

# The Mothers of The Motherland—Women In The Independence Movement

On the stroke of midnight when the world fell asleep, India woke up as an independent nation. After countless trysts with destiny, the country was finally free from British rule, largely because of the protests, sacrifices, and rebellion of the people. While most forerunners of the independence movement were and continue to be celebrated, there remained an entire class of citizens whose contributions were overlooked, namely women.

While women fought against the external colonisers, they were pulled back by the constrictions imposed on them by the patriarchal society of those times. They battled social evils, generational oppression, and artificial barriers to deny equal opportunities, amongst others. At times even national greats like Mahatma Gandhi were convinced that it was the duty of women to look after home and hearth, be good mothers and good wives. As a result, for a long time, Congress was reluctant to allow women to hold any position of authority within the organization.



*Image of a protest during the Civil Disobedience Movement  
[Image credits: Wikipedia]*

Regardless, the beginning of the 20th century saw increased participation of women in the freedom struggle. When Lord Curzon declared the partition of Bengal, the country adopted the Swadeshi movement as a response, boycotting anything British. People from all genders burned foreign goods while women took up the handlooms and spun khadi to supplicate it.

Soon after, the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat movement was announced in 1920, and the Civil Disobedience movement in 1930, both characterized by multitudes of women protesting and suffering its consequence at par with men. Leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Kamala Nehru, and many others participated in Satyagrahas across the country. They also consolidated the No Tax Campaign in all the major states of India.

Around the same time, revolutionaries were countering the British atrocities in the subcontinent with more radical measures. In 1938, in a bleeding Chittagong, Pritilata

Waddedar led a band of Indian Republican Army resistance to storm an Anglo-only club whose signpost read “*Dogs and Indians not allowed.*” It served as a reminder that Indians would no longer take disrespect from them.



Aruna Asaf Ali



Pritilata W.



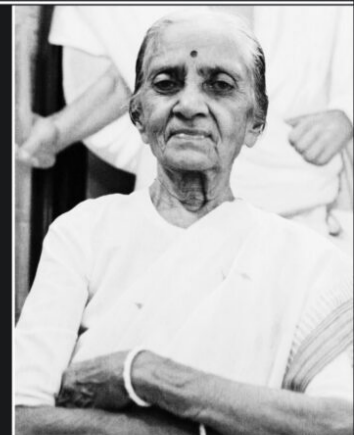
Kasturba G.



Kamala Nehru



Sarojini Naidu



Usha Mehta

*Women at the forefront of the Indian Freedom Movement [Image credits: Wikipedia]*

Around 1942, when it became increasingly clear that the British had no intention of granting natives the power to govern themselves, Congress launched the Quit India Movement, demanding them to leave the country. Naturally, it was met with widespread and brutal repression by the colonial rulers, with hundreds of leaders being jailed and hundreds of thousands of Indians dying. At a time like this, Aruna Asaf Ali, also referred to as the Grand Old Lady of Indian

Independence, hoisted the National flag at Gowalia Tank Maidan, Bombay. She was subsequently jailed after. Usha Mehta, another compatriot, risked her life to run an underground radio station keeping the nation informed of the colonial tyranny.

No account of the history of women in the freedom struggle is ever complete without a mention of Captain Lakshmi Sehgal and her Rani Jhansi regiment, INA. When Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose reached Singapore in 1943 to form an army with the Indian Prisoners of War, Capt. Lakshmi demanded a women's regiment to be commissioned. The battalion fought on the front line against the British right until they were ordered to retreat in 1945. They were arrested in Burma and were tried in the infamous INA Trials, which ignited public outrage and further hastened the departure of the Crown.



*Captain Lakshmi Sehgal inspecting the Rani Jhansi regiment with Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose [Image Credits: Wikipedia]*

As India completes 75 years of Independence in terms of

governance, economy, and spirit. We are now a developing nation that has seen a pleasant palate of progressive developments. Throughout these 75 years, women went on to hold the highest offices in the country, the most recent of which is Smt. Draupadi Murmu's election as the President of India. However, despite their sacrifices, and the challenges they faced, the active participation of women in delivering India's freedom remains unrecognized, perhaps by a force of habit.

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