

Women's Sacrifices and Contributions in the Indian Freedom Struggle

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Abstract- Without acknowledging the role played by women, the history of the Indian Freedom Struggle would be lacking. The sacrifices made by Indian women will take center stage. To gain our independence, they endured several forms of torture, abuse, and adversity while fighting with unwavering bravery and passion. Women took the lead in the fight when the majority of the male freedom fighters were imprisoned. There is a lengthy list of outstanding women whose names have been recorded in history due to their unwavering commitment to serving India. Women first took part in the Indian independence movement in 1817. In guerrilla warfare, Bhima Bai Holkar valiantly battled and beat British colonel Malcolm. In the 19th century, thirty years prior to the "First War of Independence 1857," a number of women, like Rani Channama fought against the British East India Company. Women's contributions to the 1857 War of Independence (also known as the Great Revolt) were admirable and won the respect of the Revolt's commanders. Daringly leading their forces into war were the Rani of Ramgarh, Rani Jindan Kaur, Rani Tace Bai, Baiza Bai, Chauhan Rani, and Tapasvini Maharani. Jhansi's Rani Lakshmi Bai, whose bravery and exceptional leadership set a remarkable example of true patriotism. Indian women from all walks of life, castes, sects, and groups, as well as those from rural regions, came from liberal and educated homes and joined the national movement. The names of Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Vijayalakmi Pundit, and Annie Besant from the 20th century are still known today for their exceptional contributions to politics and the battlefield.

Keywords: Freedom Struggle, Women, Sacrifice, Bhima Bai Holkar, Keladi Chennamma, Avanti Bai, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Women's involvement in the Indian liberation movement began as early as 1817. In guerilla warfare, Bhima Bai Holkar bravely fought and defeated British Colonel Malcolm. Jhansi native Rani Lakshmi Bai,

whose valor and astute leadership demonstrated an extraordinary display of true patriotism. People from the twentieth century including Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Vijay Lakshmi Savant, Annie Besant, and others are remembered today for their unique contributions to India's liberation movement.

Bhima Bai Holkar: (1795 - 1858)

The daughter of Yashwant Rao Holkar, the Maharaja of Indore, Bhima Bai Holkar was born on September 17, 1795. In 1817, Bhima Bai valiantly engaged in guerilla warfare and beat British colonel Malcolm. She led a brigade of 2,500 horsemen into the combat against the British at Mahidpur, brandishing a sword and a spear. Her decision to fight for the East India Company as a soldier is thought to have served as an inspiration for Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi in 1858 during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. On November 28, 1858, she passed away in Indore (Basu, 1976).

Keladi Chennamma: (1778 -1829)

Chennamma was a freedom warrior and Indian revolutionary who was the Rani of the Kittur, a former Karnataka princely kingdom. In an effort to keep Indian rule over the area, she led an army against the British East India Company in 1824 against the theory of lapse. However, she lost the third battle and died in prison. According to Thilagavathi and Thilagavathi (2009), she was among the first female monarchs to struggle against British control. On October 23, 1778, Rani Chennamma was born in Kakati, a little hamlet in the modern-day Belagavi District of Karnataka. At the age of 15, she wed Raja Mallasarja, a member of the Desai family. After her husband passed away in 1824, Chennamma was left with a boy and a volatile situation. The death of her son in 1824 came next. The state of Kittur was entrusted to Rani Chennamma, who had a formidable challenge in defending it against the British. After her husband and son passed away, Rani

Chennamma declared Shivalingappa the heir apparent by adopting him in 1824. This infuriated the East India Company, who used the Doctrine of Lapse as an excuse to order Shivalingappa's departure.

War broke out after Rani Chennamma's petition to Lieutenant-Governor of the Bombay Presidency Mount Stuart Elphinstone, begging for her cause, was denied. British soldiers suffered severe losses in the first phase of fighting in October 1824, and political agent and collector St. John Thackeray lost his life. Chennamma was killed and lost to British soldiers mostly because of amateur Balappa, a lieutenant. Sir Walter Elliot and Mr. Stevenson, two British officers, were also captured. Chaplin and Rani Chennamma agreed that the conflict would end when they were liberated, but Chaplin carried on with additional troops. Thomas Munro's nephew, Mr. Munro, the Sub Collector of Solapur, was slain in the second attack. With the help of her lieutenant, Sangolli Rayanna, Rani Chennamma battled valiantly, but she was eventually taken prisoner and held in Bailhongal Fort, where she passed away on February 2, 1829 (Bhat, 1998).

Avanti Bai: (1831- 1858)

A champion of independence, Avanti Bai ruled over what is now Dindori in Madhya Pradesh, which was known as Ramgarh during her lifetime. Vikramaditya Singh of Ramgarh estate, which is today in Madhya Pradesh's, Dindori district, had Avanti Bai as his queen. When her husband passed away in 1851, Avanti Bai tried to take on the role of regent for her little son, Amar Singh. This was rejected by the British government, and an administrator was chosen by the Court of Wards to manage his affairs. She declared war on the British and kicked out the administrator. Avanti Bai organized and commanded an army of 4,000 soldiers when the uprising of 1857 began. She and her army defeated the British soldiers at the hamlet of Kheri, which is close to Mandla, in their first encounter. The British, however, were devastated by the loss and returned with a vengeance, attacking Ramgarh. Avanti Bai sought refuge in the Devharigarh hills. The British troops attacked the queen in Devharigarh after burning Ramgarh (Gupta, 2015). When facing a virtually certain defeat in battle, Avanti Bai used guerrilla warfare to repel the British troops

before killing herself with her sword on March 20, 1858.

Baiza Bai: (1784-1863)

In Kagal, Kolhapur, Maharashtra, Baiza Bai was born in 1784. At the age of 14, she married Gwalior's king, Daulat Rao Scindia, at Poona in February 1798. She was taught to battle with a sword and spear and was renowned for being an exceptional horsewoman. She fought at the Battle of Assaye against Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington, and fought with her husband during the British Maratha wars (Farooqui, 2000). It seems that when Baiza Bai was younger, she took up her father's anti-British views. She had persuaded her husband to back Peshwa Baji Rao II in his fight against the Pindaris during the British war. When Daulat Rao submitted to British demands, she even left him briefly, accusing him of cowardice. She was also fiercely opposed to the Scindia surrender of Ajmer to the British. Baiza Bai died in Gwalior in 1863 (Farooqui, 2011).

Bina Das: (1911–1986)

Bina was a West Bengali Indian nationalist and revolutionary. She was the daughter of Sarala Devi, a social worker, and Beni Madhab Das, a well-known Brahmo instructor. Another liberation warrior was her older sister, Kalyani Das (Bhattacharyee). Bina Das belonged to Kolkata's Chhatri Sangha, a semi-revolutionary women's organization. She tried to kill Bengal Governor Stanley Jackson in the University of Calcutta's Convocation Hall on February 6, 1932. Kamala Das Gupta, another freedom warrior, provided the revolver. She was given a nine-year severe jail term after failing to fire five rounds. Das became a member of the Congress party after being released early in 1939. She took part in the Quit India movement in 1942 and spent the years 1942–1945 behind bars. She served in the Bengal Provincial Legislative Assembly from 1946 to 1947 and the West Bengal Legislative Assembly from 1947 to 1951. She lived a solitary life in Rishikesh after her husband passed away and passed away in secret. On December 26, 1986, her slightly decomposed body was found on the side of the road (Radha, 1997).

Rani Lakshmi Bai: (1828 –1858)

On November 19, 1828, Rani Lakshmi Bai was born into a Marathi Karhade Brahmin family in Varanasi.

Manu was her nickname, and her name was Manikarnika Tambe. Her mother was Bhagirathi Sapre (Bhagirathi Bai), and her father was Moropant Tambe. Maharashtra is where her parents are from. Manikarnika was thereafter referred to as Lakshmi Bai (or Laxmibai) in honor of the Hindu deity Lakshmi and in accordance with customs after she married Gangadhar Rao Newalkar, the Maharaja of Jhansi, in May 1842. In 1851, she gave birth to a baby who died four months later and was eventually called Damodar Rao. The day before the Maharaja's death, he adopted a boy named Anand Rao, who was the son of Gangadhar Rao's cousin, who was renamed Damodar Rao. The adoption was in the presence of the British political officer who was given a letter from the Maharaja instructing that the child be treated with respect and that the government of Jhansi should be given to his widow for her lifetime (Thomas, 1860). Following the Maharaja's death in November 1853, the British East India Company, led by Governor-General Lord Dalhousie, used the Doctrine of Lapse to deny Damodar Rao's claim to the throne and annex the kingdom to its holdings since Damodar Rao (born Anand Rao) was an adopted son. She said, "I shall not surrender my Jhansi" (Main apni Jhansi nahi doongi), upon learning of this. Rani Lakshmi Bai received an annual annuity of Rs. 60,000 in March 1854, along with an order to vacate the fort and palace. In the first struggle of independence, however, she bravely fought against British commander Hugh Rose and refused to give up Jhansi. After unsuccessfully defending Jhansi she fled to Gwalior and died in the course of the battle on 18 June 1858 near Kotah-ki-Serai (Nigel, 2009). Twenty years after her death Colonel Malleon wrote in the "History of the Indian Mutiny; vol. 3; London, 1878", "Whatever her faults in British eyes may have been, her countrymen will ever remember that she was driven by ill-treatment into rebellion, and that she died for her country, We cannot forget her contribution for India (John & Malleon, 2010).

Annie Besant: (1887-1933)

Annie Besant was a British socialist, theosophist, activist, author, speaker, educationist, and philanthropist who was born in Clapham, London, on October 1, 1847. She was a strong advocate for Indian and Irish self-rule and was regarded as a defender of human freedom. Among her accomplishments as an educator was the establishment of Banaras Hindu

University (Aparna., B, 1990). She made her first trip to India in 1893, shortly after joining the Theosophical Society. Besant said in 1902 that "India is not ruled for the prospering of the people, but rather for the profit of her conquerors, and her sons are being treated as a conquered race." She successfully fought for Indian education, criticized child marriage and caste, and promoted Indian nationalism. Besant kept up her strong involvement in politics in addition to her theosophical pursuits. She was elected president in 1907 of the Theosophical Society, which was founded in the United States in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky to promote Theosophy. By that time, the organization's global headquarters were in Adyar, Madras, Chennai (Maitrayee, 2011).

Once more basing aspirations for India on Irish nationalist traditions, Besant and Lokmanya Tilak founded the All India Home Rule League in 1916. This was the first Indian political party whose primary objective was regime change. Besant defiantly flew a red and green flag while being imprisoned and incarcerated at a hill station in June 1917. Besant's imprisonment had made protests a focal point, and the Congress and Muslim League jointly vowed to stage demonstrations if she was not released. After being released in September 1917, Besant assumed the role of president of the Indian National Congress for a year in December 1917 (Bala, 1986).

Usha Mehta: (1920-2000).

On March 25, 1920, Usha was born in Saras hamlet, close to Surat, Gujarat. She first saw Mahatma Gandhi when she was five years old, while visiting his ashram in Ahmedabad. Soon after, Gandhi set up a camp close to her hamlet, where little Usha took part by attending meetings and spinning a bit. During a demonstration against the Simon Commission in 1928, Usha, then eight years old, yelled her first protest against the British Raj: "Simon Go Back." In 1932, when Usha was 12, her family moved to Bombay, making it possible for her to participate more actively in the freedom movement. She and other children distributed clandestine bulletins and publications, visited relatives in the prisons, and carried messages to these prisoners (Kaur, 2013).

Usha became a disciple of Gandhi after being greatly impressed by him as a child. She adopted a Spartan, Gandhian lifestyle, wearing only Khadi clothing and avoiding all forms of luxury, and she made the early

choice to live a life of celibacy. She became a well-known advocate of Gandhian philosophy and ideas throughout time. In 1942, she dropped out of school to join the Quit India Movement. She then became a full-time participant in the liberation struggle at the age of 22. Gandhi and the Congress had declared that a demonstration at Mumbai's Gowalia Tank grounds on August 9, 1942, would mark the start of the Quit India Movement. Gandhi and almost every other leader had been arrested before to that day. On the designated day, however, a sizable contingent of Indians assembled at Gowalia Tank Ground. The task of addressing them and raising the national flag was left to a handful of workers and subordinate leaders. On August 9, 1942, at Gowalia Tank Ground (later renamed "August Kranti Maidan"), Usha was among those who raised the tricolour (Raju, 2004).

CONCLUSION

As a result, it is evident from the discussion above that women's political savvy, bravery, altruism, and sacrifice are abundant throughout the history of the liberation movement. Without acknowledging the role these courageous women played, the history of the Indian Freedom Struggle would be lacking. Unfortunately, some of the brave women who took part in the Indian freedom fight are lost to history. Thus, it is vital to draw attention to the role these courageous girls of the soil played in their motherland's fight for independence.

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