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## UNTOLD AND HIDDEN STORIES OF INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE: THE STORY OF HELEN LEPCHA

Pemu Tshering Lepcha\*

### Abstract

The project of history writing has always favoured the elite, male, upper class individuals, groups, and communities. History writing thus is essentially biased and patriarchal in its approach since contributions made by women from lower classes and tribal women in particular have hardly been acknowledged and given due recognition. History from below and minority history have been excluded and omitted from the mainstream narratives of the nation. This argument was vociferously highlighted in the early 1980s by the renowned Subaltern historian Ranajit Guha, in his critique of elitist historiography. One of the proponents made by him was that in elite historiography, indigenous elites alone claim to have inspired and led the people to freedom. People and communities from the margins and peripheries are thus rendered voiceless and have remained hidden in the pages of history.

The paper seeks to highlight the contribution made by Helen Lepcha, alias Sabitri Devi, a lone Lepcha woman freedom fighter, who by dint of her courage, bravery and selfless dedication could make a mark in the national freedom movement. Born in 1902 in Namchi, South Sikkim and migrated to Kurseong along with her parents in search of better education and livelihood option, she became highly inspired by the Gandhian ideals of Khadi, Satyagraha, Swadeshi and Non-cooperation. Being a dropout from school at the age of 15, she joined the Khaddar and Charkha Movement in 1917, which became a turning point of her life and political career. The paper thus argues at length that minority histories should be explored and represented which has always remained in the shadows and the margins. The little contribution made by them in the freedom movement should be etched in golden letters in the pages of history.

**Key words:** Subaltern Studies, Historiography, Tribal History, Lepcha History

### Introduction

The writing of history has seldom been an unbiased affair. Historiography or the history of all histories has never been a scientific venture. It has never proceeded objectively and scientifically, preventing in the emergence of historical truth objectively. Carl Becker had in this respect expressed that "*historiography provides us with manuals of information about histories and historians, a neat balance sheet of contributions made in the establishment of verified historical knowledge*". Unfortunately, the professed grand objectivity in the writings of history has led to the silencing of minority histories and 'histories from below'; since history writing is enmeshed in its own brand of politics. A major challenge to this style of historiography came in the writings of the scholars of subaltern studies, particularly Ranajit Guha in the 1980s, whose forceful articulation