

# From Silence to Action: Women in Freedom Struggle

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## Abstract:

In the early eighteenth century, women have always held the position of backstage leader. It wasn't until certain historians came out to show how women, although being at the back of the stage, helped their husbands fight for independence. Women began to actively and consistently participate in the nation's freedom movement after the 18th century. Women made the decision to stand up and deal the Colonialists a serious blow. The stories of those lesser-known female revolutionaries will be told in this paper. It's fascinating to observe how women have evolved from being viewed as merely housewives to the first human bomb to political leaders.

**Keywords:** British Colonialism, Women revolutionaries, imprisonment, human bomb.

## Introduction:

The emergence of British colonialism in India is credited with sparking a Freedom Movement outburst against the British. According to certain historians, the First War of Independence took place in 1857 & a number of revolutionaries, including peasants, soldiers, and laborers, led to the beginning of the Movement. In addition to fighting side by side with men against the British, Indian women revolutionaries, who receive less credit than their male counterparts

Not only were women in the 18th and 19th centuries housewives who worked inside walls, but they were also active revolutionaries who started movements, established clandestine organizations, wrote articles critical of the British, and took up guns. We shall attempt to tell some tales of women's sacrifices for the cause of the country's freedom in this essay. Numerous revolutionaries, such as **Begum Hazrat Mahal**, **Rani Chinamma** are credited for motivating numerous warriors to spearhead the fight against the British. She was the "best and bravest of the leaders," according to Sir Hume Rose.

Then comes **Bhima Bai Holkar**, who rebelled against the British and battled Colonel Malcom in a guerilla war, ultimately defeating him.

During the Revolt of 1857, **Rani Laxmibai, Queen of Jhansi**, rose to prominence. She caused the British to leave her area in addition to refusing to give it up.

**Velu Nachiyar**, renowned for creating the human bomb, waged war against the British colonists in the late 1700s and won. After burning herself on fire, **Kuyili**, her army leader, is said to have entered a British ammo stockpile.

## Literature Review:

**Rashid & Veena (2024)** The study focused on the legacy that the female revolutionaries left behind during

the fight for freedom. One of the independence warriors who was instrumental in the fight was Rani Laxmibai.

**Suruchi Thaper (2006):** Her contributions to the Indian liberation movement have been exceptional. One of the main topics of his book is the nationalist role played by middle-class women in India's independence struggle, especially in the united provinces. Prominent female leaders including Suchetakirpalani and Sarojini Naidu are highlighted by the author.

**O.P Ralhan (1995):** The author discusses the economic and social circumstances faced by the women of India, who have been instrumental in the development of our culture from ancient times to the present. The current generation should be made aware of these women's significant contributions.

**Manmohan Kaur (1985)** The 90-year era from 1857 to 1947 is covered in this book about Indian participation of the women in the freedom movement. It began with the first attempt at liberation in 1857 and ended in 1947.

**P.N Chopra (1975)** In addition to detailing their tale of bravery, devotion, and sacrifice, this book highlights the valiant role Indian women played in the country's fight for independence. They fought bravely and with unwavering spirit.

**Judith Brown (1972):** Women's involvement in the movement is characterized in the book as a political annoyance.

### Objectives:

The objectives of the investigation were as follows:

- To research the Indian liberation movement as a whole.
- To investigate how women led the independence movement while the male freedom fighter was incarcerated.
- To investigate the part women liberation fighters played in India's independence movement.
- To assess the role of the women in Indian politics and the liberation movement.

### Research Methodology

Textual sources, such as books, essays, and papers published in various National and international publications, provided majority of the information used in this study. As a result, the researcher employed secondary data.

### PROMINENT WOMEN FREEDOM FIGHTERS

#### Veeramangai Rani Velu Nachiyar

On January 3, 1730, Velu Nachiyar, the **Queen of Ramanathapuram**, was born. She was the sole child of **King Chellamuthu Vijayaraghunatha** Sethupathy and **Queen Sakandhimuthathal** of the Ramnad Kingdom. She is regarded as India's first queen to declare war against the British. She received instruction in a variety of combat techniques, such as using weapons in battle, practicing martial arts like Kalaripayattu, Valari, and Silambam, archery, horseback riding, and more.

She spoke Urdu, French, English, and many other languages fluently. She had a daughter with Muthu Vaduganatha Periya Udaiyathevar, the King of Sivagangai, with whom she was married. Her spouse was slain in a conflict with the East India Company in 1772. Consequently, she clashed with the East India Company and turned to Hyder Ali and several wealthy merchants for assistance. After eight years of

preparation, she ultimately rebelled against the British with the help of Thandavarayan Pillai, Tipu Sultan, and the Maruthu Brothers.

Once she discovered where the British had kept their ammo, her commander, Kuyili, committed suicide by burning herself alive and blowing up the ammunition godown.

After fighting the East India Company, she recaptured her kingdom in 1780. She governed for roughly a decade. **Vellacci** succeeded her in 1790 with her daughter. Velu Nachiyar passed away on December 25, 1796.

### **Kittur Chennamma**

Born on November 14, 1778, in Kakati, Belagavi District of Karnataka, India, Kittur Chennamma was the member of the Lingayat group. Padmavati was her mother, while Dhulappa Desai was her father. She was trained in sword fighting, horseback riding, and archery from an early age.

She married **Raja Mallasaria** when she was fifteen years old. Shivalingarudra Sarja, her eldest son, succeeded to the throne following the death of her husband in 1816. However, his declining health made it impossible for him to live for very long. According to the Doctrine of Lapse, Lord Dalhousie refused to recognize Shivalingappa as his heir, despite the fact that Shivalingarudra had adopted the kid before his death.

**John Thackery**, a British official, attacked Kittur in October 1824. In retaliation, Rani Chennamma assassinated British official John Thackery and captured Steveson and Sir Walter Elliot as prisoners. Although **Thomas Munro's nephew** was slain in the second assault, she was eventually taken prisoner and held at **Baihongal Fort** until her death on February 21, 1829.

### **Chapekar Widows**

Between 1897 and 1898, the Chapekar Brothers, who were active in a revolutionary movement against the British, were imprisoned. Their wives, **Durgabai Damodar**, **Yamunabai Balkrishan**, and **Sitabai Vasudeo**, endured a lot of hardship during this period. They endured humiliation and cruelty as typical widows. They were not even permitted to see or even get pictures of their husbands while they were incarcerated. At just 25, Durgabai assumed responsibility for taking care of the Chapekar Brothers' family and children. Leaders such as Veer Savarkar and Lokmanya Tilak supported her during this trying time.

### **Yesubai Savarkar**

The Phadke family welcomed Saraswatibai, also known as **Yesubai Ganeshpant Savarkar**, into the world in Trimbakeshwar, Maharashtra, in 1885. Yesubai Savarkar, Ganesh Savarkar's wife, made important sacrifices. Despite her lack of involvement in revolutionary activities, she was a passionate supporter of her husband's endeavors. She promoted the use of Swadeshi goods by women and established the **Atmanishtha Yuvati Sangha**. Yesubai accepted **Swadeshi Vrata** in 1905 after being influenced by the Swadeshi movement. She began wearing bangles made of black beads in the rope in place of glass ones since the glass was coming from overseas. She stopped eating sugar at that time because it was also imported.

Babarao Savarkar was in Mumbai in 1908 when Ganesh Savarkar was captured. Yesubai was aware that day would see a police raid on her Nashik home. Savarkar's home contained a number of offensive items, such as government-banned publications and firearms. However, Yesubai swiftly destroyed some crucial materials and concealed others with Vishwanath Kelkar's assistance. While some books were burned, others were stored in Govinda's home. The work was completed at four in the morning, and the police conducted a raid thirty minutes later. However, because of Yesubai's presence, the police were unable to find any significant evidence.

Following their arrival in Mumbai in 1916, Yesubai and Narayan Rao attempted on multiple occasions to grant Babarao Savarkar permission to travel to the Andamans, but their requests were typically denied. She became unwell at the end of 1918. She frequently experienced delusions during this time. She used to think that Babarao, her husband, had come to see her. Although it was too late, Narayan Rao received a letter on February 8, 1919, permitting Yesubai to see her husband. Yesubai died on February 5, 1919, at the young age of 34, three days before to the letter's receipt.

### **Pritilata Waddedar**

One of the pioneers of the Indian revolutionary struggle, Pritilata Waddedar was celebrated as the **first Bengali lady martyr**. She was born in the Chattagram District of modern-day Bangladesh on May 5, 1911. She became a member of Surya Sen's revolutionary group.

She is renowned for organizing a group of fifteen revolutionaries who launched an armed assault on the **Pahartali European Club** in 1932. Dressed as a Punjabi man, she led the attack on the evening of September 23 and was wounded in the leg. In order to escape being arrested, she took cyanide.

### **Aruna Asaf Ali**

On July 16, 1909, **Aruna Ganguly** was born into a Bengali family in Kalka, Punjab (now Haryana). Ambalika Devi was her mother, while Upendranath Ganguly was her father. Despite parental objections due to their age and religion, she married Congress Party Leader **Asaf Ali**.

Aruna Asaf Ali joined INC after being married and took part in a number of agitations during the Salt Satyagraha, which led to her incarceration at the young age of 21. Aruna Asaf Ali was not included in the list of political prisoners who were to be released in 1931 with the signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Only until Mahatma Gandhi stepped in and other female inmates refused to leave the building was she allowed to go. She protested against the mistreatment of political prisoners when incarcerated in Tihar jail in 1932. After that, she was relocated to Ambala. She wasn't very active after being freed, but she participated in a number of Underground movements by the end of 1942.

Many leaders were detained on August 8<sup>th</sup> 1942 by the colonial government after the resolution for the Quit India Movement was passed. At the Gowalia Tank Maidan, Aruna Asaf Ali raised the Congress flag. In retaliation, the police opened fire on the crowd, but Aruna Asaf Ali refused to back down. She escaped arrest despite an arrest warrant being issued in her name. In exchange for her capture, a compensation of Rs. 5,000 was given. It was not until 1946 that her name was removed off the arrest warrant that she came out of hiding.

She was instrumental in the **National Federation of Indian Women's** establishment in 1954. She was elected Delhi's first mayor in 1958. At the age of 87, she died on July 29, 1996, in New Delhi.

### **Bina Das**

Bina Das Born on August 24, 1911, Bina Das was a West Bengali Indian nationalist and revolutionary. Being a member of the semi-revolutionary women's movement **Chhatra Sangha**, she attempted to kill Bengal's Governor, Stanley Jackson, at the University of Calcutta during a commencement ceremony on February 6, 1932. She came from a socially engaged family because both of her parents were educators who adhered to Brahmo Samaj ideals.

She was called out of class during her school years to practice for a presentation welcoming the British Viceroy's wife, which was the event that inspired her to become revolutionary. She describes her experience in her biography, **Shrinkhal Jhankar**: "As she entered, we were to carry baskets of flowers and scatter them at her feet. I left the rehearsal because I found the idea repulsive." The

plan was really offensive. Subhash Chandra Bose was a major inspiration to her. She joined the **Bengal Volunteer Corps**, which Subhash Chandra Bose created, in 1928.

The convocation event at Calcutta University was scheduled to be attended by Stanley Jackson, the governor of Bengal, Bina Das found out in the spring of 1932. She went to the Jugantar Party's **Kamala Dasgupta** to get a gun for herself. **Sudhir Ghosh**, a friend of Kamala's, paid **Rs. 280** for an antique **Belgium five-chambered pistol**. None of the five bullets that Bina Das fired at the convocation were able to strike him. She was apprehended, taken to jail, and given a nine-year term. She met her tutor, Subhash Chandra Bose, after being freed. She took part in 1942 with the Quit India Movement. She wed Jugantar gang member **Jatish Chandra Bhaumik** in 1947. On December 26, 1986, she passed away.

### **Rani Gadinliu**

On January 26, 1915, Gadinliu Pamei was born into a Rongmei Naga family in the village of Nungkao (also known as Longkao), Tamenglong District, Manipur.

When She was thirteen, In 1927 When her cousin **Haipou Jadonang** was a well-known local leader, Gadinliu joined his Heraka movement. A tribal religion was revived by the Jadonang movement. Jadonang was imprisoned by the British and hanged at Imphal on 29<sup>th</sup> of August 1931. Jadonang was not involved in the killings, but he was charged with treason because he violated a social taboo and killed four Meitei traders in Longkao. Thus, Gadinliu became his political and spiritual successor. She encouraged the Zeliangrong people to avoid paying taxes in an outspoken rebellion against the British raj.

People in the community donated to her, and many of them also volunteered with her. A manhunt was initiated by the British police for her. She avoided being arrested by the authorities by moving between villages of Nagaland, Assam, and Manipur. The 3rd and 4th regiments of the Assam Rifles, led by Naga Hills Deputy Commissioner JP Mills, were sent by the Assam Governor to fight her. A 10-year tax break was announced for any village that provided information on her whereabouts, as part of the monetary awards announced for information leading to her capture. In the Hangrum village (18 March 1932) and the North Cachar Hills (16 February 1932), her troops fought with the Assam Rifles.

Rani Gadinliu moved to the village of Pulomi in October 1932. Her supporters began constructing a wooden stronghold. On October 17, 1932, **Captain MacDonald's** force of the Assam Rifles unexpectedly attacked the village while the fortress was being built. Gadinliu and her supporters were taken into custody close to the village of Kenoma. After a ten-month trial, Gadinliu was found guilty of murder and abetment of murder and transported to Imphal. She was found guilty by the Political Agent's Court of aiding and abetting murder and sentenced her to life in jail. The majority of her associates were imprisoned or put to death.

In 1934, she founded a tribal group called **Kabni Samiti**. Jawaharlal Nehru promised to strive toward her freedom when he met her at the Shillong Jail in 1937. He called Gadinliu, "**daughter of the hills**" and also bestowed upon her the title of "**Rani**," or **Queen of her people**, in a statement that was published in the Hindustan Times. Nehru wrote to **Lady Astor**, a British Member of Parliament, requesting that she take action to free Rani Gadinliu. The Secretary of State for India, however, rejected his request, claiming that Rani's release may spark more unrest.

Following the establishment of the Indian Interim Government in 1946, Prime Minister Nehru ordered Rani Gadinliu to be released from Tura jail after he had been incarcerated for 14 years. Rani Gadinliu persisted in supporting Naga culture and the rights of her people after being released from prison. She was



honored with multiple accolades for her efforts to community development and India's freedom movement before passing away in Luangkao on February 17, 1993.

- In 1972, she received the **Tamra Patra Award** for her services to the cause of independence. For her outstanding accomplishment, she was awarded the Padma Bhushan (1982), one of India's highest civilian honors.
- **The Stree Shakti Puraskar (1991)** and **Vivekananda Sewa Summan (1983)** awards honor her achievements to social justice and women's empowerment.
- In 1996, **Bhagwan Birsa Munda Puraskar** was awarded posthumously for her commitment to tribal welfare and rights.
- To commemorate her legacy, the Indian Coast Guard put the "**ICGS Rani Gaidinliu**" into service in 2016.

### Kalpana Dutta

Born on July 27, 1913, Kalpana Datta (also known as **Kalpana Joshi**) participated in the military independence movement under Surya Sen, which carried out the 1930 armored assault on Chittagong. After joining the Communist Party of India, she married **Puran Chand Joshi**, the party's general secretary, in 1943.

Kalpana Datta (often written Dutta) was born in Sripur, Chittagong District. Binod Behari Dattagupta, her father, worked for the government. She traveled to Calcutta and enrolled to study Science in Bethune College after passing the Chittagong matriculation exam in 1929. She soon became a part of the semi-revolutionary **Chhatri Sangha** (Women Students Association), which also included **Pritilata Waddedar** and **Bina Das**

### Armed independence movement

On April 18, 1930, the **Chittagong armory attack** took place. In May 1931, Kalpana became a member of the armed resistance group "**Indian Republican Army, Chattagram branch,**" which was headed by Surya Sen. Surya Sen assigned her and Pritilata Waddedar the mission of attacking the European Club in Chittagong in September 1931. She was caught while doing reconnaissance in the region one week prior to the attack. After being released on bail, she went into hiding. The police surrounded their hiding spot in Gairala village on February 16, 1933. Kalpana escaped during this operation, but Surya Sen was taken into custody. She attempted, but failed, to blow the jail in order to liberate Surya.

Finally, on May 19, 1933, Kalpana was taken into custody. In the Chittagong armory raid case, Kalpana received a life sentence of transportation in the second supplementary trial. 1939 saw her release.

### Later life

Kalpana Datta joined the Communist Party of India after graduating from Calcutta University in 1940. During the Partition of Bengal and the famine in 1943, she worked as a relief worker. Her autobiographical book, "**Chittagong Armoury Raiders: Reminiscences,**" translated into English by **Arun Bose** and **Nikhil Chakraborty** and published in October 1945, was prefaced by her husband, communist leader P. C. Joshi. She ran unsuccessfully in the 1946 Bengal Legislative Assembly elections as a Chittagong candidate for the CPI. She thereafter started working at the ISI, where she remained until her retirement. On **February 8, 1995**, in Calcutta, she passed away.

### Lakshmi Sehgal

In addition to serving as the Minister of Women's Affairs in the Government of Azad Hind and an officer in the INA, Lakshmi Sahgal born on **October 24, 1914**, as **Lakshmi Swaminathan** was a revolutionary in the Indian independence movement. Lakshmi is frequently called **Captain Lakshmi** in India, a tribute

to her position when she was taken prisoner during Second World War in Burma.

S. Swaminathan, a criminal law practitioner at the Madras High Court, and A.V. Ammukutty, a social worker and independence activist from a wealthy Nair family, were the parents of Captain Lakshmi.

In 1938, she graduated from Madras Medical College with an MBBS. She obtained her obstetrics and gynecology diploma a year later. She worked as a doctor in Triplicane, Chennai's Government Kasturba Gandhi Hospital. In 1940, she left for Singapore when her marriage to pilot P.K.N. Rao ended. She met some members of the INA, led by Subhas Chandra Bose, while she was in Singapore.

During Singapore's British capitulation to the Japanese in 1942, Lakshmi provided assistance to injured POWs, many of whom wanted to start an Indian independence army. During this period, a number of nationalist Indians, including **S. C. Guha, K. P. Kesava, and N. Raghavan**, were employed in Singapore and established a Council of Action. But when it came to their involvement in the war, the occupying Japanese forces made no definite promises or gave their INA or Azad Hind Fauj, its blessing.

In this context, the movement was restructured by Subhash Chandra Bose upon his arrival in Singapore on July 2, 1943. At the second mass gathering, Netaji revealed his plan to create a **women's army unit** named after the Rani of Jhansi, who had fought so valiantly against the British in 1857, according to a later post by Lakshmi Sahgal.

**I assured him I was prepared to join. On July 8, 1943, something occurred. Dr. Lakshmi Swaminathan was given the nickname and persona that would follow her throughout her life: Captain Lakshmi. Women eagerly volunteered to join the all-female brigade.**

Captain Lakshmi was the Minister in Charge of Women's Organizations in Singapore's Provisional Government, which was led by Subash Chandra Bose.

After deploying to Burma with the Japanese army in December 1944, the INA leadership chose to beat a retreat before they could conquer Imphal in March 1945 since the tide of war was turning against them. Captain Lakshmi stayed in Burma till being sent to India in March 1946 after being captured by the British in May 1945. This occurred during the Delhi INA trials, which heightened popular discontent with colonial rule and hastened its demise.

### **Later years**

Later, in 1971, Lakshmi joined the Marxist CPI. She established medical facilities and relief camps in Calcutta to accommodate the influx of Bangladeshi migrants into India during the Bangladesh crisis. She led several of the All-India Democratic Women's Association's campaigns and events after helping to launch it in 1981. She fought to restore peace to Kanpur during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, led a medical team to Bhopal following the gas tragedy in December 1984, and was arrested in 1996 for her involvement in a campaign against the Miss World pageant in Bangalore. Even at the age of 92, she continued to see patients on a regular basis at her Kanpur clinic in 2006.

Sahgal was nominated as a candidate in the 2002 Indian presidential election by four communist parties: the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the All-India Forward Bloc, and the Communist Party of India. She had just been a rival to A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, and he had won. Sahgal passed away in Kanpur on July 23, 2012, at 11:20 a.m., after suffering a heart attack on July 19. Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi Memorial Medical College received her body as a donation for medical study.

### **CONCLUSION**

If women's contributions to the Indian liberation movement were not recognized, the history of the Indian liberation Struggle would be lacking. During the Indian independence movement, many women displayed

courage. Since 1817, in the fight for India's independence from British domination, women have been instrumental. It is fascinating to witness how women like Velu Nachiyar, Bina Das, Kittur Chenamma, and hundreds more became well-known as warriors in a society dominated by men and chose to actively participate in the fight against British colonialism rather than only observing it passively. It is heartbreaking that the majority of people are unaware of the names of these unsung heroes who sacrificed their life for the good of the country. It is necessary for the historians of the time to emphasize their contributions more. After all History is not only His- story, its Her- story too. It is high time that women freedom fighters who gave played important role in freedom struggle be given due recognition as they have left a vast legacy to inspire the coming generations.

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