

Involvement of Women in Quit India Movement

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ABSTRACT

We are the Independent citizens of Independent India. We got this freedom because of thousands of known and unknown Indians who sacrificed their lives smilingly to get this freedom. In this struggle not only men came forward, but women also forsook the shelter of their homes and with unfailing courage and endurance stood shoulder to shoulder with their men folk in the frontline of India's freedom fighters to share with them the sacrifices and triumphs of the struggle.

We have heard the name of Rani Laxmi Bai who faced Britishers with exceptional bravery during 1857 freedom revolt but few know about the courageous stories of females contribution during 'Quit India Movement'.

When the Second World War broke out, India was committed to belligerency by the British without any consideration for the feelings of Indians or any assurance of Indian Self-Government.

1. Introduction

In, protest the congress ministers in the provinces resigned and Gandhiji commenced Individual Satyagraha to express the country's disgust.

When the pressure of war mounted, particularly with the advances of Japan in South East Asia, Britain became anxious to secure the full and active co-operation of India in the war efforts. The Cripps Missions came with a promise of dominion status and a plan for future constitutional developments. But all the offers would materialize only after the war and not before.

The plan was rejected in India and India's demand for immediate self-government to enable her to fight for freedom in other countries seemed just and unequivocal. Accordingly, the congress working committee passed a resolution in July 1942 at Wardha asking the British to transfer power to India and to "Quit India", otherwise it would be compelled to launch a Civil Disobedience Movement.

A meeting of the All India Congress Committee was called in Bombay on 8 August, 1942 to accept the "Quit India" resolution and Gandhiji asked all Indians to act as if they were "no longer under the heel of this imperialism". The next day, that is, on 9th August 1942, was the day to be launched the Quit India Movement.

The government has sensed the danger which was about to come. That is why the decision has been taken to crush effectively the Quit India Movement Campaign. On the morning of 9th August Mahatma Gandhi, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Abdul Kalam Azad and many congress leaders were thrown into different prisons of the country.

The news of the imprisonment of Congress leaders put the fire into the fuel and all the freedom lovers came on roads. Spontaneous hartals, protest meetings and strikes took place all over the country. As the Quit India Movement was practically leaderless as all senior members of the congress had been imprisoned, two females Aruna Asif Ali and Usha Mehta, committed patriots set up a radio transmitter, called the 'Voice of Freedom' to disseminate information about the war of freedom. Many other women joined in taking out processions, holding meeting, demonstrations and organizing strikes.

The freedom lovers without caring about their lives prepared the pious path on which the glorious victory chariot moved forward. There is description of some women who dedicated their lives and showed undying devotion to the service of India in the form of Quit India Movement.

Kasturba, the wife of Mahatma Gandhi, was one of the foremost supporters, of the Gandhiji's programmes. Gandhiji's own opinion was that he learnt the first lesson of Satyagrah from Kasturba. She was the idol of bravery, patience and endurance. On the August 1942 when Quit India Movement was launched for the freedom of the Country.

2. Role of Women In Quit India Movement

Gandhiji along with many other Congress leaders were imprisoned, she decided to speak in place of Gandhiji and was arrested in the afternoon from the meeting place. Firstly she was kept in a jail in Mumbai then she was shifted in the Aga Khan Palace at Pune where she began experiencing serious health problems. She took only Gangajal. On 23th February, 1944 on the day of Mahashivratri she left this world and took abode in heaven.

Kanklata Barua, born at home of Krishan Kanth Barua in the village of Barunga Wadi of Assam, her dream was to wave Tiranga in a place of Union Jack. It was on September 20, 1942 that Kanklata Barua, a girl in her teens, marched towards Gohapon Thana, leading five thousand people to occupy the Thana building.

As soon as march reached near Thana they were surrounded by police station. She asked her Comrades to put Union Jack down and hoist tri-colour over police station. She along with her friends cleverly entered Thana premises and police were surprised that a girl had shown such a courage of putting Union Jack down and hoisting tri-colour over there. The police started Lathi Charge over the crowd. The bullets crushed her badly but little girl hoisted Tri-colour bravely. The whole crowd started shouting 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' she signed the charter of Britishers Quit India with her blood.

On August 9, 1942, when the entire congress leadership, including Gandhiji had been placed under arrest by the British. Usha Mehta felt the need of launching an underground radio to

spread Gandhiji's call to the British to Quit India and his Exhortation to his own people 'to do or die' to achieve the goal of complete Independence from foreign yoke. On 24th August, 1942 Usha Mehta laid foundation of underground Congress Radio through which she disseminated information about the movement to common folk.

Congress Radio was the broadcasting mouthpiece of the Indian National Congress and functioned from different locations from Bombay. After every two or three days the place of secret radio had been shifted so that it could not be in the range of British detectives. Everyday the citizens of India from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari got the information through the broadcasting of Usha Mehta and the enthusiasm of the movement was not cooled down.

For three months Usha Mehta broadcasted the Secret Radio and then eventually the secret radio was discovered by the police who arrested its directors and organizers which included Usha Mehta on 12th November, 1942. She was constantly interrogated for the six months by Criminal Investigation Department (CID), a department of Indian Police. She was then confined in solitary cells if she withdrew from the Quit India Movement. She refrained from making comments when she was questioned repeatedly by the Judge of the High Court. The trial sentenced Usha Mehta to four years of imprisonment.

From 1942 till 1946 and two of her associates were also charged with involvement against the British Government. She was sent to Pune's Yeravda Jail. She was finally set free in March 1946 following the order of Morarji Desai, the then Home Minister of interim government.

3. Discussion

Aruna Asif Ali attended the Bombay on 8th Congress session where the historic Quit India resolution was passed on 8th August. When the congress leaders were arrested on the day after this resolution was passed, Aruna presided over the flag-- hoisting ceremony at Gowalia Tank Maidan in Bombay.

She provided the spark that ignited the movement. She became a full -time activist in the Quit India Movement and went underground to evade arrest. Her property was seized by the Government and sold. The Government also announced Rs. 5000 reward for her capture. She was the leading associate of Usha Mehta in the foundation of Underground Congress Radio.

Matangini Hazra was a revolutionary who participated in the Quit Indian Movement until she was shot dead by the

British Indian Police in front of the Tamluk Police Station on September 29,1942. She was affectionately known as Gandhi buri, Bangla for old lady Gandhi. As part of the Quit India Movement, members of the Congress planned to take over the various Police Stations at Midnapore district and other government offices. This was to be a step in overthrowing the British government in the district and establishing an Independent Indian State.

Matangini Hazra, who was 73 years at the time, led a procession of six thousand supporters, mostly women volunteers, with the purpose of taking over the Tamluk Police Station. When the procession reached the outskirts of the town, they were ordered to disband under section 144 of the Indian Penal code by the Crown Police. As she was repeatedly shot, she kept chanting Vande Mataram, translating as 'hail to the Motherland'. She died with the flag of the Indian National congress held high and still flying.

Like her contemporaries Aruna Asif Ali and Usha Mehta, she came to the forefront during the Quit India Movement. She was the founder of All India Mahila Congress, established in 1940. The Women's department had hardly begun its work when Sucheta offered individual Satyagraha and was imprisoned for two years. She was out of prison when Congress leaders were arrested in 1942 and, hearing the news, decided to go into hiding.

Sucheta's first job was to establish contact with groups still active throughout India and encourage them to continue non-violent activity. Wearing a variety of disguises, Sucheta travelled from province to province to keep leaders in touch with one another and help them plan activities. In 1944 she was imprisoned and sent to Lucknow Jail as a dangerous prisoner but even from there she continued to spread the vitality of her patriotic thoughts.

4. Conclusion

The names of freedom loving women have been written in golden words in the history of India. These women had only one desire in their hearts, the desire to give India freedom and to fulfill this desire they desired to die. They have served the country even unto death without praise or reward.

Actually they paved the path of freedom with their blood and we looked forward to the opening of a new chapter in the history after the cataclysm is over and the atmosphere rendered clean. Their spirit of service and sacrifice make us realize to be responsible citizens who make our country a great place to live in.

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