

Changing Nature of Workers Participation in Freedom Struggle

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: 24th January 2026 Accepted: 01st February 2026 Published: 05th February 2026 Keywords: <i>Indian Freedom Struggle, Workers' Movement, Labour Participation, National Movement, Subaltern Perspective, Trade Unions</i>	The Indian freedom struggle was not led only by political leaders; the working class played a very important role in it. This paper studies the changing nature of workers' participation in the national movement from the 1920s to the 1940s. It explains how workers moved from local economic protests to active political participation against British rule. The study focuses on three major phases of the freedom struggle – the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement, and the Quit India Movement. During these phases, workers in factories, railways, plantations, and mills became more organized, politically aware, and fearless. Their role changed from demanding better wages and working conditions to directly challenging colonial authority. The paper also examines the workers' movement from a subaltern perspective and highlights how labour participation strengthened the national struggle. It concludes that the working class provided mass support, discipline, and revolutionary energy, making the freedom struggle more inclusive and powerful.

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Introduction:

National movement or freedom struggle in India was not a linear or uniform process. Various trends, drift, movements, development emerged during that phase, but all these developments were final destined at the same goal of Independence at last, but though they were working in the similar but different parts of movement. That is the reason where Indian National Freedom struggle carries its own characteristics.

As mentioned above, this paper carries out research about the participation of workers in the National movement. As like whole struggle, participation of workers was also not carried along similar lines. It also went through various trends emerging amongst it. This paper basically goes through the various pattern created by workers in the participation of national movement. It is a comparative study of participation of workers in National movement in vivid periods. Paper explains various situations and general state of affairs about workers movement and the path which connects them to the national movement. Spirit behind workers movement in National struggle is also been discussed. Paper do not only examines the workers participation through the scope of national movement, it also critically evaluates it through lenses of workers and their struggle.

General elements of research methodology are also been given in proper format. At last conclusions are been discussed on major findings. This paper opens the scope to critically evaluate the angle of workers and national struggle. It also goes through the subaltern view and discuss the subject through that scope. In short it overall discusses the changing nature of workers participation in national movement.

Aims and objectives:

- to study about workers movement in colonial period.
- To study changing nature of workers participation in moments.
- Two examine the pattern of relation between workers movements and national movement.
- To study subaltern view about workers movement.
- To study emergence of various trends in national movement with special reference to workers moment.

Research methodology:

This study adopts an analytical research design. Unlike descriptive research, which aims to provide a narrative of what is occurring, this methodology utilizes existing facts and information to perform a critical evaluation of Changing nature of workers participation in Freedom Struggle. The analytical framework of this research is grounded in the Research -Based View. This framework provides the criteria for selecting variables and serves as the benchmark against which the gathered data is critically evaluated. By applying this theory, the study moves beyond mere observation to a critical analysis of the underlying mechanisms of topic.

The story of the Indian National Movement is often told through the lives of great leaders and political thinkers, but the real strength of the movement came from the common people, especially the working class. The industrial workers, railway staff, and plantation labourers played a massive role in shaking the foundations of British rule. Over three decades, from the 1920s to the 1940s, the way these workers participated in the movement changed significantly. They evolved from a group of people fighting for better pay into a disciplined and fearless political force that demanded nothing less than complete independence. Understanding this change requires a look at the three major milestones the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement, and the Quit India Movement.

The first major turning point was the Non-Cooperation Movement in the early 1920s. Before this period, workers were mostly disorganized. They had many grievances, such as extremely long working hours, low wages, and physical abuse by British supervisors, but their protests were usually local and small. However, after World War I, the inflation in India rose sharply, causing great distress. At the same time, the formation of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) in 1920 gave workers a national platform. When Mahatma Gandhi launched the Non-Cooperation Movement, he called for a boycott of British goods and institutions. This felt deeply with the workers. They began to see the British factory owners not just as bad owners, but as representatives of an oppressive foreign government. In the tea gardens of Assam, thousands of labourers left their jobs, chanting slogans in favour of Mahatma Gandhi. Railway workers in Bengal went on strike, weakening the transport system. This period was significant because it was the first time the working class realized that their economic struggle was part of a larger national struggle for freedom.

As the years passed, the consciousness of the workers grew deeper, leading to the Civil Disobedience Movement in the 1930s. By this time, the trend had shifted from simple participation to a more organized and ideological form of protest. New political ideas, such as socialism and communism, began to influence the labour unions. Workers were no longer just asking for fairness, they were starting to talk about their rights as a class. When Gandhi started the Salt Satyagraha in 1930, the response from the urban working class was powerful. In the city of Sholapur, the participation of textile workers reached a level of intensity that shocked the British. Following the arrest of Gandhi, these workers went on a more regressive form of protest, attacking symbols of British authority like police stations, courts, and railway stations. For a few days, the British lost all control, and the workers effectively ran the town. In Bombay, the centre of India's textile industry, workers participated in massive strikes and parades, often wearing Khadi caps to show their loyalty to the Congress. The trend during this phase showed that the workers had become a leading section or a front-line force that was willing to take bigger risks than the middle class.

The final and most radical shift occurred during the Quit India Movement in 1942. This phase was different from the previous ones because it was a leaderless movement. Almost immediately after the movement was announced, the British arrested all the top leaders of the Indian National Congress. Instead of giving up, the working class took charge of the struggle themselves. This period saw the most widespread and longest strikes in Indian history. In Ahmedabad, which was known as the "Manchester of India," textile workers stayed away from their factories for more than three months. In Jamshedpur, the workers at the Tata Steel plant went on strike, refusing to produce steel for the British war effort during World War II. The trend here was no longer just about peaceful protest; it was about total rebellion. Workers used their knowledge of machinery and infrastructure to set back the British administration. They cut telephone wires, damaged railway tracks, and helped organize secret communication networks for underground freedom fighters. For the workers, the fight was no longer about wages or factory conditions it was a total war for the independence of their motherland.

Looking at these three movements together, we can see a clear evolution in the trends of worker participation. In the 1920s, the trend was awakening, where workers first joined hands with political leaders. In the 1930s, the trend was ideological based and based on organization, where they began to form a more disciplined political identity. Finally, in 1942, the trend was Revolutionary Action, where they became the primary force driving the movement forward despite the absence of formal leadership. This transition was crucial because it proved to the British that they could no longer rely on the silence or cooperation of the Indian masses. The factories, the railways, and the ports the very things that made India profitable for the British were now being used as weapons against them.

The participation of the working class also changed the nature of the Indian National Congress itself. Because the workers were so active, the Congress had to include labour rights and economic justice in its official goals. This ensured that the fight for freedom was not just about replacing British officials with Indian ones, but about creating a fairer society for everyone. The bravery of the workers who faced bullets, lathis, and job losses paved the way for the labour laws and social protections that were later written into the Constitution of independent India.

The changing trends of worker participation show that the Indian freedom struggle was a deeply inclusive movement. From the tea gardens of the East to the textile mills of the West, the working class provided the physical strength and the revolutionary spirit that the movement needed to succeed. Their journey from the Non-Cooperation Movement to the Quit India Movement is a testament to the power of the common people. By standing up for their dignity and their country, they ensured that when India finally became free, it was a victory for the laborer in the field and the worker in the factory just as much as it was for the leaders in the parliament.

Conclusion :

The history of the Indian freedom struggle shows that while political thinkers provided the strategy, the working class provided the physical strength and revolutionary energy required to challenge British rule. Over the course of three decades, the labour movement underwent a profound transformation, evolving from a disorganized group focused on local grievances into a disciplined political force. This shift was not merely about better wages; it was a fundamental change in consciousness where workers began to see their economic exploitation as a direct result of foreign imperialism.

The progression through the three major national movements shows a clear increase in both radicalism and self-reliance. During the 1920s, the trend was one of getting join to national struggle. Workers in tea gardens and on railways began to realize that their local protests against long hours and physical abuse were part of a much larger national struggle. By joining the Non-Cooperation Movement, they moved beyond simple factory disputes and started viewing British owners as representatives of an oppressive government.

By the 1930s, the movement matured in way of organisational and ideological base. Influenced by socialism and communism, workers began to fight for their rights as a specific class. During the Civil Disobedience Movement, this group became a front-line force that often took greater risks than the middle class. In places like Sholapur, textile workers even took temporary control of the town after attacking symbols of British authority.

The 1942 Quit India Movement represented the peak of this evolution a phase of direct action. In the absence of formal leadership, the working class took total charge of the struggle. By weakening the infrastructure the steel plants, textile mills, and railway tracks that made India profitable for the British, they proved that the colonial administration could no longer function without their cooperation. This transition from peaceful protest to total rebellion marked the final blow to British authority.

The impact of this participation extended far beyond the protests themselves. The intensity of the workers involvement forced the Indian National Congress to make changes in the national policy of party and struggle based on workers, ensuring that the fight for independence included labour rights and economic justice. This ensured that the movement was not just about replacing British officials with Indian ones, but about creating a fairer society for everyone.

Ultimately, the bravery of these labourers, who faced everything from job losses to physical violence, ensured that the independence of India was a victory for the common person. Their legacy remains embedded in the social protections and labour laws written into the modern Indian Constitution. The story of the working class is a testament to the fact that when the masses find their voice, they become an unstoppable force for national dignity and social change.

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