



# Role of Subhas Chandra Bose In Women Empowerment

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**Abstract** - Subhas Chandra Bose is considered one of the most influential freedom fighter and a charismatic orator with extraordinary leadership skill. He played a crucial role in freeing the country from the clutches of 200 years of British rule. He was credited with setting up the first Indian armed force named 'Azad Hind Fauj'. Bose was not just a great leader but also a progressive thinker and one who wanted to empower every section of the society. Bose believed that women were equals of the men therefore should be prepared to fight and sacrifice for India's liberation. He had a clear vision regarding women's and their status as citizen of free India. Bose was one of the few of his times who advocated women's movement in their full dimension. Here is an attempt to show how Netaji viewed women and their role in the freedom struggle and how he paved the way for empowerment of women.

**Index Terms** - Bose, Freedom struggle, Netaji, Women empowerment.

Subhas Chandra Bose is considered one of the greatest leader of Indian freedom struggle history. He was called Netaji, known by the slogan *Tum Mujhe Khoon Do, Main Tumhe Aazadi Dunga* (Give me your blood and I shall give you freedom) was born in Cuttack, Odisha on January 23, in the year 1897. He was a brilliant student but he often ran into trouble with his English teachers if they ever made any disparaging remarks about India. He qualified for the much coveted Indian Civil Service but soon quit it because he did not want to work under British Government. Soon he came under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi and became an active member of India's independence movement. In 1938 he was elected as president of the Indian National Congress. Bose's ideology tilted towards socialism and leftist authoritarianism. In 1939 he formed the All India Forward Bloc as a faction within the Congress. The prime objective of Forward Bloc was to bring all radical elements of the Congress party. So that he could spread the meaning of complete independence of India with adherence of the application of the principles of equality and social justice. He revived the Indian National Army (INA), popularly known as Azad Hind Fauj in 1943 which was initially formed in 1942 by Rash Behari Bose. The Azad Hind Fauj was initiated during World War II to secure complete Indian independence from British rule. The assault by the INA, no matter how short lived it was an important factor that eventually contributed to the British decision to stop their operations and shift back to their own land. INA carried out many fight and struggle to bring India's independence and all these were only possible because of the highly intelligence of Subhas Chandra Bose.

Bose encouraged Indian women to play an important role in the activities for the freedom of India. A women's regiment of Azad Hind Fauj was formed, which was under the command of Captain Lakshmi Swaminathan. It was called the Rani Jhansi Regiment. Bose in his speech, *Why I Left Home and Homeland*, he concluded with a stunning demand. Bose said, 'I want also a unit of brave Indian women to form a death-defying regiment who will wield the sword, which the brave Rani of Jhansi wielded in India's first war of independence in 1857.' Unsurprisingly his call for the formation of female combat unit generated controversies. While

some said that the purpose of the female soldiers was to serve as propaganda only and not as a fighting unit, others were happy and felt proud of women for being a part of the struggle for independence. In his address to the women's section of Indian Independence League, Singapore on 12 July 1943, Netaji said, '.....During the post many years of our national movement, women have been equal to men in undergoing suffering with joy and courage ....When I express my confidence that you are today prepared to fight and suffer for the sake of your motherland. Therefore, sisters too must take your share in the coming struggle.... Many brave women like the Rani of Jhansi required in our Last War of the Independence also .... The time has come for every Indian man and women, boy and girl – to come forward and make great sacrifices for liberating India.' Again in his speech during the opening of Rani Jhansi Training camp for the Women's section of I.N.A. on 22 October 1943, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose said, ' The opening of the Rani of Jhansi regiment training camp is an important landmark in the progress our movement in East Asia . We are engaged in the great task of regenerating our nation. And it is only in the fitness of things that there should be a stir of new life among our womenfolk.'

Bose encouraged the formation of the first political organization for women, the Mahila Rastriya Sangha which was formed in 1928 and Latika Ghosh was appointed as its Secretary. The Mahila Rastriya Sangha recruited members and set up a network of Shakti Mandirs. It was intended to develop as a national women's organization connected with the congress. It followed a radical ideology and placed the social economic and political emancipation of women as its goal. The organized the All India Women's Social Conference along with the regular session of the Congress in 1928, which was presided over by the junior Maharani of Travancore. The conference passed resolutions condemning dowry system and legitimising divorce. It also advocated equal education for all irrespective of caste, sex or religion.

Netaji's ideas for women emancipation were visible even before formation of I.N.A. and Rani Jhansi Regiment. From the start of his active political career in 1920s, Bose appealed to women to make it their duty to look after the nation and not just their families. He also encouraged them to boycott foreign cloths, carry on propaganda among women and organise women societies. In 1928 he organized a 300 strong women's section of the Bengali volunteers who would parade in the streets of Calcutta on the occasion of the Indian Congress gathering in the city. We can say this was an early prototype of the Rani Jhansi Regiment.

Among the nationalist leaders of India Subhas Chandra Bose led Indian National Army had a clear vision regarding women's rights and their status as citizen of free India. Though not a socio- religious reformer he was a political thinker on his own right and had a deep insight into the social problems prevalent in colonial India. Bose was one of the few of his times who advocated women's movement in their fullest dimensions. In that period many conservative Indian raised eyebrows when he advocated regarding women right. Bose's visions of women empowerment was vastly different from Gandhi's while Gandhi wanted women to serve the country from within the traditional constructs of womanhood; Bose urged women to break not only the shackles of imperialism, but also the shackles of patriarchy. Unlike Mahatma he wanted women to get all-round education including not only literacy but physical and vocational training. He wanted women to play a greater role in future economic development of India. He insisted that there should be a separate planning commission for women. Netaji was against all tradition which kept women under bondage. He believed in women's emancipation from age old customs and man-made social, economic and political disabilities. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose ideal women was free of the restraints, were equal to men, took larger and more intelligent interest in public affairs and more importantly were not look upon with sympathy.

The status of women can be evaluated from the social framework, social structure, cultural norms and value system. Women have occupied a significant position within the Indian society throughout the ages. They have been considered as a pivot through which the family revolves. The discriminatory treatment against women is the result of gender bias, which forms an integral part of the Indian society. In ancient India though the patriarchal system was prevalent, women were given respect and admiration. In the Vedic society women participated in religious ceremonies and assemblies. They were not kept in seclusion, but were dependent on the male relatives throughout their lives. Towards the end of the Vedic period the status of women weakens. They were not allowed to participate in social and religious functions. They were deprived of social and religious rights and over the period they were not allowed to participate in the decision making process. They were subordinate to men and were meant to carry out the household chores and meet the requirement of the family members. In medieval times women underwent a numbers of adversities and sufferings due to the prevalence of social problems such as child marriage, sati, widowhood, prostitution and the Devadasi and so on. The position of girls, women and widows improved during the British period. The education of female was introduced within the country. On the other hand, the system of child marriage proved to be end impediment within the course of enhancement of education amongst women and girls. Hence, in 1929 the child marriage restraint act was passed.

Thus Subhas Chandra Bose was a man who advocated and supported women's empowerment and women's movement in late twenties to emancipate them from all shackles and disabilities and to enable them to attain equality with men. At that time women were kept behind Purdah for so many decades but now they were out in the open, offering service to the nation. This was perhaps the height of empowerment may possible by the selfless leadership of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

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