

India's Freedom Struggle ROLE OF WOMEN

A critical study of the history of India will reveal that, down the ages, women have excelled both in war and peace, both through pen and sword, upholding India's cultural values and its ethical system. During the freedom struggle, Mahatma Gandhi was quick to realize the importance of *Nari shakthi* (women's power) and he empowered them to be equal partners in the unique freedom struggle of India.

Gandhiji did not expect all Indian women to become Joans of Arc or Ranis of Jhansi.



Kasturba Gandhi

He wanted them to be as proud and brave as Sita. "Rani of Jhansi" he said "could be subdued but not Sita (wife of lord Rama). He, therefore, gave a clarion call to them to join the national movement and save the national honor. The first woman to respond to his call was Kasturba, his wife. A symbol of self sacrifice, she displayed qualities of leadership particularly when Gandhi was in jail. A pillar of strength to Gandhi's efforts for non violence she was always in the forefront in all his non-violent agitations in South Africa as well as at home. She had a distinct outlook on life. "Kasturba's outlook on life" he said, "means the outlook" represented by Kasturba Gandhi and not Mohan Das Karamchand Gandhi". She died in the detention camp in Agha Khan Palace in February, 1944, near Pune. Although she was herself an illiterate she stood for the education, of women and through education, their empowerment.



Sarojini Naidu

Others who plunged into the national movement included Madame Cama, Sister Nivedita, Annie Besant, Pandita Ramabai, Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Nehru, Maniben Patel, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Sucheta Kripalani, Prabha Vati Devi and thousands of others who sacrificed their homes to see the country free. Even those who did not fully subscribe to non-violence joined the movement for a new India through revolutionary methods. These included Durga Bhabi, an associate of Bhagat Singh: Satyawati Devi, Khurshed Behn, Lado Rani Zutshi, Aruna Asaf Ali, et, et al as also Durgabai Deshmukh and Ammu Swaminathan who served the country through active social service. 'If courage of the highest type is to be developed', said Mahatma Gandhi, 'the women of India are the natural leaders in this regard.'

The story of Madame Cama reads like a thriller. Even before Gandhi had started his movement in India, she along with Sardar Singh Rana had unfurled the tri-colour of India in 1907. In an inspiring speech she said, "This flag is of India's independence. Behold, it is born. It is already sanctified by the blood of martyred Indian youth. I call up on you, ladies and gentlemen, to rise and salute the flag of Indian independence" The occasion was the International Socialist Conference at Stuttgart, Germany. All the delegates rose and saluted the flag of freedom.

When Madan Lal Dhingra, the 22-year old patriot and an engineering student in London was hanged in 1909, she said: "More Madan Lals are the need of the hour". In collaboration with Virendranath Chattopadhyay, she started a magazine called "*Madan Talwar*" (Madan's sword) printed from Berlin. This magazine soon became the mouthpiece of all Indian revolutionaries abroad.

Replying to the British criticism about the use of violence in the freedom struggle, she said: "Some time back it was repugnant to me even to talk of violence as a subject of discussion, but owing to the heartlessness, the hypocrisy and the rascality of the liberals, the feelings is gone. Why should we deplore the use of violence when our enemies drive us to do it. If we use force it is because we are forced to use force." Madame Cama exercised tremendous influence on the mind of Bhagat Singh and his comrades. Popularly known as the 'Mother of Revolution', she asked her countryman to pledge to overthrow the foreign yoke.

Durgavati and Susheela Devi were two sisters who played a vital role in the revolutionary movement of the Bhagat Singh era. With Durgavati-popularly known as Durga Bhabhi-Bhagat Singh had traveled in the Calcutta Mail on December 18th, 1928, in one of his escapades.

Durga Bhabhi appeared like a meteor on the firmament of the freedom struggle in India. Wife of professor Bhagwati Charan Vohra she was a terror to British police.

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Cultural Calendar for January

- January 10** World Hindi Day Celebrations
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m.
- January 12** A Bharatha Natyam Recital
by Ms. Vidhya Kamalabayson student of Kalabooshanam
Sivakumari Gnanendran
Venue & Time: ICC 6.30 p.m.
- January 16** Film: Mother India (with English subtitles)
Language: Hindi
Directed by: Mehboob
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs
- January 18** Film: Gadar
Language: Hindi
Directed by: Anil Sharma
Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration : 3 hrs
- January 20** An evening of Hindustani classical vocal music recital
by Prof. Krishnakumar Kapoor from the Bathkhande Sangeet
University, Lucknow, India
Venue & Time: ICC 6.30 p.m.
- January 25** "Geet Govindam" a dance dram by renowned Odissi exponent
Smt. Ranjana Gauhar & her troupe from India, sponsored by the
Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi and Ministry of
Cultural Affairs, Sri Lanka on the occasion of 56th Anniversa'y of India's
Republic Day.
Venue & Time: Bishops College Auditorium, Perehera Mw.,
Colombo 03 at 6.30 p.m.
- January 27** Classical Odissi dance performance by Smt. Ranjana Gauhar
& her troupe from India
Venue & Time: ICC 6.30 p.m.
- Smt. Ranjana Gauhar will also present "Geet Govindam" dance drama
on 30th January 2006 in Kandy

(Admission to all programmes is free on first come first served basis except 25th show)

Satyawati is another name to reckon within India's freedom movement. She was the illustrious daughter of Swami Sharadhnanda whose only passion was India's freedom. Of the 37 years she lived, 12 were spent in prison once with a new born babe in arms as her companion.

She served 11 jail terms and died two years before India gained independence. She firmly stood for *swadeshi*, and took active part in Gandhiji's civil disobedience movement.

Lado Rani Zutshi, wife of a Lahore advocate, and her two daughters Janak Kumari Zutshi and Swadesh Kumari Zutshi also played a prominent role in the civil disobedience movement in Punjab, particularly Lahore. They started a new movement of women *satyagrahis*, who wore a distinctive uniform of red trousers, green shirts and white caps. They stood for *swadeshi* and complete prohibition. Intensely patriotic and totally fearless, Lado Rani was the embodiment of self-sacrifice and renunciation. "When a government starts arresting women, its days are numbered", she often said. A perfect Gandhian, she stood for peaceful and non-violent resistance.

Usha Mehta of Bombay was, however, a different kind of revolutionary one who kept the torch of freedom alive with her Freedom Radio. A scholar of exceptional brilliance, she was, in the words of Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, "A woman of rare courage and rare attainments."

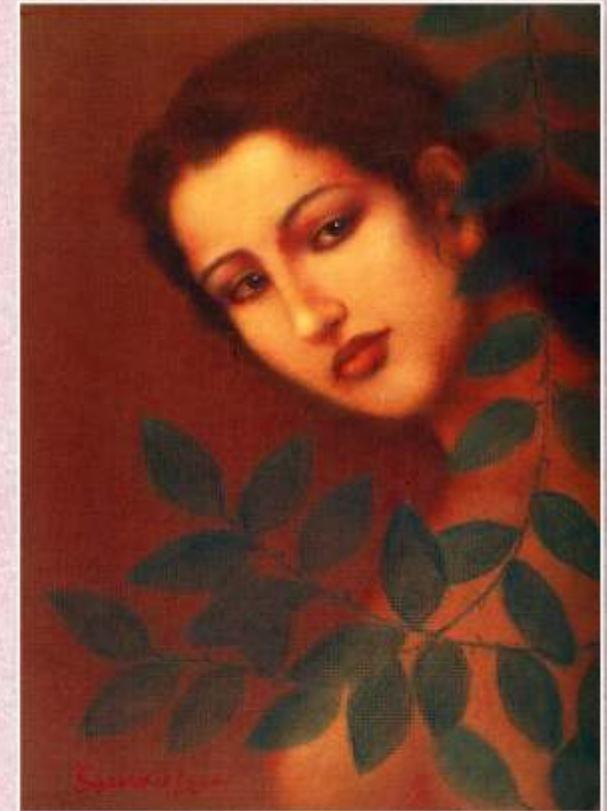
She came into prominence during the Quit India movement started by Gandhiji. She started a secret radio and called it of Voice of Freedom. Khurshed Behn, another young woman from Maharashtra, worked in the North-West Frontier Province and became a legend among the Pushto-speaking freedom fighters.

Contd.



ICC

January 2006



Radha, Suhas Roy, Soft pastel on toxi board, 56 x 40.5 cms, 2000

Indian Cultural Centre

133, Baudhaloka Mawatha,
Colombo 4, Sri Lanka
Telephone: 2500014 Fax: 2598674
E-mail : icc@eureka.lk

ICC wishes everyone a happy and prosperous New Year

In Retrospect

8th November

“Prevention and Reversal of Heart Disease” Lecture by Dr. Bimal Chhajer



Dr. Bimal Chhajer, a pioneering Cardiologist from India delivered a lecture on “Prevention and Reversal of Heart Disease” at the Centre. His lecture was jointly organized by the Indian Cultural Centre & the Indo Lanka Forum. In his talk he explained in detail the root of the heart disease and how various causes such as high blood pressure, blood sugar etc. leads to heart diseases by using a power point presentation. The lecture was followed by an interactive discussion with the audience. It was very well attended by several dignitaries of the state.

10th November

Bharatha Natyam Recital By the dance students of the Indian Cultural Centre trained by Ms. Subashini Pathmanathan



The students of the Indian Cultural Centre, trained by Ms. Subashini Pathmanathan presented a classical Bharatha Natyam recital on 10th November at the Cultural Centre's auditorium amidst a large gathering.

Different groups of students proved their mastery and ability. The recital started with “Pushpanjali” on Lord Ganesh and switched on to a “Venba” by the great Tamil poet Awaier and that was followed by a “Saturstra Alarippu”. The traditional “Sabtham” started with “Kambothi” raga and switched on to “Ragamaliga” set to “Misra Chapu” thala. In “Sabtham” the students revealed the splendid movements of facial expressions and Abinaya. The classical recital displayed the fragrance of beautiful and devotional pieces of “Thevaram”, “Keerthanams”, “Padams” and melodious “Javalis”. In all items the students showed their excellent skill in pure “Nirtha”, “Nirthya”, “Thala” and “Laya”.

The finale of the recital was a brisk “Thillana” in “Thesh” raga set to “Aathi” thala and concluded with “Mangalam”, a composition of Subramaniya Bharathi. The evening was a memorable event for the art lovers.

12th November

Painting, Drawing and Essay Competition for children to commemorate the Birth Anniversary of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru



The Indian Cultural Centre celebrated children's day, which falls on November 14 coinciding with the birthday of Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, by hosting a painting, drawing and essay writing competition for children on 12th November. Around 290 children from

all over the Island participated in this competition. Boys and girls between the age groups of three and fifteen drew and painted colourful pictures on a wide variety of themes using their imagination. It was interesting to see such enthusiasm among the children. At the end of the day each participant was awarded a certificate for participation. All entries completed at the Centre were sent to India to be adjudged in the Shankar's International Competition 2006



Films in January

Mother India (with English subtitles)
Language: Hindi
Directed by: Mehboob
Starring : Nargis, Sunil Dutt,
Rajendra Kumar & Rak Kumar



Gadar
Language: Hindi
Directed by: Anil Sharma
Starring : Sunny Deol,
Amisha Patel & Amrish Puri



LIBRARY Recent Library Accessions

Saraswativijayam: Potheri Kunhambu
Mukherjee, M. ed.
New Delhi: The Book Review Literary Trust,
2002. 115 p.
002385
F SAR

Stories of Joginder Paul
Kumar, S.P. trans.
New Delhi: NBT, 2003. 201 p.
00387
F PAU

**The Untold Story of India's Partition:
The Shadow of the Great Game**
Sarila, Narendra Singh
New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2005. 436 p.
002386
954.04 SAR

Separate Journeys
Dharmarajan, G. ed.
New Delhi: Katha, 1998. 206 p.
002390
808.8 SEP

Almost an Ambassador
Dogra, Rajiv
New Delhi: Srishti, 2005. 238 p.
002394
F D0G

**Sriramacaritabdhiratna of Nityananda
Shastri**
Shastri, S.V. trans.
New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2005. 441 p.
002388
294.592 2 SRI

NEW COURSES

HINDI

Course begins : 1st March 2006
Class day : Monday to Friday
Age limit : Children class 6 to 15 years
Adults class over 16 years
Course fee : Registration fee Rs.150/=
Monthly fee Rs.200/=
Registration : Will commence from 4th January 2006

SITAR

Course begins : 1st February 2006
Class day : Monday
Age limit : Over 12 years
Course fee : Registration fee Rs.250/=
Monthly fee Rs.300/=
Registration : Will commence from 4th January 2006

India's Freedom Struggle... contd.



Vijayalakshmi Pandit

woman from Maharashtra, worked in the North-West Frontier Province and became a legend among the Pushto-speaking freedom fighters.

Aruna Asaf Ali was the heroine of the 1942 movement. Originally a Gandhian, she changed her views on non violent methods. She remained underground for a number of years, hoisted the national flag in Bombay, became Mayor of Delhi and won the admiration of all politicians.

A brilliant orator, she wrote with great felicity. With Dr. Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan she founded the Socialist Wing of the Indian National Congress. These women of India proved that fighting for freedom was not the exclusive preserve of men.

The intellectual gaps were filled by women like Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalakshmi Pandit and Sucheta Kriplani, not to mention artists such as M.S.Subbalakshmi. Captain Lakshmi Sehgal, who fought shoulder to shoulder with men in the Indian freedom struggle, as Head of the Rani Jhansi regiment of Indian National Army (INA), was one of the most trusted and loyal aides of Netaji.

Sarojini Naidu was the nightingale of India's freedom movement. In a letter to Nehru, she said: “As I watched your face while you were being given a rousing reception on your election, I felt I was envisaging both the coronation and the crucifixion. Indeed, the two are inseparable and almost synonymous today, especially for you, because you are so sensitive and so fastidious in your spiritual response and reaction and you will suffer a hundred-fold more poignantly than men and women of less fine fibre and less vivid perception and apprehension, in dealing with the ugliness, falsehood, backsliding, betrayal..... all the inevitable attributes of weakness that seeks to hide its poverty by aggressive and bombastic sound.”



Kamla Nehru

In yet another letter to Gandhiji, she said:” The specialists think that my heart disease is in the advanced and dangerous stage, but I cannot stir till I stir the heart of the world to repentance over the tragedy of martyred India”. Thus Sarojini Naidu was the poet-chronicler of the freedom struggle.

A princess of the native Kapurthala state, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was Gandhiji's secretary for 16 years and free India's first Health Minister. Imprisoned a number of times and lathicharged on several occasions, Amrit Kaur was drawn towards Gandhiji during the days of martial law in Punjab. She decided to forsake princely pomp and join Gandhiji's ashram.

Another name to emerge in the freedom struggle was that of Durgabai Deshmukh during the salt satyagraha. Popularly known as the Iron lady, she defied British authority in the 1930s and edited a magazine called *Andhra Mahila*. These women social activists broadened the base of the freedom movement by their active social work.

Last but not the least, a word about Ammu Swaminathan, endearingly called *Cheri Amma* (Aunte). A founder-member of the all India Women's Conference situated in Madras, she joined the Indian National Congress in 1934 and played a leading role in the 'Quit India' movement in 1942. A firm believer in non-violence and Gandhian economics, she became a Member of the Constituent Assembly and stood for a new India based on social justice and gender equality.

Source : *Sushma*, The India Perspectives