Swaraj, the concepts of boycott, National Education and the spirit of Swadeshi were spread from Bengal to Maharashtra along with other regions.

Keywords: Freedom Movement, Women, Swadeshi, Boycott etc.

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INTRODUCTION

The Swadeshi Movement, part of the Indian Independence Movement and the developing Indian nationalism, was an economic strategy aimed at removing the British Empire from power and improving economic conditions in India by following the principles of Swadeshi (self-sufficiency), which had some success strategies of the Swadeshi movement involved boycotting British products and the revival of domestic products and production process.

The two main features of the anti- Partition agitation were the Swadeshi movement and the boycott. In the word Swadeshi "swa" means "own" and "desh" means country, the letter "i" being the usual adjectival termination ; Swadesh therefore means "one's own country", and Swadeshi, "pertaining to one's own country". The Swadeshi movement accordingly consisted, economically, of using goods produced in the country in preference to those imported from abroad, and politically of making the administration as far as possible Indian. The boycott was mainly the boycott of all kinds of foreign goods, particularly those of English manufacture; and the Hindu agitators expressed it. Swadesh and boycott were positive and negative aspects of the same thing. Swadeshi, however, had a political side which went much further; it aimed at a change in the Government of the country with which the use of foreign goods had little or nothing to do, namely, self –Government or Swaraj.

There has been some controversy about the meaning of Swaraj, or it ought to be written Swarajya. As explained above "swa" means "own", and "rajya" means "rule", i.e., what a raja, or king, exercises over his raj, or kingdom. Hence Swaraj means Self Government, and the official translation of "Local Self- Government" is "Sthanik Swarajya". It was, however, new to Bengal when it was introduced to the local leaders of Indian National Congress in Calcutta, in 1906, by Dadabhai Naoroji, the celebrated Parsi leader from Bombay. Through these two movements, then, Swadeshi and boycott, it was hoped to force the reversal of the Partition by bringing pressure to bear on the Government and on the British elector, the assumption being that the former was very sensitive to agitation, and the latter to anything that touched his pocket.

The watchword of the new movement was "India for the Indians" which, after all, advocated the boycotting of all goods not made by Indian labour. Commenting on boycott nearly a decade after the launching of the Swadeshi movement, Annie Besant said that it "had one admirable effect". The Bengali youths addicted to the wearing of ugly British coats and trousers, appeared in the graceful dhoti, shirt and shawl of Bengal. The year 1906 was declared as the Swadeshi year. The slogan "Be Indian and buy Indian" was chanted everywhere. The nationalists knew that India's one sure means of drawing England's attention to partition and other wrongs of the British Indian administration was the boycott of British goods. As a precursor of the larger boycott programme launched by Mahatma Gandhi under his

renowned Non-cooperation Movement (1920-22) first, and Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-32) later, which crippled the British textile industry, the Swadeshi movement contributed substantially to the industrial and political advancement of India. Swadeshim endeavoured to stimulate by all possible means, such as indigenous industries were already in existence but were languishing for want of support. The movement helped to establish various new industries on modern lines and supply the daily wants of the mills. The monetary resources of the people would be well-organised and utilised to provide the necessary capital and skill for India's industrial regeneration. It would cement, more strongly than ever before, the forces already at work in various directions to create a great and united nation in India. It would thereby challenge the "half-malicious and half-ignorant" misinterpretation set afloat by the ruling race that Indian people were never a nation but discredited and mutually antagonistic congeries of races.

The Swadeshi movement spread from Bengal to Punjab, western and central India and down in the south. Before long, the new spirit of Swadeshim had seized hold of the minds of the masses throughout the country. It was the first time people supported Swadeshi movement of all shades- high and low, rich and poor, literates and illiterates – joined hands.

Hundreds of meetings were held everywhere in India to protest against the partition and to adopt the pledge to boycott the products of British manufacture. At many of these meetings, the audience destroyed the British made articles which they happened to have on their persons at that moment - like shirts, shoes, watches etc. Many English houses in Calcutta wired home to apprise England of the gigantic dimensions the Swadeshi movement had assumed and to caution against sending its merchandise which practically had no buyers among the Bengalis. It was thus the British trade which suffered most from Curzon's error. This sentiment was echoed, though in an exaggerated form, there is an article in the English magazine which said that giving assent to Swadeshi would mean the absolute ruin of all British manufactures, starvation throughout Lancashire and the other manufacturing districts of England and Scotland, and the destruction of British commerce.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN SWADESHI MOVEMENT:

"The women of India should have as much share in winning Swaraj as men. Probably in this peaceful struggle woman can outdistance man by many a mile. We know that a woman is any day superior to man in her religious devotion. Silent and dignified suffering is the badge of her sex. And now that the government have dragged the woman into the line of fire, I hope that the woman all over India will take up the challenge and organize themselves," Mahatma Gandhi appealed in to the Indian women to enter the struggle for India's freedom. "If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with woman". "If Indian women arose, he said,

"no one could prevent the country's march to independence".

Swadeshi Movement was a seedling for the entire freedom movement and had spread to different parts of the country. The women though staying at home insisted that there should be prohibition of foreign goods into their house. The other shape of Swadeshi Movement, which is a starting point for freedom, is hatred towards foreign goods (in a small way against foreign rule). Along with foreign clothes and goods, people also prohibited foreign medicine in this Swadeshi Movement.

The Swadeshi movement started with the partition of Bengal by the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, 1905 and continued up to 1908. It was the most successful of the pre-Gandhian movements. Its chief architects were Aurobindo Ghosh, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai, Poet Rabindra Nath Tagore. Swadeshi, as a strategy, was a key focus of Mahatma Gandhi who described it as the soul of Swaraj (self-rule).

In later days Gandhi was aware of the fact that the Swadeshi movement was to hate the foreign goods, however, he was very much concerned with the development of the production of goods in the village by the villagers. It would help greatly in upliftment of the masses. In order to make Swadeshi more influential, he wanted that there should be weaving of Charaka as a starting point.

Similarly his ideas were to involve women in weaving clothes and increase among the people, the desire for Swadeshi clothes. Further, this does not prevent the women from household works. In this way he generated idea among women will help in participating in picketing struggle for closing liquor shops and other activities. They themselves can organize and undertake these activities. Therefore, the basic thread was itself in the cause for freedom struggle.

As the Swadeshi movement was multifaceted, it could attract all sections of the society. The movement could spell its charm to attract landlords, low-caste people, students, and women at all. Though the Swadeshi movement was a mass movement, the fact remains that it disappeared by 1908- by and large it were a 'failure'. In spite of it being dubbed as a failure, the movement, nevertheless failed to make its own contributions. It is, indeed, this movement, which mooted the 'idea of nationalism'.

In spite of its disappearance, the impact of Swadeshi movement could be witnessed in every stage of freedom movement like Non co-operation movement, Civil Disobedience movement and Quit India movement. The Anti-partition movement, or the Swadeshi movement as it came to be called, was remarkable, in many respects and most of all in the active programme which it placed before the nation.

The program was fourfold; a) Boycott of foreign goods, especially of British goods; b) The exclusive use of Swadeshi goods and the promotion indigenous industries; c) National education as different from the soulless education which was meant only to manufacture intelligent clerks and finally; d) Demand for Swaraj, or self-rule on the same pattern as England itself.

SWADESHI MOVEMENT IN BENGAL

The Swadeshi movement in Bengal had two trends. First trend was the 'constructive Swadeshi'. The movement during this phase was not political. It gave more emphasis to constructive programme which were taken as self-strengthening movement and therefore prepared the ground for the subsequent political agitation. In their way of self-strengthening programme, the importance was given to Hindu religion revivalism as it was thought a ground for imagining India as a nation. As a part of constructive programme, national schools as well as the indigenous industries were established. The other trend of Swadeshi movement in Bengal was political extremism. This trend was led by political extremists like Aurobindo Ghosh and Bipin Chandra Pal. They were critical of the non-political constructive programme and argued that the political freedom of India could be the pre-condition for the regeneration of national life. Therefore achieving complete independence or Swaraj became their goal. The programme at this stage was passive resistance. This programme needed the mass to be mobilized for the movement. For the same purpose the religion was used as a tool. The organization of samitis was another way which was used for the mass mobilization. Through samitis the programs like physical training, propagation of the Swadeshi message were carried out. The bureaucracy was determined to suppress the Swadeshi, boycott movement in Bengal. The Barisal conference showed the coercive techniques in the utter ruthlessness. The conference was held on April 14, 1906, where the procession led by Surendranath Banerjee, Motilal Ghose, and Bhupendranath Dutta was attacked by the police for the cry of the 'Vande Matram'. Kesari the Marathi newspaper welcomed the move of the Bengal leaders who had agitated for obtaining the rights and shouted the slogan of 'Vande Matram' (Ke sari, May 15, 1906).

SWADESHI MOVEMENT IN MAHARASHTRA

The Swadeshi movement was not limited to the Bengal alone. It was spread to other parts of the country and many national leaders were taken an active part in the movement. Thus the waves of movement which were started in Bengal had touched

the whole of India and the leaders from various parts of the country got involved into the movement; in Maharashtra, Tilak took direct part, in Punjab it was Lala Lapat Rai and in South India it was Subramaniam Bharati were among the prominent leaders. The present part of the article focuses on the Swadeshi movement in Maharashtra. Boycott was no longer a matter of interest to the Bengalis alone, it had become an issue of all-India importance and the Slogans of Swaraj, the concepts of Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education which were emerged during the anti-partition campaign and finally, the spirit of Swadeshi had spread from Bengal to Maharashtra along with other parts of country like Madras and other provinces. The Swadeshi Movement in Maharashtra should be looked at as was developing over the Swadeshi that was already there in Maharashtra. Therefore, it is informative to look at the history of the Swadeshi in the region before discussing the Swadeshi movement in Maharashtra.

Though, the Swadeshi Movement was supported by the Moderates in Maharashtra, but they were not in favour of the boycott of goods. Gokhale, for instance, observed that Swadeshi Movement was both a patriotic and economic movement and that boycott was apolitical weapon which should be reserved only for the certain occasions (J. C. Johari, ed., 1993).

Swadeshi Movement and Oriya Women Swadeshi is a native concept which implies the use of indigenous goods. The association of women elites of Orissa in the Swadeshi movement came in an informal way in later period following 1907 under the influence of Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das. Although the Swadeshi movement started in Bengal in 1905 following the partition of Bengal, yet its effect was not felt in Orissa until 1907. It was Gopabandhu Das who was deeply inspired by the gospel of Swadeshi and by the ideas of Bande Mataram Movement after he came in contact with Sashi Bhusan Raychoudhury, an associate of Khudiram Bose.

He came back to Orissa in 1907 and went to interiors of Puri district in the clad of a Sanyasi and preached the gospel of Swadeshi. His down to earth attitude soon brought him name and fame and he became the torch bearer of the Oriya masses. Being inspired by him, the women elites like Haimabati Devi, Haramani Devi, Dhanamani Devi, Radhamani Devi, Shradhamani Devi, Rama Devi, Sunamani Devi, Sarala Devi, Ashalata Devi and many others. They participated whole heartedly in this Swadeshi movement and worked for the revival of cottage industries. By 1910, the Swadeshi Movement had spread quite widely in Orissa. Rama Devi and Sarala Devi along with Kshetramani Devi, Bimala Devi, V. Subhadramma, Pokalay Taramma, Jayanti Swadeshi Movement and Oriya Women Dr. Saroj Kumar Jena Suramma and others preached the gospel of Swadeshi and Swaraj in various parts of Orissa and

called upon their audiences to boycott the foreign goods and preached that using foreign made articles amounted to an anti-national activity. They urged upon them to use indigenous articles in place of foreign ones and also to revive spinning and other cottage industries in their own house. Their appeal generated great enthusiasm among the women of Orissa.

Being influenced by the charisma of Pandit Gopabandhu Das and his Satyabadi school, most of the women elites of Orissa like Nishamani Devi, Nitambini Patra, Haramani Devi, Manorama Devi, Champamani Devi, Sunamani Devi, Radhamani Devi, Ashamani Devi and a host of others took recourse to the establishment of Ashram schools in different parts of Orissa. They also taught the inmates to fight for the removal of casteism, untouchability and other social evils of the time and serve the downtrodden and poverty-stricken countrymen. Being inspired by the idea of serving the lowliest and the most neglected people of the society, they tried to mitigate the sorrows and sufferings of others by sharing their pains with them and at the same time, helping them to improve their lot. They undertook social services by way of working for the improvement of the sanitary conditions of the villages, creation of a healthy atmosphere in the society and giving relief operations in times of natural calamities.

Although their activities were resented by orthodox people, yet they flouted the crippling conventions. They were conscious of their social duties and political responsibilities. In all these circumstances, they led the women and gradually received encouraging responses from them. On the whole, they tried to change the stereotyped role of women and were successful to a great extent in this noble venture.

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 movement. They bravely faced the baton of the police and went behind the iron bars. The Swadeshi movement spread all over the nation, in a short period of time. The people across the country gave their full-fledged support to the progress of this movement and they were fully responsible for the growth of industries and establishment of national schools, colleges in their respective areas. Khadi and boycott of foreign cloth had proved to be an especially potent weapon in Indian freedom struggle in the period of 1905 after the partition of Bengal. After a century of revolutions, struggle, blood shedding, Sathyagrahas and sacrifices, India finally achieved independence on August 15, 1947. Thus the part the women of India played may be written in golden letters.

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