

**THE UNTOLD, UNHEARD AND UNSEEN STRUGGLE OF WOMEN FOR
FREEDOM IN INDIA**

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ABSTRACT

When it came to winning India's freedom, women were instrumental. They never receive the same amount of recognition as the men of the movement for their lives, battles, and contributions to the movement, however. Women stepped forward and led the freedom movement when most of the males were imprisoned. There is a vast list of remarkable women whose contributions to India's history will be remembered forever. Some of Gandhi's ideas about women's place in society come from the belief that she personified the bravery of the Hindu legendary heroines Sita and Draupadi. Women's engagement in the Quit India Movement increased dramatically, with many coming to the streets to press for independence. The presence of women in the movement was crucial in overcoming sexism and opening the door for more women to run for office. But, the goal of an independent India would never come true if women did not participate as freedom fighters. There have been many remarkable women throughout history who have held their own intellectually and bravely beside the men of their eras. Their efforts have been largely disregarded, but now is the moment to honor their sacrifices. So, the purpose of this dissertation is to bring to light the unsung female liberation heroes of India.

Keywords: Women, Struggle, Independent India, Sacrifice, Quit India Movement

INTRODUCTION:

In the early days of a nation-state, it was primarily male-led. The role of women in the freedom struggle has been significant, however, as they have been at the forefront of movements for change throughout history. To call women the

weaker sex is a libel, it is men's injustice to women. If by strength is meant moral power, then women are immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing ...has she not greater powers of endurance, has she got greater courage? Without her man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. I have nursed this thought now for years." (Mahatma Gandhi) Women led protests and rallied behind male leaders during the fight for independence. Nonetheless, they have been oppressed for doing anything other than taking care of their homes and children. Women are morally braver than males. Without her, humanity would not exist. Nonviolent men would give women the future. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chander, Vidya Sagar and Jyotiba Phule struggled to enhance Indian women's responsibilities during the East India Company era. Women helped male-led armed resistance succeed. Women spies, nurses, and messengers risked their lives for freedom. Indian women who struggled for independence in the 18th century showed their bravery and tenacity. Satyagraha and other nonviolent social movements involved Indian women. Women shaped the nation after independence. Fifteen women were voted to the Constituent Assembly to safeguard gender equality and women's rights in the new Constitution. Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Nehru pushed women across to fight for freedom. India will always recognize women liberation warriors' sacrifices. Many Indian Independence Movement heroes went unacknowledged.

Objective of the paper:

1. To study the role of women in achieving freedom in India.
2. To create awareness about different women freedom fighters across the country.
3. To make people realise that women are no less than men.
4. To highlight their sufferings and sacrifices.
5. To show the social economic emancipation of Indian women.

Research methodology:

To write this paper, the data has mainly concentrated on textual approach, books written by eminent scholars and articles, papers written on various national and international journals has been considered to do the framework of this paper. Thus, secondary data has been used to write this paper.

LOST IN HISTORY: INDIA'S WOMEN FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Mentioning the role of women in the Indian Independence Movement would be insufficient. The Indian women's sacrifice will be front and center. They battled valiantly and fearlessly while being subjected to a wide range of tortures, exploitations, and difficulties in order to secure our independence.

There is no denying the importance of women's contributions. A large number of brave women spoke out against British tyranny. A large number of women organized and led marches, rallies, and other public events. These ladies

were fiercely patriotic and possessed an abundance of courage. Women deserve the same respect as men for all of their hard, unselfish work, sacrifices, and struggles. Indian women from every corner of the country joined the movement. Hundreds of women risked being tortured or oppressed at the hands of males in order to leave their homes and show their support for the men.

Several influential women throughout history deserve recognition. A few examples of such women are Rani Laxmi Bai, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Kasthurba Gandhi, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Sarojini Naidu, Aruna Asaf Ali, Madam Bhikaji Cama, Kittur Chennamma, Savitri Bai Phule, and Aruna Asaf Ali.

There are many forgotten women freedom fighters overall India. We have selected Usha Mehta, Sucheta Kriplani, Basanti Devi, Janaky Thevar Athi Nahappan, Kanaklata Barua for our research paper.

USHA MEHTA:

Usha Mehta was born in the village of Saras, which is located close to the city of Surat in the Indian state of Gujarat, on March 25, 1920.

She joined a protest march when she was just eight years old, shouting, "Simon Go Back," as her first act of defiance against the British Raj. She and other youngsters also took part in early morning protests against the British Raj and picketing outside liquor shops. A girl holding the Indian flag was knocked to the ground by a police charge during one of these protest marches. The kids were so upset by what had happened that they told their parents about it. A few days later, the adults dressed the kids up in Indian flag colors and sent them out into the streets as a response. The kids once again marched while dressed in national colors. This demonstrates the full participation of society, from men and women to young children. It's wonderful to have the backing of the parents. Yet, Usha Mehta's father was a judge during the British Raj, therefore it wasn't the case in her family's life. Thus, he did not urge her to join the liberation movement. When her father finally retired in 1930, however, she was freed from this constraint. Usha's family relocated to Bombay when she was 12 years old, allowing her to become more involved in the independence cause.

Usha was a little girl when she became a devotee of Gandhi. She made the early decision to be celibate for the rest of her life, adopting a minimalist, Gandhian lifestyle complete with the wearing of only khadi clothing and the avoidance of any and all luxury. She became an outspoken advocate for Gandhian ideas and principles over time. Usha attended schools in Kheda and Bharuch before moving on to complete her secondary education at Bombay's Chandaramji High. In school, she performed about par. When she took her matriculation exams in 1935, she scored in the top 25 in her class. She went on to finish her degree in Philosophy at Wilson College in Bombay, from which she graduated at the top of her class in 1939. She started school for law but dropped out in 1942 to participate in the Quit India

Movement. Once she turned 22, she dove headfirst into the independence movement. Her father was a wealthy businessman who always pushed his daughter to do well in school. Usha studied English literature at the University of Bombay and graduated with a degree. Usha joined the Indian independence movement when she was a college student. She became active in the Congress Party and attended anti-British rallies and demonstrations.

Radio Broadcasting Career

Usha became a radio host for All India Radio after finishing her education. She was the host of a hit show called "Jai Hind," which celebrated Indian heritage and national pride. This is the Congress radio calling on 42.34 meters from somewhere in India," were the first words aired in her voice. Her partners consisted of Vithalbhai Jhaveri, Chandrakant Jhaveri, Babubhai Thakkar, and Nanka Motwani, the proprietor of Chicago Radio, who all contributed resources like equipment and personnel. This is the Congress radio calling on [a frequency of] 42.34 meters from somewhere in India," were the first words aired in her voice. Her partners included equipment suppliers and technicians Vithalbhai Jhaveri, Chandrakant Jhaveri, Babubhai Thakkar, and Chicago Radio owner Nanka Motwani. During World War II, Usha rallied support for the Allies in India and encouraged the Indian people to resist the Nazis. She also secretly aired broadcasts from Indian National Congress leaders who were imprisoned by the British.

The Underground Radio

Usha established Congress Radio, a clandestine underground radio station, in 1942. The station, which aired to India from an undisclosed location in the city of Bombay, promoted ideas of liberty and democracy. In maintaining the subterranean radio, Usha and her team encountered various difficulties. They were always on the go to avoid being discovered by the British police. Congress Radio overcame these obstacles to become an important part of the Indian independence cause.

Arrest and Imprisonment

Usha was detained by British authorities in 1942 due to her participation in the Indian independence struggle. She had been arrested for sedition and had to do time.

Usha never stopped fighting for Indian freedom even when incarcerated. Among the inmates, she orchestrated protests and hunger strikes. By her advocacy, support for India's fight for independence was bolstered both at home and abroad.

Post-Independence Activism

Usha's political career did not stop with India's independence in 1947. As a diplomat for the Indian government, she spoke for India at international forums. Usha also established a group called BharatiyaStree Shakti (Indian Women's Power) to further her mission of advancing women's rights in India. She spent her entire life fighting for equality for women and ending sexism.

Legacy and Honours

On August 11, 2000, Usha Mehta passed away at the age of 80. Her bravery as a freedom warrior and advocate for women's rights in India will live on in infamy. Usha was awarded many prizes for her work in improving Indian culture. For her exceptional contributions to society, she was honored in 1998 with India's Padma Vibhushan award.

Later years

With time, Usha grew increasingly unhappy with the developments taking place in the social, political, and economic spheres of independent India. Once, in an interview, she expressed her feelings in these words: "Certainly this is not the freedom we fought for." She added that the freedom fighters of her generation felt that "once people were ensconced in positions of power, the rot would set in." However, in her words, "we didn't know the rot would sink in so soon." Nevertheless, she did not deny the achievements of free India since the independence: "India has survived as a democracy and even built a good industrial base," she said. "Still, it is not the India of our dreams".

Even though Usha had a fever in August 2000, she nevertheless made it to the August Kranti Maidan commemorations of the Quit India Movement anniversary. She was fatigued and frail when she got back home. She lived to be 80 years old, but passed away quietly on 11 August 2000, leaving behind an older brother and three nephews. Generations of Indians have been inspired by Mehta's dedication to social problems and her contributions to Indian culture and education. She will be remembered as a fearless advocate for social equality and fair treatment.

SUCHETA KRIPLANI:

On June 25, 1908, Sucheta Kriplani entered the world in the city of Ambala, Punjab. She came from a progressive and enlightened background. Her mother, Banu, was an important member of the Indian National Congress, and her father, S. N. Majumdar, was a famous mathematician. After graduating from Delhi's Indraprastha College for Women, Kriplani went on to earn a degree in education. But she quickly discovered her true calling was in social service and joined numerous campaigns advocating for the rights of women and Indian independence. She was a major figure who made significant strides in the fight for India's independence. In her memoir, "An Unfinished Autobiography," she recalls being a timid child who worried excessively about what others thought of her intelligence and looks. She had tremendous willpower and determination and was not afraid to show it. She was one of the few women to be elected to India's first parliament, the Constituent Assembly. She was on the subcommittee that framed the Indian Constitution and was elected as the first female chief minister of Uttar Pradesh from the Kanpur constituency. She was recruited to serve on the committee that drafted India's founding document. A few minutes before Nehru gave his famous "Tryst

with Destiny" address, she sang VandeMataram at the Independence Session of the Constituent Assembly on August 14, 1947. The All-India Mahilla Congress, which she organized in 1940, was also her brainchild.

Political Career

In the 1930s, Kriplani got her start in politics when she joined the Indian National Congress and took part in the Salt Satyagraha. For her part in protests, she was imprisoned multiple times and spent time behind bars. As a member of the Constituent Assembly following India's independence in 1947, Kriplani was instrumental in the creation of the Indian Constitution. In 1963, she made history as the first female Chief Minister of an Indian state when she took office in Uttar Pradesh. Her management of a walkout by state employees was a shining moment in her term in office. The state workers' historic strike lasted 62 days. She gave in only after the company executives reached a middle ground. By turning down their wage increase request, Kriplani was able to maintain her credibility as the company's administrator.

Women's Rights Activism

Kriplani was a dedicated activist who fought for women's equality in Indian society. She advocated for women's suffrage, equitable pay, and improved working conditions by establishing the All-India Women's Conference. The passage of the Hindu Code Bill, which expanded women's legal protections in marriage, divorce, and inheritance, was also largely due to Kriplani's efforts. As a result of her work, Indian women today enjoy greater equality and empowerment than ever before.

Arrest and Imprisonment

During the Quit India Movement, she rose to prominence like her contemporaries Aruna Asaf Ali and Usha Mehta, and was subsequently detained by the British. Later, during the Partition riots, she collaborated closely with Mahatma Gandhi. In 1946, she went with him to Noakhali.

Legacy

The impact of Kriplani's activism for women's rights and on Indian politics is still felt today. She broke barriers for women in politics, and her example paved the way for many more. The Padma Vibhushan, India's second-highest civilian honor, was posthumously bestowed upon Kriplani by the Indian government in 1998 in honour of her many contributions. Women in India and beyond have been inspired and empowered by her work.

Personal Life

Kriplani had two children with her husband, the well-known socialist politician Acharya Kriplani. She was devoted to her family even as she pursued a career in politics, and she constantly stressed the importance of striking that balance. Kriplani left us on August 1, 1974, yet her work will be remembered for generations.

She was an incredible role model for everyone she met and will be remembered as a bold leader and advocate for women's rights forever.

Kriplani's advocacy and leadership opened the path for women to gain political and economic independence in the decades and centuries to come. Her example of perseverance, bravery, and kindness has served as a source of motivation and direction for generations.

BASANTI DEVI:

Basanti Devi's father, Baradanath Halder, was the Diwan of a sizable zamindari in Assam when she was born on March 23, 1880, when the region was still under British colonial administration. Her parents were struggling farmers, but they sent Basanti to school because they knew the value of an education. Basanti overcame the sexism and humiliation of her male classmates to become the first woman in her village to graduate from high school. During the Non-cooperation movement, she was the first Indian woman to be arrested for selling Khadi. She was like a mother to the young people fighting for India's independence. She was referred to as "Ma" by Netaji Subash Chandra Bose. She played a key role in the collection of 2000 gold coins and gold jewelry from Jalpaiguri for the Tilak Swaraj Fund in 1920-1921. She is an environmentalist in addition to being a famous Indian freedom warrior.

Activism and Social Work

Basanti completed her schooling and then went on to advocate for the rights of women and workers. She became active in the movement for Indian independence from British control by joining the Indian National Congress. Basanti Devi followed her husband's footsteps by participating in many movements, including the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Khilafat Movement, and the 1920 session of the Indian National Congress held at Nagpur. After the British police attacked Lala Lajpat Rai, she urged young Indians to stand up for Indian pride. A school for the children of sex workers and an organization that provides healthcare and education to rural women are just two of the many organizations that Basanti started to assist improve the lives of underprivileged populations. She advocated for Khadi and established the Nari Karma Mandir to help empower women.

Political Career

Basanti was the first woman to occupy a political post in West Bengal when she was elected to the state legislature that year, in 1952. She was famous for her fiery speeches and fierce fight for the rights of women and underrepresented groups. For more than a decade, Basanti represented her district in the state legislature, where she helped usher in reforms in healthcare, education, and worker protections. After her release from prison, she became editor in chief of Das's Banglar Katha newspaper. In the years 1921 and 1922, she also served as president of the Bengal Provincial Congress. In 1922, she spoke at the Chittagong Conference. It stoked

discontent at the grass-roots level. She explored several parts of India, fostering anti-colonial artistic movements along the way. She gained notoriety for her bravery and determination when she chose to print a poem by Kazi Nazrul Islam that would spark a revolution. She established the Chittaranjan Seva Sadan to aid pregnant women in need. The Government of India established Basanti Devi College in Kolkata to commemorate her. She also received the Padma Vibhushan, India's highest civilian honor.

Legacy

Many people in India honor Basanti Devi for what she did for their country. Among the many accolades bestowed upon her, the Padma Vibhushan (India's highest civilian award) was bestowed to her in 1973. Basanti is now regarded as a trailblazer for the advancement of women's rights and social fairness. Her work has influenced many future activists and political figures in India and beyond.

Personal Life

At the age of seventeen, Basanti Devi wed Chittaranjan Das, who encouraged her to continue her schooling and advocate for social change. Together, they started a family and raised two kids who would go on to excel in their own fields. Until her death in 1993 at the age of 83, Basanti was devoted to her work. Her offspring and great-grandchildren honor her memory and carry on her commitment to social justice. One of Basanti's most renowned remarks goes like this: "We must struggle for our rights, not just for ourselves but for future generations." Let us remember these words as we honor Basanti's memory. No matter how tough the fight, we must never give up.

JANAKY THEVAR ATHI NAHAPPAN:

On February 25, 1925, in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Janaky Thevar Athi Nahappan entered the world. She was one of the first women to actively participate in the movement for Malaysian independence and a founding member of the Malaysian Indian Congress. She was a major figure in the fight for Indian independence. At the age of 16, Janaki, who had been raised in a wealthy Tamil family in Malaya, heard Subash Chandra Bose's call for Indians to do whatever they could to support the independence movement. Janaky Thevar Athi Nahappan was an incredible heroine who was willing to risk death for her cause of liberating India. She promptly removed her gold earring donation. Janaki Thevar Athi Nahappan, at just 18 years old, commanded the all-female Rani of Jhansi Regiment. Her father's disapproval was extremely vocal. But after much convincing, her dad gave up.

Her Life in Indian National Congress

After the war, she founded Malaya Indian Congress under the leadership of John Thivy. The organisation was based on the principles of Indian National Congress. Later, she became a senator in the Dewan Negara of the Malaysian

Parliament. She was not only a commissioner of the Selangor Girl Guides Association but was also involved in the National Council of Women's Organisation. The Indian Government awarded her the fourth highest civilian honour-Padma Shri in 2000.

Rani of Jhansi Regiment

The Indian National Army, founded in 1942 by Indian nationalists in southeast Asia with the purpose of toppling the British Raj in colonial India with the help of the Japanese, included a women's battalion known as the Rani of Jhansi. It was one of the many female-only fighting units formed during WWII. Volunteers from the Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia formed the regiment in July 1943 under the command of Captain Lakshmi Swaminathan, also known as Lakshmi Sahgal. The regiment was named after Rani Lakshmi Bai, Rani of Jhansi, an important figure in the Indian independence movement.

Establishment of Regiment

On July 12, 1943, Subash Chandra Bose made the decision to organize the regiment public. Teenage girls of Indian heritage volunteered their time on Malayan rubber plantations, although few of them had actually gone to India. About one hundred and seventy cadets formed the force's first nucleus at the Singapore training camp. Cadets with less formal training were awarded the lower ranks of sepoy or noncommissioned officer. By November of 1943, the regiment had more over 300 cadets and campuses had been set up in both Rangoon and Bangkok.

Service by the Regiment

Over a hundred Rani of Jhansi troops were sent to Maymyo at the beginning of the INA's Imphal campaign to serve as a vanguard force entering the Gangetic plains of Bengal after the anticipated surrender of Imphal. A subset of the unit served as the hospital's nurses at the INA's Maymyo facility. The Rani forces were responsible for coordinating the relief and treatment of the INA troops who arrived at Monwya and to Maymyo but were not engaged in combat after the failed siege of Imphal and the INA's tragic retreat.

End of Regiment

Those troops originally from Burma were allowed to disband after Rangoon fell, and the Azad Hind Government and Subash Chandra Bose withdrew from the city and throughout Burma, but the rest of the regiment retreated on foot and, when possible, on mechanized transport, along with the retreating Japanese forces. During the withdrawal, it came under fire from the Allies' air force and the Burmese resistance. It is unknown how many people were killed. In time, the group broke apart.

Legacy and Honours

The fight for equal rights for women and other oppressed groups she led continues in her wake. She was revered as a leader who cared deeply about her people and

battled relentlessly for their rights. Janaky's services to Indian society have been recognized with a number of prizes and citations. In 2012, the Indian government released a special stamp honoring her as a national hero and role model for the country's youth.

Janaky's Philosophy

Janaky Thevar Athi Nahappan thought that the best way to effect social change was via concerted group effort. She believed that the fight for women's rights and Indian independence were two sides of the same struggle for freedom and equality. Nonviolence, compassion, and regard for one another were central to Janaky's worldview. She encouraged people to join her in the fight for a brighter future because she was certain that each individual could make a difference for the better. Let Janaky's bravery, kindness, and dedication to social change serve as an example for us as we reflect on her life and work. Let us carry on her legacy by working for a world in which everyone is treated with equality and respect.

KANAKLATA BARUA:

During India's war for independence, a young man named Kanaklata Barua was a key figure. On the 22nd of December, 1924, she entered the world at Gohpur, Assam. The liberation of her country was worth more to Barua than her own life. Her death at such a young age, at only 17, ensured that her role in the independence movement would not be forgotten.

Early life

Kanaklata Barua was raised in a middle class household in the Assamese city of Gohpur. Her parents were both educators; her dad taught and mom stayed at home. Barua excelled academically and had an early passion for social justice.

Barua's early involvement in the liberation movement may be traced back to Mahatma Gandhi's concept of nonviolence. She was an enthusiastic participant in several demonstrations and rallies in opposition to British authority.

When she was five, her mother passed away, and when she was thirteen, her father, who had remarried, also passed away. She finished third grade but then left school to take care of her younger brother and sister.

The Tezpur Incident

Barua, a youngster from the Gohpur area of Assam, joined the Mrityu Bahini, a killing squad, during the Quit India Movement. The Bahini agreed to fly the national flag at the local police station on September 20th, 1942. To do this, Barua led a group of unarmed peasants. The police station's in charge, Rebati Mahan Som, issued a stern warning to the procession, saying that they would face serious repercussions if they went ahead with their plan. As the police opened fire on the marchers, they had already ignored repeated warnings not to go. Mukunda Kakoti, who was also shot

at, picked up the flag that Barua had been holding after she was hit. The police intervention resulted in the deaths of both Barua and Kakoti. Barua died at the young age of 17.

Legacy

The death of Kanaklata Barua was not in vain. There was a groundswell of public outcry after her death, which encouraged more people to join the freedom fight. This event stands out as one of the most heinous acts of violence carried out by the British in India.

Generations of Indians have been encouraged by Barua's bravery to advocate for their own rights and oppose injustice. For millions of Americans, she is still a representation of optimism and inspiration.

During the Quit India Movement in 1942, as she marched with the National Flag, she was shot and killed by the Indian Imperial Police of the British Raj.

Honours and Recognition

The Government of India posthumously presented Kanaklata Barua with the Tamrapatra (Copper Plate) in 1959. A statue of Barua was unveiled in 1992 in her birthplace of Gohpur, Assam.

Songs, poetry, and plays have all been written to honor Barua and his sacrifice. Her legacy encourages people to keep fighting for their rights and improving India's future.

Filmmaker Chandra Mudoj used her life tale in his film Epaah Phulil Epaah Xoril. To attract a wider audience, the film was also made available in Hindi under the title Purab Ki Awaz.

CONCLUSION:

Five women from different regions have been discussed. Due to their various family history, cultural expectations, and obligations, women are more courageous than men and should not be overlooked in the freedom movement. Usha Mehta shaped India's independence movement. Her Secret Congress Radio work galvanized independence support. Sucheta Kriplani is a selfless woman. Her commitment to social justice and women's rights made her an Indian political legend. Basanti Devi inspired education, advocacy, and social justice. She pioneered in her community and overseas, inspiring people today. Janaky Thevar Athi Nahappan, an amazing woman, battled for equality and justice her whole life. Her indefatigable activism has inspired social justice activists worldwide. In conclusion, India's liberation movement succeeded because women participated. Women helped fundraise, spy, protest, and boycott. The brave and selfless Kanaklata Barua sacrificed her life for India's independence. Her legacy and the millions of people she has inspired through her sacrifice will never be forgotten. Despite many challenges, women

continued their fight for equality and liberation. Suggesting that women must be portrayed as masculine to demonstrate war prowess is sexist. This proves women can compete with men in any field. Many female liberation fighters are forgotten. This paper highlights their contributions towards the freedom movement.

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