



Prominent Women freedom fighters of India

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Abstract:

The role played by women in the War of Independence (the Great Revolt) of 1857 was creditable and invited the admiration even leaders of the Revolt. They are activating participating in social, economic, and political activities. Women are an important element of our Society since ancient. The history of Indian Freedom Struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of women. The sacrifice 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. When most of the men freedom fighters were in prison the women came forward and took charge of the struggle. The list of great women whose names have gone down in history for their dedication and undying devotion to the service of India is a long one. After a century of revolutions, struggle, blood shedding, Sathyagrahas and sacrifices, India finally achieved independence

Introduction

Customarily, Indian woman had four fold status-role sequences. These were her role as a daughter, wife, housewife (homemaker), and mother. The woman, whose status and role traditionally was well defined and almost fixed in the society, is now experiencing far-reaching changes. The woman in modern times is entering into certain new fields that were unknown to the woman's sphere of role-sets. They are activating participating in social, economic, and political activities. Women are an important element of our Society since ancient. The history of Indian Freedom Struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of women. The sacrifice 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. When most of the men freedom fighters were in prison the women came forward and took charge of the struggle. The list of great women whose names have gone down in

history for their dedication and undying devotion to the service of India is a long one. Woman's participation in India's freedom struggle began as early as in 1817. Bhima Bai Holkar fought bravely against the British colonel Malcolm and defeated him in guerilla warfare. Many women including Rani Channama of Kittur, Rani Begam Hazrat Mahal of Avadh fought against British East India company in the 19th century; 30 years before the "First War of Independence 1857.

The role played by women in the War of Independence (the Great Revolt) of 1857 was creditable and invited the admiration even leaders of the Revolt. Rani of Ramgarh, Rani Jindan Kaur, Rani Tace Bai, Baiza Bai, Chauhan Rani, Tapasvini Maharani daringly led their troops into the battlefield. Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi whose heroism and superb leadership laid an outstanding example of real patriotism. Indian women who joined the national movement belonged to educated and liberal families, as well as those from the rural areas and from all walk of life, all castes, religions and



communities. Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Vijayalakmi Pundit and Annie Beasant in the 20th century are the names which are remembered even today for their singular contribution both in battlefield and in political field.

Let us elucidate the role of Indian women who participated in the freedom struggle against British East India Company and British Empire and made great and rich contributions in various ways

Women freedom fighters of India

The list of great women whose names have gone down in history for their dedication and undying devotion to the service of India is a long one. There are endless number of women who daringly fought for India's freedom with their true spirit and undaunted courage and had faced various tortures, exploitations and hardships to earn us freedom that we enjoy today in our motherland India. It is a very difficult task list out all Women freedom fighters and equally difficult to segregate a few amongst them. With all respect and due apologies, furnishing below a brief note on selected ten Women freedom fighters.

Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi (19 November 1828 – 17 June 1858)

Rani Lakshmi Bai was one of the leading warriors of India's freedom struggle who laid an outstanding influence on the succeeding women freedom fighters. She used to go into the battlefield dressed as a man. Holding the reins of their horse in her mouth she used the sword with both hands. She fought valiantly and although beaten she refused to surrender and fell as a warrior should, fighting the enemy to the last. Her remarkable courage inspired many men and women in India

to rise against the alien rule. She used to go into the battlefield dressed as a man. Holding the reins of their horse in her mouth she used the sword with both hands. She fought valiantly and although beaten she refused to surrender and fell as a warrior should, fighting the enemy to the last. Her remarkable courage inspired many men and women in India to rise against the alien rule. She was a symbol of bravery, patriotism, self-respect, perseverance, generosity and resistance to British rule. She fought till her last breath for the welfare of women in the country and for the noble cause of India's independence.

Sarojini Naidu (February 13, 1879 – March 2, 1949)

Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India, was a distinguished poet, renowned freedom fighter and one of the great orators of her time. She was elected as the president of Indian National Congress. The dynamic phase of Sarojini's career was from 1917-1919. She campaigned for the Khilafat Movement. When Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience Movement, she proved a faithful lieutenant. With great courage she quelled the rioters, sold proscribed literature, and addressed frenzied meetings on the carnage at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. In 1930 when Mahatma Gandhi chose her to lead the Salt Satyagraha the stories of her courage became legion. After Gandhi's arrest she had prepared 2,000 volunteers under the scorching sun to raid the Dahrsana Salt Works, while the police faced them half a mile up the road with rifle, lathis (canes) are steel tipped clubs. She gave up writing poetry and fully devoted herself to emancipation of women, education,



Hindu-Muslim unity etc. She became a follower of Gandhiji and accompanied him to England. Whenever in England, she openly criticized British rule in India which caught the attention of scholars and intellectuals.

Madam Cama (24 September 1861-- 13 August 1936.)

Madam Cama fought for the freedom of the country till the last in her own way, and helped many revolutionaries with money and materials. She unfurled the first National Flag at the International Socialist Conference in Stuttgart (Germany) in 1907. She declared "This flag is of Indian Independence! Behold, it is born! It has been made sacred by the blood of young Indians who sacrificed their lives. I call upon you, gentlemen to rise and salute this flag of Indian Independence. In the name of this flag, I appeal to lovers of freedom all over the world to support this flag." A thousand representatives from several countries were attended. She traveled a lot of places including America and propagate Americans about Indians struggling for Independence.

Begum Hazrat Mahal (1820—1879)

Begum Hazrat Mahal was a great Indian freedom-fighter who played a major role during India's First War of independence (1857-58). She was also known as the Begum of Awadh (Oudh) and was the wife of the then Lucknow ruler, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. She led a band of her supporters against the British, and was even able to seize the control of Lucknow. She worked in close association with other leaders of the India's First War of Independence, including Nana Sahib. Begum was not only a strategist but also

fought on the battlefield. When the forces under the command of the British re-captured Lucknow and most part of the Awadh, she was forced to retreat. When her forces lost ground, she fled Oudh and organized soldiers again in other places. She turned down all offers of amnesty and allowances by the British rulers.

Finally, she took refuge in an asylum in Nepal, where she died in the year 1879. To acknowledge her endless effort in fighting for the freedom of country, the Government of India issued a stamp on 10th May 1984.

Annie Besant (October 1, 1847 - September 20, 1933)

Annie Besant an Irish lady the leader of the Theosophical Society joined the Indian National Congress and gave it a new direction. She was the first woman president of the Congress and gave a powerful lead to women's movement in India. She soon became a leading labour organizer, strike leader and reformer. She also became involved in Indian Nationalism and in 1916 established the Indian Home Rule League of which she became President. She started a newspaper, "New India", criticized British rule and was jailed for sedition. She came to be associated with rationalistic congress group of workers who did not appreciate Gandhi's views. She got involved in political and educational activities and set up a number of schools and colleges, the most important of which was Central Hindu College High School at Banaras which she started in 1913.

Arun Asaf Ali (July 16, 1909,—July 29, 1996): Aruna became an active member of Congress Party and participated in public processions during the Salt



Satyagraha. She was arrested on the charge that she was a vagrant and hence not released in 1931 under the Gandhi-Irwin Pact which stipulated release of all political prisoners. Other women co-prisoners refused to leave the premises unless she was also released and gave in only after Mahatma Gandhi intervened. In 1932, she was held prisoner at the Tihar Jail where she protested the indifferent treatment of political prisoners by launching a hunger strike. Her efforts resulted in an improvement of conditions in the Tihar Jail but she was moved to Ambala and was subjected to solitary confinement. She edited 'Inqulab' a monthly journal of the Indian National Congress. On August 8, 1942, the AICC passed the Quit India resolution at the Bombay session. The government responded by arresting the major leaders and all members of the Congress Working Committee and thus tried to pre-empt the movement from success. Aruna Asaf Ali presided over the remainder of the session on 9 August and hoisted the Congress flag and this marked the commencement of the movement. The police fired upon the assembly at the session. Aruna was dubbed the Heroine of the 1942 movement for her bravery in the face of danger and was called Grand Old Lady of the Independence movement in her later years.

Usha Mehta (March 25, 1920 – August 11, 2000)

Usha Mehta is remembered for broad casting the Congress Radio, and called her the Secret Congress Radio, an underground radio station, which was functioned for few months during the Quit India Movement of 1942. She is also

known as child leader as in 1928, eight-year-old Usha participated in a protest march against the Simon Commission and shouted her first words of protest against the British Raj: "Simon Go Back." As a child, she did not comprehend the significance of her actions except that she was participating in a movement to free her country under the leadership of Gandhi. She and many other children participated in morning protests against the British Raj and picketing in front of liquor shops. During the Quit India Movement, Usha quickly became a leader. She moved from New Delhi to Mumbai, where she hoisted the tricolor on August 9, 1942 at Gawalia Tank Ground.

Kasturba Gandhi (April 11, 1869 – February 22, 1944)

Kasturba Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi's wife worked with him for many years. She was a leader of Women's Satyagraha for which she was imprisoned. She helped her husband in the cause of Indigo workers in Champaran, Bihar and the No Tax Campaign in Kaira, Gujarat. She was arrested twice for picketing liquor and foreign cloth shops, and in 1939 for participating in the Rajkot Satyagraha. She many times took her husband's place when he was under arrest. Kasturba suffered from chronic bronchitis. Stress from the Quit India Movement's arrests and ashram life caused her to fall ill. After contracting pneumonia, she died from a severe heart attack on February 22, 1944. She died in Mahatma Gandhi's arms while both were then in prison.

Kamala Nehru 1899–1936)

Kamala Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru's wife gave full support to her husband in his



desire to work actively for the freedom struggle. In the Nehru home town of Allahabad, she organized processions, addressed meetings and led picketing of liquor and foreign cloth shops. She played a prominent part in organizing the No Tax Campaign in United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh). In the Non Cooperation movement of 1921, she organized groups of women in Allahabad and propagated use of khadi cloths. When her husband was arrested, to prevent him delivering a "seditious" public speech, she went in his place to read it out. She was twice arrested by British authorities. Kamala died from tuberculosis in Switzerland while Jawaharlal Nehru's was in prison. She spent some time at Gandhi's ashram with Kasturba Gandhi.

Vijaya Lakshmi Pundit (August 18, 1900 - December 1, 1990)

She is the daughter of Motilal Nehru, was the president of Congress and brother Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister. She was inspired by Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi and impressed by Sarojini Naidu. She entered the Non Cooperation Movement to fight against the British rule. Vijaya Lakshmi Pundit represented India in many of the conferences abroad. She attended numerous public lectures and challenged the British dominated delegate's rights to represent India therein. She was a great fighter and took parts in many of the freedom movement. She was arrested in 1932 and sentenced to one year's rigorous imprisonment. She was arrested in 1940 and yet again during the Quit India Movement in 1942.

Conclusion

After a century of revolutions, struggle, blood shedding, Sathyagrahas and sacrifices, India finally achieved independence on August 15, 1947. The Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Christian and all the other brave sons and daughters of India fought shoulder to shoulder to throw out the British. Perhaps for the first and the only time in world history, the power of a mighty global empire 'on which the sun never set', had been challenged and overcome by the moral might of a people armed only with peace, ideals and courage. 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 Movements. They bravely faced the baton of the police and went behind the iron bars. Hundreds and thousands of Indian women dedicated their lives for obtaining freedom of their motherland and only very few could include in this essay due to space restriction.

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