APPENDEX

EMINENT WOMEN FREEDOM FIGHTERS

The list of great women whose names have gone down in history for their dedication and undying devotion to the service of India is a long one. There are endless number of women who daringly fought for India’s freedom with their true spirit and undaunted courage and had faced various tortures, exploitations and hardships to earn us freedom that we enjoy today in our motherland India. It is a very difficult task list out all women freedom fighters and equally difficult to segregate a few amongst them.

With all respect and due apologies, furnishing below a brief note on selected few women freedom fighters.

1. Kittur Rani Chennamma (1778-1829):

Kitturu Rani Chennamma was the first woman independence activist of India. Rani Chennamma was the queen of the princely State of Kittur in Karnataka. In the 1857 war of independence, she led an armed rebellion against the British in response to the Doctrine of lapse. The resistance ended in her martyrdom and she is remembered today as one of the earliest Indian rulers to have fought for independence. Rani Chennamma did not succeed in driving them away, but she did provoke many women to rise against the British rule. Along with Abbakka Rani, Keladi Chennamma and Onake Obavva she is much venerated in Karnataka as an icon of bravery and women’s pride. Rani Chennamma has become a legend.
2. Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi (19 November 1828- 17 June 1858):

Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi whose heroism and superb leadership laid an outstanding example for all future generations of women freedom fighters. She was a symbol of bravery, patriotism, self respect, perseverance, generosity and resistance to British rule. She fought till her last breath for the welfare of women in the country and for the noble cause of India’s independence. “Khoob Ladi Mardani thi Woh To Jhansi Wali Rani Thi” - Rani Laxmi Bai the Queen of Jhansi (which is located on the northern side of India) is an epitome for all the generations ahead. She was one of the leading figures of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and was a symbol of the resistance to British rule in India. She married to Gangadhar Rao head of the state of Jhansi. She was not allowed to adopt a successor after his death by the British, and Jhansi was annexed. With the outbreak of the revolt she became determined to fight back. She used to go into the battlefield dressed as a man. Holding the reins of their horse in her mouth she used the sword with both hands. Under her leadership the Rani’s troops showed undaunted courage and returned shot for shot. She fought valiantly and although beaten. She refused to surrender and fell as a warrior should, fight the enemy to the last. Considered by the British as the best and bravest military leader of rebels this sparkling epitome of courage died a hero's death in the battlefield. Her remarkable courage inspired many men and women in India to rise against the alien rule.

3. Rani Avanti Bai (1831-1858):

Rani Avantibai was born on 16, August 1831. When Vikramaditya Singh, the ruler of Ramgarh State died leaving behind his wife Avantibai and no heir to the throne, the British put the state under court administration. Avantibai vowed to win back her land from the British. She raised an army of four thousand men and led it
herself against the British in 1857. A fierce battle ensured and Avantibai fought most valiantly but could not hold out for long against the superior strength of the British army. When her defeat becomes imminent she killed herself with her own sword and English army couldn’t defeat her in her life. Later Rani Avantibia’s sacrifice became a example to the Lodhian kingdom and became history of the fight for freedom on 20-03-1858. She was a great freedom fighter.

4. Begum Hazrat Mahal (1820-1879):

Begum Hazrat Mahal was a great Indian freedom-fighter who played a major role during India's first war of independence (1857-58). She was also known as the Begum of Awadh (Oudh) and was the wife of the then Lucknow ruler, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. She led a band of her supporters against the British, and was even able to seize the control of Lucknow. She took active part in the defence of Lucknow against the British. Although, she was queen and used to a life of luxury, she appeared on the battle-field herself to encourage her troops. Begum Hazrat Mahal held out against the British with all her strength as long as she could.

She worked in close association with other leaders of the India’s first war of independence, including Nana Sahib. Begum was not only a strategist but also fought on the battlefield. When the forces under the command of the British re-captured Lucknow and most part of the Awadh, she was forced to retreat. When her forces lost ground, she fled Oudh and organized soldiers again in other places. She turned down all offers of amnesty and allowances by the British rulers. Finally, she took refuge in an asylum in Nepal, where she died in the year 1879. Government of India issued a commemorative stamp in the honour of Begum Hazrat Mahal on 10th May 1984.
5. Rani Jindan Kaur:

Rani Jindan was Punjab's first woman freedom-fighter, the tigress of Lahore, a sparkling revolutionary, a daring organiser, the great enemy of the British imperialism. She was the mother of Dalip Singh, the ruler of Lahore kingdom, was the brain behind the rising of 1848-49 against the British authorities. She was known for her intelligence and intrepid spirit, Jindan was one of the few persons who was intensely disliked and also feared by the British.

Rani Jindan played a conspicuous role in the Punjab politics after her son's elevation to the throne of Lahore kingdom. The British entered into a treaty known as the treaty of Bhyrowal with the Lahore kingdom in December 1846 which made the British the virtual masters of the Punjab. They had not only excluded the Rani from participating in the negotiations which led to the signing of the treaty but also of all share in the government of the Lahore Kingdom. She was removed from the Regency Council, which was to conduct the administration during the minority of Maharaja Dalip Singh. She hatched a plot to murder the British Resident and the members of the Regency Council who collaborated with the British. Prema, an old retainer of Gulab Singh, along with some other persons were to execute the plan. The plan however failed but the British could not take action against the Rani for lack of evidence. But they wanted to get ride of her and imposed restrictions on her movements. The chiefs of the Lahore Darbar were forbidden to see her.

The Queen had become a symbol of national dignity. She continued to urge the freedom fighters back in the Punjab to continue the struggle dauntlessly. Through her trusted band of servants, she continued to send letters and messages to Dewan Mul Raj, Sardar Chattar Singh and Raja Sher Singh, the chiefs of the rebellion. As
soon as the British came to know of the secret designs of the Rani, they transferred her to the Chunar fort on 6 April 1849. On the same evening, she escaped from the fort in the guise of her attendant and proceeded towards Nepal. She reached safely in the Nepalese territory on 27 April. The Government of India confiscated all her jewels and other property at Benaras and allowed her to stay in Nepal on a monthly pension of one thousand rupees. In Nepal, Rani Jindan, carried through her secret plans for the expulsion of the British from the Punjab. She wrote letters to influential people both inside and outside Punjab to rise once again against the British. In the rising of 1857, she found a fresh opportunity to stimulate a rising in the Punjab. But her efforts were against rendered futile by the vigilance of the British.

Being sadly disillusioned, the Rani ultimately thought to seeing her son Maharaj Dalip Singh, who was then staying in England as a Christian gentleman. Her health was shattered and she became almost blind. The British Government allowed Dalip Singh to come to India and to take his mother along with him to England. Disillusioned, her health shattered and almost blind she went to England to stay with her son Maharaj Dalip Singh. Rani resided in a separate house in England till her death in 1863. As per Rani's last wishes, Dalip Singh brought her body back for cremation to India, but was disallowed by the Britishers to perform the last rites in Punjab. He therefore cremated her body at Nasik and returned to England.

6. Lado Rani Zutshi:

Lado Rani Zutshi was the leading woman revolutionary of Punjab. She was married to late Pandit Ladli Prashad Zutshi, a leading lawyer of Lahore. Her interest in politics began in the Martial Law days in the Punjab in 1919; and ever after she was an active Congress worker. During Civil Disobedience movement (1930-1935)
she gained importance for her singular activities and was appointed the 8th Dictator of the War Council and steered the movement successfully. This courageous woman and her daughters and other women offering Satyagraha picketed the cloth shops, law courts and the quarters of Members of the Legislative Assembly. She had arranged a uniform of red trousers, green shirts and white Gandhi caps resembling the National Emblem for volunteers.

On June 23, 1930, she encouraged the people ‘to bear the tyranny of machine guns and lathi blows. How much the government can tyrannize us?’ she asked. She also distributed seditious matter, the publication of which was punishable under Section 124A or 153A of the Indian Penal Code. Speaking at the death anniversary of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, she referred to the highhandedness of the government. “These people”, she said “are wild beasts and devoid of humanity. Their civilisation is only temporary, and has forgotten what humaneness is. They are now to learn to what extent this tyranny can go”. She was sentenced to one year's imprisonment, but was released under the Gandhi-Irwin Pact in 1931 before the expiry of the sentence, only to be re-arrested in 1932. This time she was sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment. She had to be released before the end of her term on account of ill-health. Her daughter Manmohini Sehgal also took part in freedom struggle.


Kasturba Gandhi, daughter of Gokuladas Makharji of Porbandar, affectionately called “Ba”, was the wife of Mohandas Gandhi. Kasturba Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi’s wife joined her husband while he was in South Africa and worked with him for many years there. She was a leader of Women’s Satyagraha for which she was imprisoned. She helped her husband in the cause of Indigo workers in
Champaran, Bihar and the No Tax Campaign in Kaira, Gujarat. She was arrested twice for picketing liquor and foreign cloth shops, and in 1939 for participating in the Rajkot Satyagraha. She many times took her husband's place when he was under arrest.

Kasturba married Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi) through arrangement. They were both 13 years old. At that time, she was illiterate, and so Gandhi taught her to read and write- a potentially radical move, given the position of women in India at that time. When Gandhi left to study in London in 1888, she remained in India to raise their newborn son Harilal. She had three more sons – Manilal (1892), Ramdas (1897), and Devdas (1900). In 1906, Mohandas Gandhi decided to practice brahmacharya, and the couple became celibate. Although she stood by her husband, she did not always easily accept his ideas. Gandhi had to work hard to persuade her to see (and agree to) his points of view. Kasturba was deeply religious. Like her husband, she renounced all caste distinctions and lived in ashrams. Kasturba often joined her husband in political protests. She travelled to South Africa in 1897 to be with her husband. From 1904 to 1914, she was active in the Phoenix Settlement near Durban. During the 1913 protest against working conditions for Indians in South Africa, Kasturba was arrested and sentenced to three months in a hard labour prison. Later, in India, she sometimes took her husband’s place when he was under arrest. In 1915, when Gandhi returned to India to support indigo planters, Kasturba accompanied him. She taught hygiene, discipline, reading and writing to women and children. Kasturba suffered from chronic bronchitis. Stress from the Quit India Movement’s arrests and ashram life caused her to fall ill. After contracting pneumonia, she died from a severe heart attack on February 22, 1944. She died in Mahatma Gandhi’s arms while both were still in prison.

Kamala Nehru, also known as “The Delhi Beauty,” was a highly patriotic and sincere woman whose main aim was to promote the status of woman in the society and bringing back peace in her country. Her best days were spent in jail and thus it proves how much she was affectionate for her motherland.

She tried to sustain Swadeshi Movement and made bonfire of the imported goods. Her courage was seen when she organised a group of young women and held a program of picketing the shops which sold liquors and foreign goods. She was greatly inspired by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and spent huge number of days in Gandhiji’s Ashram with Mrs. Kasturba Gandhi. In the Non Cooperation movement of 1921, she organized groups of women in Allahabad and propagated use of khadi cloths. When her husband was arrested, to prevent him delivering a "seditious" public speech, she went in his place to read it out. She was twice arrested by British authorities. Kamala died from tuberculosis in Switzerland while Jawaharlal Nehru’s was in prison. She spent some time at Gandhi's ashram with Kasturba Gandhi.


Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India, was a distinguished poet, a politician, peace maker, renowned freedom fighter and one of the great orators of her time. She was one of the formers of the Indian Constitution and was the first Indian woman President of the Indian National Congress. She also became the first woman Governor of Uttar Pradesh state. Naidu was a powerful and important personality in the Civil Disobedience movement and even struggled hard with Mahatma Gandhi. She involved herself in various activities such as women education and Hindu Muslim
equality. Her landmark achievements were Khilafat movement, Satyagraha Movement. The Rowlett Act and the Montagu Chelmsford Reform through which she earned huge glory and respect worldwide. She devoted her entire life for the cause of her own country. Her birthday is celebrated as women's day all over India.

Sarojini Naidu was born on February 13, 1879 in Hyderabad. Her father, Dr. Aghornath Chattopadhyaya, was the founder of Nizam College of Hyderabad and a scientist. Her mother, Mrs. Varasundari, was a Bengali poetess. Sarojinidevi inherited qualities from both her father and mother. She studied at King’s College of London. During her stay in England, Sarojini met Dr. Govind Naidu from southern India. After finishing her studies at the age of 19, she got married to him during the time when inter-caste marriages were not allowed. Her major contribution was also in the field of poetry. Her poetry had beautiful words that could also be sung. Soon she got recognition as the “Bul Bule Hind” when her collection of poems was published in 1905 under the title “Golden Threshold”. Mahashree Arvind, Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru were among the thousands of admirers of her work. Her poems had English words, but an Indian soul.

One day she met Shree Gopal Krishna Gokhale. He said to her to use her poetry and her beautiful words to rejuvenate the spirit of Independence in the hearts of villagers. He asked her to use her talent to free Mother India. Then in 1916, she met Mahatma Gandhi, and she totally directed her energy to the fight for freedom. She would roam around the country like a general of the army and pour enthusiasm among the hearts of Indians. The independence of India became the heart and soul of her work. She was responsible for awakening the women of India. She travelled from state to state, city after city and asked for the rights of the women. She re-established
self-esteem within the women of India. The Non-Cooperation movement was launched by Gandhiji in 1920. Like a loyal follower she followed Mahatma Gandhi's programme and was once again in the midst of the fight. Gandhiji was arrested in 1922 and his parting message to her was: “I trust the unity of India in your hands”.

In 1925, she chaired the summit of Congress in Kanpur. In 1928, she came to the USA with the message of the non-violence movement from Gandhiji. When Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience Movement, she proved a faithful lieutenant. With great courage she quelled the rioters, sold proscribed literature, and addressed frenzied meetings on the carnage at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. In 1930 when Mahatma Gandhi chose her to lead the Salt Satyagraha the stories of her courage became legion. After Gandhi's arrest she had prepared 2,000 volunteers under the scorching sun to raid the Dahrsana Salt Works, while the police faced them half a mile up the road with rifle, lathis (canes) are steel tipped clubs. Mrs. Naidu was arrested May 21, 1930. In a message to her comrades she thus: whatever happens, strictly adhere to the law of non-violence. Don't budge an inch from the place you have taken. Mrs. Naidu was released following Gandhi-Irwin Pact signed on March 5, 1931.

In 1931, she participated in the Round Table Summit, along with Gandhiji and Pundit Malaviyaji. Sarojini Naidu was arrested on December 3, 1940, for taking part in the individual Satyagraha inaugurated by Vinoba Bhave. She fell ill and had to release on December 11, 1940. As soon as Sarojini's health permitted she started her political work. She was again arrested immediately after the passing of the “Quit India” resolution on August 9, 1942 and stayed in jail for 21 months with Gandhiji.
After independence Sarojini Naidu became the Governor of Uttar Pradesh. She was the first woman governor. On March 2, 1949, she took her last breath, and India lost her beloved child, her “Bulbul.” Nevertheless, her name will always be in the golden history of India as an inspiring poet and a brave freedom fighter.

10. Durgabai Deshmukh (July 15, 1909– May 9, 1981):

Durgabai Deshmukh was an Indian freedom fighter, lawyer, social worker and politician. She was a member of the Constituent Assembly of India and the Planning Commission of India. She was born in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh, India. Durgabai was married at the age of 14 to a Telugu person, later left and married C.D. Deshmukh, the first Indian Governor of the Reserve Bank of India and Finance Ministerin India's Central Cabinet during 1950 - 1956. She was a public activist for women's emancipation and was also the founder of Andhra Mahila Sabha. She was also the founder chairperson of central social welfare board.

From an early life Durgabai was associated with Indian Politics. When the Indian National Congress had its conference in her hometown of Rajamundry in 1923, she was a volunteer and placed in charge of the Khadi Exhibition which was running side by side. Her responsibility was to make sure that visitors to the exhibition were not allowed without tickets. She fulfilled the responsibility given to her honestly and even forbade Jawaharlal Nehru from entering. When the organizers of the exhibition saw what she did and angrily chided her, she replied that she was only following instructions. She allowed Nehru in only after the organizers bought a ticket for him. Nehru then praised the girl for the courage with which she did her duty.
She was a follower of Mahatma Gandhi in India's struggle for freedom from the British Raj, and a prominent social reformer who participated in Gandhi-led Satyagraha activities. This led to British Raj authorities imprisoning her three different times. She was the President of the ‘Blind Relief Association’ and in that capacity; she set up a school-hostel and a light engineering workshop for the blind. She has authored a book in Telugu called "Matlade Rallu", meaning stones that speak. Durugabai was a member of India's Lok Sabha. She was instrumental in the enactment of many social welfare laws. She was a member of the Planning Commission (India), and in that role, she mustered support for a national policy on social welfare. The policy resulted in the establishment of a ‘Central Social Welfare Board’ in 1953. As the Board's first chairperson, she mobilized a large number of voluntary organizations to carry out the Board programs, which were aimed at education, training, and rehabilitation of needy women, children, and the handicapped. She was the first chairperson of the National Council on Women's Education, established by the Government of India in 1958.

11. Preeti Lata Waddadar (1911-32):

Preetilata was born on 5 May 1911 in the Dholaghat village of Chittagong. Her father’s name was Jagabandhu Waddadar, the head clerk of Chittagong Municipality. Her mother Protibha Waddadar was a patron of the local revolutionaries and a supporter of Swadeshi movement. In 1927 Preetilata obtained her SSC in first division from Dr Khastogir Girls’ College. Then she moved to Dhaka for her HSC studies and enrolled in Eden College. As a student of Eden Girls’ College, Preetilata joined the Deepali Sangha; a Dhaka based women’s revolutionary organization. In 1929 Preetilata topped among the female students in HSC exam. Due to her outstanding result Preetilata was awarded (Rs.) 20.00 monthly scholarship from the
board of education. The financial support enabled Preetilata to pursue her higher studies in Kolkata, the then centre of culture and education of united Bangla. In Kolkata, Preetilata succeeded in enrolling in the prestigious Bethune College. As a member of the Revolutionary party Preetilata immediately formed a student front of the revolutionary party with a couple of her classmates. Her group raised money to support the Chittagong based revolutionaries and organized a readers’ forum to promote patriotic spirit among the college students. On the direction of the party high command Preetilata bought explosive implements from underground factories in Kolkata and took the explosives to Chittagong. Her mates at Bethune College, Kalpana Datta, Sarojini Pal, Kumudini Rakhit, Renuka Ray, and Kamala Mukherjee helped Preetilata in her mission. In 1930 Preetilata, instead of sitting for BA (hons), sat for BA (pass) exam and passed BA with distinction. On her return to Chittagong Preetilata started her teaching career and joined as the principal of a newly established English medium school, Aparna Charan Girls High School. Preetilata was a member of Jugantar—a secret revolutionary organization.

The death of comrade Ardhendu Dastidar in the Jalalabad hill war on 22 April 1930 spurred her commitment to revolutionary causes. On 13 June 1932 Preetilata secretly met Mastarda Surya Sen, the legendary Bangalee revolutionary, at the residence of Sabitri Debi of Dholaghat. In the meeting Preetilata demanded that girls should be given equal opportunity in armed revolutionary activities. She argued that many young people have already given their lives for the freedom of the motherland, now it was the time for the girls to embrace the same fate of honour.

The task for attacking the European Club in Chittagong was initially assigned to rebel Shaileshwar Chakraborty which he failed to carry out twice for various reasons. In September 1932 Surya Sen came to South Kattali village to discuss the strategies and tactics for attacking the European Club. On the instruction from the
party high command Preetilata and Kalpana Datta, wearing man’s clothes in order to escape the British spies, headed for the secret meeting called by Surya Sen. Unfortunately Kalpana was arrested at Pahartali but Preetilata managed to skip the British spies. In the meeting Surya Sen told Preetilata that she was nominated to lead the attack on the European Club on 23 September 1932 and the other members of her team were: 1. Shanti Chakraborty (Kattali), 2. Kali Dey (Gosail Danga), 3. Sushil Dey (Dharala), 4. Prafulla Das ((Kattali), 5. Mahendra Chaudhury (Mohra).

At 2145 hrs on 23 September Surya Sen, with one of his body guards, came to Kattali to wish luck to his comrades for the success of the operation. At 2200 hrs Preetilata and her comrades, all wearing military uniforms, took farewell from the commander and marched off to carry out the operation. Soon they reached the European Club and took position in the bush near the club. They were carrying rifles robbed from the British armoires, pistols and macerates in their waists and bombs in their haversacks. The British colonial officers were having a great time inside the club while Preetilata’s team was preparing the attack. The gate of the club was protected by armed guards. On receiving Morse coded signal from the chef of the club kitchen Preetilata stormed the club firing shots on the armed guards at the gate and shouting “Charge”. Her comrades joined her and kept shooting on the club. Preetilata lead the attack and threw a bomb through the main gate as soon as she reached the gate. The Britons were bewildered at the sudden armed attack and ran their heads off to save their asses. An Englishman tried to play James Bond and threw goblets to the rebels. Preetilata shot him and sent his soul to merry old England.

But soon the military reinforcement from the nearby cantonment came for rescue. Under-equipped to fight the military Preetilata signaled her comrades to retreat. They followed her command and retreated. A few minutes later Preetilata
went back to make sure that all her comrades were ok. The group of partisans soon reached the rail line near the club covered by the team leader who followed them to ensure a safe retreat. They were heading for Pahartali bazaar because Kattali village is very close to the bazaar. As the rebels were heading to the bazaar a young Englishman, who hid in the gutter to escape the attack, shot at Preetilata. The bullet hit Preetilata on her chest and she dropped on the road bleeding profusely. But Preetilata was a born rebel and was determined not to surrender to the British colonists so the valiant rebel took out the cyanide pill and swallowed it.

12. Matangini Hazra (1869-1942):

Matangini Hazra was an Indian revolutionary who participated in the Indian independence movement until she was shot dead by the British Indian police in front of the Tamluk Police Station (of erstwhile Midnapore District) on September 29, 1942. She was affectionately known as Gandhi buri, Bangla for old lady Gandhi.

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 stepped forward, Matangini Hazra was shot once. Apparently, she had stepped forward and was appealing to the police not to shoot at the crowd.

The Biplabi newspaper of the parallel Tamluk National Government commented: “Matangini led one procession from the north of the criminal court building; even after the firing commenced, she continued to advance with the tri-colour flag, leaving all the volunteers behind. The police shot her three times. She
continued marching despite wounds to the forehead and both hands.” 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.


Kalpana Joshi (Datta) a revolutionary was born at Sripur of Chittagong district on 27 July 1913 in a middle-class family. Having matriculated in 1929 from Chittagong, Kalpana Datta went to Calcutta and joined the Bethune College. Greatly influenced by the examples set by the revolutionaries Kshatriya Basu and Kanailal Datta, she soon joined the Chhatri Sangha. Purnendu Dastidar drew her into the revolutionary circle of Mastarda Surya Sen. The Chittagong Armory Raid took place on 18 April 1930 and Kalpana hurried back to Chittagong and came in contact with Surya Sen in May 1931. In the meantime, many of the leaders of the Raid like Ananta Singh, Ganesh Ghosh and Loknath Bal had been arrested and were awaiting trial.

Kalpana was entrusted with the safe carrying of heavy explosive materials from Calcutta. She also secretly prepared ‘gun-cotton’ and planned to plant a dynamite fuse under the court building and inside the jail to free the revolutionary leaders, who were being tried in a special Tribunal. The plot was uncovered and certain restrictions were imposed on Kalpana’s movements. She, however, managed to visit regularly the village of Surya Sen, sometimes even at dead of night. She also used to have regular training in revolver shooting, along with her comrade pritilata waddedar.
In September 1931 Surya Sen decided to entrust Kalpana and Pretilata with a plan to attack the European Club at Chittagong. A week before the action Kalpana was arrested while moving out for a survey work in a boy's attire. While in jail, she was told about the Pahartali action and the heroic suicide of Pretilata. Being released on bail, she went underground at the bidding of Surya Sen and in the early hours of 17 February 1933 the police encircled their hideout. Surya Sen was captured while Kalpana, along with Manindra Datta, escaped. On 19 May 1933 Kalpana, with some comrades, was arrested. In the second supplementary trial of Chittagong Armory Raid case, Surya Sen and Tarakeswar Dastidar were sentenced to death, and Kalpana was sentenced to transportation for life. Being released in 1939 she graduated from the Calcutta University in 1940. Soon she joined the CPI and resumed her battle against the British rule. She turned Kalpana Joshi in 1943 when she married PC Joshi, the leader of the CPI. She went back to Chittagong and organised the Kisans’ and women’s fronts of the party. In 1946 she contested, though unsuccessfully, in the elections to the Bengal Legislative Assembly. After 1947 she migrated to India and resigned from active politics. Kalpana Datta breathed her last at New Delhi on 8 February 1995.

14. Madam Cama (24 September 1861 - 13 August 1936):

"This flag is of Indian Independence! Behold, it is born! It has been made sacred by the blood of young Indians who sacrificed their lives. I call upon you, gentlemen to rise and salute this flag of Indian Independence. In the name of this flag, I appeal to lovers of freedom all over the world to support this flag." -- B. Cama, Stuttgart, Germany, 19th she unfurled the first National Flag at the International Socialist Conference in Stuttgart (Germany) in 1907. A thousand representatives from
several countries were attending. An Indian lady in a colorful sari was a rare phenomenon in those days and her majestic appearance and brave and clear words made everybody think that she was a Maharani or at least a princess from a native state.

The tricolor-flag Madam Cama unfurled had green, saffron, and red stripes. Red represented strength, saffron victory, and green stood for boldness and enthusiasm. There were eight lotuses representing the eight provinces and flowers represented princely states. "Vande Mataram" in Devanagari adorned central saffron stripe which meant "salutation to Mother India." The sun and the moon indicated Hindu and Muslim faiths. The flag was designed by Veer Savarkar with the help of other revolutionaries. After Stuttgart, Madam went to United States. She traveled a lot and informed Americans about Indians struggling for Independence. She told about British efforts to smother the voice of educated Indians who protested against tyranny and despotism of British who always boasted themselves as "mother of parliamentary democracy" over the world! She could be called Mother India's first cultural representative to USA. Where is the Flag Now? The flag was smuggled into India by Indulal Yagnik, the socialist leader of Gujarat. It is now on public display at the Maratha and Kesari Library in Pune. Madam Cama fought for the freedom of the country till the last in her own way, and helped many revolutionaries with money and materials. She unfurled the first National Flag at the International Socialist Conference in Stuttgart (Germany) in 1907. She declared “This flag is of Indian Independence! Behold, it is born! It has been made sacred by the blood of young Indians who sacrificed their lives. I call upon you, gentlemen to rise and salute this flag of Indian Independence. In the name of this flag, I appeal to lovers of freedom all over the world to support this flag.” A thousand representatives from several countries
were attended. She traveled a lot of places including America and propagates Americans about Indians struggling for Independence.

Bhikaiji Rustom Cama who designed the flag of Independent Hindustan was a prominent figure in the Indian independence movement. She was the first woman who hoisted India’s Flag in a foreign country.


Aruna Asaf Ali was an Indian independence activist. Aruna comes from a respectable Gangoli family of Bengal. After completing her education she took up work in the Gokhale Memorial School for girls at Calcutta. She married Asaf Ali in 1924. Aruna Asaf Ali became an active member of Congress Party and participated in public processions during the Salt Satyagraha. She was arrested on the charge that she was a vagrant and hence not released in 1931 under the Gandhi-Irwin Pact which stipulated release of all political prisoners. Other women co-prisoners refused to leave the premises unless she was also released and gave in only after Mahatma Gandhi intervened.

In 1932, she was held prisoner at the Tihar Jail where she protested the indifferent treatment of political prisoners by launching a hunger strike. Her efforts resulted in an improvement of conditions in the Tihar Jail but she was moved to Ambala jail and was subjected to solitary confinement. After Aruna’s release from jail. She kept away from active politics and for the next ten years she watched the developments in India with interest and fromed her own ideas about the programma and methods of achieving freedom. She published bulletins, participated in the independence movement, and went from place to place for her work. She even met Mahatma Gandhi during this period but the police was not able to get her. She was a
prominent leader of the underground movement. She edited ‘Inqulab’ a monthly journal of the Indian National Congress, Eastern zone, along with Rammanohar Lohia.

Aruna was one of the most important figures of the movement of 1942. Aruna accompanied her husband to Bombay for the All India Congress Committee meeting in August 1942. She was a witness to the Famous 'Quit-India' resolution of August 8, 1942. The government responded by arresting the major leaders and all members of the Congress Working Committee and thus tried to pre-empt the movement from success. Aruna Asaf Ali presided over the remainder of the session on 9 August and hoisted the Congress flag at the Gowalia Tank Maidan, Bombay, and the site of the All India Congress Committee meeting. A vast crowd had gathered to witness the function and this marked the commencement of the movement. The police tried to disrupt the function and lathi-charged the crowd. Teargas and bullets were also used. The sight of so much innocent blood and suffering lit the fire in her. It was Aruna’s baptism in the politics of revolution.

Aruna's contribution during the Quit India Movement (1942) was also notable as she fought for the country from underground. For her bravery and heroic activities, Aruna Ali was rewarded with Bharat Ratna Award and also she earned the title of “Grand old Lady of India.”


Usha Mehta is remembered for broadcasting the Congress Radio, and called her the Secret Congress Radio, an underground radio station, which was functioned for few months during the Quit India Movement of 1942. The prominent leaders were
in jail by August 9, 1942 and it was from this day that preparations for setting up a radio in the name of “Voice of Freedom” speaking from somewhere in India were taken in hand. A transmitter was necessary for successfully carrying on the movement. It was felt that the press would be censored and as such the required propaganda could easily be done through the radio for the case. It was Babubhai and Usha who first started working for the radio. Money had to be obtained. A woman relative of Usha offered her jewellery. Usha was hesitant to accept this offer. Ultimately Babubhai Khakar got the required amount and a transmitter was ‘set up’ with it. The Congress Radio started broadcasting on August 14, 1942.

Usha Mehta is also known as child leader as in 1928, eight-year-old Usha participated in a protest march against the Simon Commission and shouted her first words of protest against the British Raj: “Simon Go Back.” As a child, she did not comprehend the significance of her actions except that she was participating in a movement to free her country under the leadership of Gandhi. She and many other children participated in morning protests against the British Raj and picketing in front of liquor shops. During the Quit India Movement, Usha quickly became a leader. She moved from New Delhi to Mumbai, where she hoisted the tricolor on August 9, 1942 at Gawalia Tank Ground. Usha Mehta was mainly assigned the task of broadcasting news and giving talks in Hindustani.

17. Vijaya Lakshmi Pundit (August 18, 1900 – December 1, 1990):

Vijaya Lakshmi Pundit was an Indian diplomat and politician, the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, the aunt of Indira Gandhi and the grand-aunt of Rajiv Gandhi each of whom served as Prime minister of India. She is the daughter of Motilal Nehru; she was inspired by Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi and impressed by Sarojini Naidu. She
entered the Non Co-operation Movement to fight against the British rule. Vijaya Lakshmi Pundit represented India in many of the conferences abroad. She had her education at home. She attended numerous public lectures and challenged the British dominated delegate’s rights to represent India therein. She was a great fighter and took parts in many of the freedom movement. She took active part in the civil disobedience movement of 1930 and 1931-32. She delivered lectures, and led processions. A notice was served on her prohibiting her from taking any part in the movement. Unaffected by the threat she continued her activities. She was arrested on January 27, 1932 and was sentenced to one year's imprisonment. In 1940, Gandhiji started individual Satyagraha and allowed only a chosen band of workers to participate in it. Vijaya Lakshmi Pundit was one such privileged person. She was arrested, but was released after four months imprisonment.

Vijaya Lakshmi Pundit was elected to Uttar Pradesh Assembly in 1936 and in 1946. She was the first woman in India to hold a ministerial rank. She was imprisoned thrice for taking part in the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1932, 1941 and 1942. After Independence, she continued to serve the country. In 1937 she was elected to the provincial legislature of the United Provinces and was designated minister of local self-government and public health. She held the latter post until 1939 and again from 1946 to 1947. In 1946 she was elected to the Constituent Assembly from the United Provinces. Her courage and dynamic personality made her get elected as the first female president in United Nation General Assembly. She was a dynamic personality who tried to abolish caste barrier and outdated custom and tried hard to bring woman empowerment in the country.
18. Lakshmi Sahgal (Swaminathan):

Lakshmi Sahgal Swaminathan, also known as Captain Lakshmi (born October 24, 1914 in Madras, Madras Presidency, and British India) is an activist of the Indian independence movement, an ex-officer of the Indian National Army, and the Minister of Women’s affairs in the Azad Hind Government. Lakshmi Sahgal later became involved in politics in independent India, serving as a member of parliament in the Upper House and later running for President as a left wing candidate. Lt. Col. Swaminathan is commonly referred to as Captain Lakshmi in India, referring to her rank at the time of being taken prisoner in Burma, as widely reported in Indian newspapers at the end of the war and which captured the public imagination, as opposed to her not widely known promotion in the last days of Azad Hind.

Sahgal was born as Lakshmi Swaminathan, daughter of Dr. S. Swaminathan, a leading lawyer practicing Criminal Law at Madras High Court. Lakshmi Sahgal mother was A.V. Ammukutty, better known as Ammu Swaminathan, a social worker and freedom fighter and hailed from the famous Vadakkath family of Anakkara in Palghat, Kerala. A.V. Kutty Malu Amma was another well known freedom fighter from the same family. Lakshmi decided to study medicine because she wanted to be of service to the poor, especially to poor women. As a result, she received an MBBS degree from Madras Medical College in 1938. A year later, she received her diploma in gynecology and obstetrics.

In 1940, she left for Singapore where she established a clinic for the poor, mostly migrant labour, from India. She became one of the most popular and prosperous gynecologists in the city. She was not only a competent doctor but also played an active role in the India Independence League which contributed greatly to
the freedom movement in India. In 1942, during the historic surrender of Singapore by the British to the Japanese, she worked hard in serving the prisoners of war who were hurt during the skirmishes. In the process, she came in contact with many Indian Prisoners of War (POW’s) who were thinking of forming an Indian liberation army.

Subhas Chandra Bose arrived in Singapore on July 2, 1943. In the next few days, at all his public meetings, Netaji spoke of his determination to raise a women’s regiment, the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, which would also “fight for Indian Independence and make it complete”. Lakshmi wasted no time in joining the new regiment, called the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. She was given the rank of a Colonel. The unit had the strength of a Brigade. In a regular army, this women’s army unit was the first of its kind in Asia. The army fought on the side of the Axis powers against the British.

Lakshmi was active both militarily and on the medical front. She played a heroic role not only in the fighting. Later, she became the Minister in charge of Women’s Organization in Arzi Hukumate Azad Hind (Provisional Government of Free India), led by Subhas Chandra Bose. Lakshmi Sahgal held this portfolio over and above her command of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. Lakshmi was captured and brought to British India on March 4, 1946 where she received a heroine’s welcome. The British realised that keeping her a prisoner would prove counter-productive and she was later released.


Well-known in the history of Indian freedom fighting for daring attack on English Governor and University Chancellor Stanley Jackson, who was a symbol of a
long and oppressive English colonial rule in India. The incident took place during the 1932 convocation of Calcutta University. Although she was unsuccessful, her act inspired many a young mind of those days. Beena Bhowmick’s father was Benee Madhab Das, the well-known educator of the Ravenshaw Collegiate School of Cuttack, Orissa. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, another famous freedom fighter also studied in that school. Bhowmick was acquainted with Bose.

Bhowmick initially studied in the Bethune College in Kolkata, but later migrated to Diocesan College in order to ensure that her revolutionary activities remain unhindered. She passed the BA with honors in English, her daring attempt occurred during her own convocation ceremony. For this she was given 9 years of imprisonment with labor. After her release in 1939, she joined the “Jugantar” revolutionary club. She was again imprisoned in 1942 for three years while she was the Secretary of Calcutta Congress Committee. In 1947 she married Jatish Bhowmick, a freedom fighter and a fellow member of Jugantar.

A true revolutionary spirit, her activities did not end with the Indian Independence in 1947. She aided Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman during his declaration of revolution in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) against a brutal and oppressive West Pakistan administration. This incident eventually precipitated into the full-scale Bangladesh war. A good writer, she penned two books, the autobiography “Shrinkhal Jhankar” and “Pitredhan”. In a characteristic show of idealistic strength, she didn’t accept the “Freedom Fighters’ Pension” offered by the Government of India. After the death of her husband, she decided to live by herself in the Rishikesh (Himalaya), where she died within a month in a lonely condition.
20. Kanaklatha Baruah (1924-1942):

Indian National Congress in Mumbai on August 9, 1942, resolved to ‘Do or die’ for Independence of the country and began agitation with ‘Quit India’ slogan against the British regime. Young and old, men and women, boys and girls, all fearlessly and wholeheartedly joined the movement. Among them was Kanaklatha Baruah.

She got an opportunity to fulfill her dream of serving the country. As soon as the ‘Quit India’ movement began the British rulers started arresting Congress leaders. Under the leadership of revolutionary Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, in the district of Darrang a resolution was adopted unanimously to hoist national flag at the court and police station, as they were the marks of British Empire. Being aware of women’s participation in the nation’s freedom struggle, Kanaklatha enrolled herself in the suicide squad. The day for peaceful and non-violent action was decided as September.

According to the programme, freedom fighters with national flag had to capture local police station. Four thousand people from Kalabari side and an equal number from Barangabari moved towards Gohpur police station. In the front line was Kanaklatha Baruah holding a National flag in her hands. She requested the officer in charge of the police station to allow her to hoist the flag at the western gate peacefully. The officer in charge ignored her request and threatened to shoot her, if she dared to proceed further. Firebrand Kanaklatha marched ahead and had to face the bullets of the strong police force. She laid down her life for the freedom of the country. Another instance of similar martyrdom was from the district of Nagaon. Berhampur in the district was also on fire of Quit India movement.

Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya is another woman who did outstanding work for the furtherance of the cause of the national freedom. She was a trade-unionist, a revolutionary, a reformer, a great patron of arts, an accomplished writer, an orator, and a freedom fighter. Kamaladevi was born in Mangalore in 1903. Belonging from an illustrious family, she got ample opportunity to meet the great freedom fighters and intellectuals of her time like Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Annie Besant, who being friends of her parents visited her home frequently. Such acquaintances bore great influence on Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, who became an early supporter of the nation's swadeshi mission. And she was married while she was yet in school. Her husband died and Kamla became a child widow. She continued her studies which was contrary to the customs of the time and later joined the Queen Mary's college at Madras. She was remarried to Harindranath Chattopadhyya brother of Mrs. Naidu, setting an example of inter-caste, inter-provincial and widow remarriage. Kamla decided to join active politics in 1922 and joined the congress the same year. She was always remained in the thick of the fight for freedom. This courageous lady was the first woman to contest election for the legislative Assembly of Madras in 1926. Kamaladevi fought against social evils that restricted the development of women. She was an active member of the youth wing of INC (Indian National Congress). During partition, Kamaladevi set up co-operative societies and self-employment schemes to help refugees. She worked to revive traditional industries like weaving and handicrafts. As chief of the Board of Handicrafts, she started the pension system for craftsmen. Kamladevi was associated with many women's organisations and attended the International congress of Women's league for peace and freedom which was held on August 23, 1929 in the city of Prague. She acquainted the gathering there with the conditions in India.
During the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930, Kamladevi addressed meetings, prepared salt and picketed foreign cloth and liquor shops. In one of the meetings she addressed at Esplanade Maidan, Bombay. She exhorted the people to follow the lead given by Gandhiji by defying the laws as that would paralyse the Government. Kamladevi offered passive resistance and guarded the salt pans when the police raided the congress house, Bombay. Salt was publicly prepares by her and was sold in the open market. She even chose High Court premises for selling salt. The salt was sold at a high price. Before she could realise her dream, she was arrested. Kamla was released in 1930. She was incharge of Women's organisation under the Hindistani Seva Dal. She arranged camps for the training of Women workers. The course of training included literary education, training in domestic hygiene, child rearing, sewing and spinning in organising meetings and course of study in Indian history and geography. The course was designed to make women fit for all that the country expected them to do.

Kamladevi was arrested again in 1932 and was sentenced to one year's imprisonment. Kaml joined the congress socialist party in 1934 and presided over its All India Conference at Meerut the very next year. She was arrested for her political work a number of times between 1939 and 1944. She visited the United States with a view to acquainting the people of that country about the true conditions in India. In her missionary zeal she championed the causes of women empowerment, education, and handicraft, theater along with her contribution to the field of arts, crafts and writings. In her pursuit and commitment she turned down many offers such as being nominated to the posts of the Vice President of India, Governor of Orissa or Tamilnadu, Ambassador in Cairo or Moscow. She preferred instead to devote herself to social causes. It was her courage displayed with a keen sense of humour that was extremely rewarding.
As a befitting tribute to a cultural icon of India one can conclude with the words of former President of India, R. Venkataraman, quoted, “Flower buds seemed to blossom at her touch—whether they be flower buds of human beings or institutions. People became more human and more sensitive to the deeper impulses of society when they came into contact with her….”

22. Sucheta Kriplani:

She was an Indian freedom fighter and politician in Uttar Pradesh and proved her strength and will while working in close association with Mahatma Gandhi to bring freedom to our country. She became the first woman to be elected Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Sucheta had immense contribution to the nation during the Quit India Movement. She was the true mother of the victims of atrocities and thus leaving behind her own health and family, immersed herself in helping others and bringing peace.

She was born in Ambala, Haryana to a Bengali family. Her father, S.N. Majumdar though a government doctor was a nationalist. Educated at Indraprastha College and St. Stephen's College, Delhi she became a lecturer at the Banaras Hindu University. In 1936, she married socialist, Acharya Kriplani and became involved with the Indian National Congress. She left her job in the Banaras University and plunged into political activities. Individual Satyagraha was launched by the Congress in 1940 and she was one of the chosen ones who was permitted to take part in this Satyagraha and was arrested.

By the time she came out of jail. Another movement was underway. Most of the leaders were in the prison. She did not think it proper to surrender to the police and went underground. She had to face many hardships to carry on her activities, but escaped arrest by the police.
During this period a women's department of the Indian National Congress was started in 1943 with Sucheta Kripalani as Secretary In charge. She issued circulars to the Pradesh Congress Committee to organise women’s department effectively. It was felt that women must be provided with correct information to save them from getting panicky over trifles. With this aim in view it was decided to hold meeting at regular intervals in Mohallas so that the uneducated, ignorant women were kept informed regarding war the Congress activities. The information could be given through hand bills and bulletins. Another work undertaken by this department was to organise a Volunteer Corps. The volunteers were taught simple drill, first-aid and the art of self-protection in an emergency. The corps was also required to help the refugees when they came to the town or left it.

Sucheta Kripalani was however arrested in 1944. After her release in 1945 she engaged herself mostly in the social and relief activities. She went to East Bengal during the communal riots in 1946 to rescue the women and children from the hands of Muslims. When Mahatma Gandhi went to East Bengal and undertook the work of rehabilitation of the refugees, Sucheta joined him in the work. During the year 1947, when the Partition of India took place, riots broke out in Punjab. Sucheta Kripalani rushed to the affected areas and organized relief operations. She was taken as a member of the Congress Working Committee in 1947 in recognition of her work. The contribution of Sucheta Kripalani in the struggle for freedom is also worthy of note. She courted imprisonment for taking part in freedom struggle. She was elected as a member of Constituent Assembly in 1946. She was general secretary of Indian National Congress from 1958 to 1960, and Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh from 1963 to 1967. Sucheta Kripalani was in the words of Shrimati Indira Gandhi, “a person of rare courage and character who brought credit to Indian womanhood.”
23. Swarn Kumari Devi:

Swarn Kumari Devi was a famous social reformer of Bengal. She came from the famous Tagore family and was the sister of Rabindranath Tagore, the renowned poet. She was married at the age of 11 years in 1867. With the help of her husband she was able to discard purdah and took over the famous Bengali Journal *Bamabhadini Patrika* in 1884. She thus, had the distinction of being the first Indian women editor. Later, in the year 1886 she started a Ladies Association. The work of this Association was: 1) to promote friendly intercourse among Indian women and foster in them the growth of an active and enlightened interest in the welfare of the country. 2) To provide a home for the education of poor girls to enable them to become useful members of the society. 3) To prepare them for employment and to help the spread of women's education by sending them out as zenana teachers.

She was also the president of the ladies section of the Theosophical society of Bengal in 1885-86. Swarn Kumari attended the Indian National Congress as a delegate from Bengal in its session held in Calcutta in 1900. This was the first time that a woman had attended the session as a delegate. Taking about her public service Amiya Bhusan Basu said in the Calcutta Municipal Gazette, “her early efforts in improving the conditions of womenfolk in Bengal when the outlook of was gloomy and opposition was so strong remind us of what emerson said: “There is always room for a man of force and he makes room for many. The fiery spirit of Swarn Kumari fond support in her daughter Sarla Devi who was not only a social reformer and educationist but also a politician of good standing.
24. Sarla Devi Chaudharani (9 September 1872 – 18 August 1945):

Sarla Devi Chaudharani was one of the prominent personages of freedom period. She formed the link between Punjab and Bengal revolutionaries. She was the niece of the great poet, Rabindranath Tagore, and was born in the year 1872, Swarn Kumari, was an ardent worker for the swadeshi cause.

The spirit of patriotism was imbibed in Sarla Devi by her mother. Her work from the year 1897, when she took over the editorship of ‘Bharati’, which she edited till 1899, is of great significance. Through the pages of Bharati, she advocated the Hindu-Muslim unity as unity alone could out the foreignness. At the Seventeenth session of the National Congress a song composed by Sarla Devi invoking the people of different provinces of the country to join hands in the national struggle was sung in chorus.

Sarla Devi opened 'Lakshmi Bhandar' for popularising swadeshi goods. In 1904 she won the gold medel for exhibiting improved varieties of tactions of fabrics

25. Padmaja Naidu:

Sarojini’s daughter Miss Padmaja Naidu devoted herself to the cause of Nation like her mother. At the age of 21, she entered the national scene and became the joint founder of the Indian National Congress of Hyderabad. She spread the message of Khadi and inspired people to boycott foreign goods. She was jailed for taking part in the “Quit India” movement in 1942. After Independence, she became the Governor of West Bengal. During her public life spanning over half a century, she was associated with the Red Cross. Her services to the Nation and especially her humanitarian approach to solve problems will long be remembered.
26. Indira Gandhi:

The most remarkable of women in modern India’s was Indira Gandhi who from her early years was active in the national liberation struggle. During the 1930 movement, she formed the ‘Vanar Sena’. A children’s brigade to help freedom fighters. She became a member of the Indian National Congress in 1938. Soon after her return to India in March 1941, she plunged into political activity. Her public activity entered a new phase with India’s Independence in 1947. In 1959, she was elected President of the Indian National Congress. She oriented Congress thinking and action towards basic issues confronting Indian society and enthused the younger generation the task of nation-building.

FOREIGN WOMEN IN THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT OF INDIA:

Besides the hundreds and thousands of Indian women who dedicated their lives for the cause of their motherland, there were a number of noble and courageous foreign women who saw in India - its religion, its philosophy and its culture, a hope for the redemption of the world. They thought that in India’s spiritual death shall world find its grave. These noble women were sick of the material west and found in India and in its civilization, solace for their cramped souls.

27. Sister Nivedita:

Margaret Elizabeth Noble (1867-1911), better known as Sister Nivedita, was an Anglo-Irish social worker, author, teacher and disciple of Swami Vivekananda. She met Vivekananda in 1895 in London and travelled to India (Kolkata) in 1898. Swami Vivekananda gave her the name Nivedita (which means one who is dedicated to God) on March 25, 1898. In November 1898 she started a school for girls which
are now called Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' High School. She worked to improve the lives of Indian women of all castes.

Sister Nivedita was impressed by the ideals of Womanhood in India. She once remarked that India was the land of great women. She, however, felt that Indian women needed, to cultivate among themselves a wider and broader concept of the nation, so that they could participate along with men in building a free and strong nation. She propagated for the cause of India throughout America and Europe. Swami Vivekananda described her as a real Lioness. Rabindranath Tagore regarded her as Lok-Mata and Aurobindo Ghosh as Agni-sikha.

28. The Mother:

Mirra Alfassa, later Morisset and Richard (February 21, 1878 - November 17, 1973), also known as The Mother, was the spiritual partner of Sri Aurobindo. She was born in Paris to Turkish and Egyptian parents and came to his retreat on March 29, 1914 in Pondicherry to collaborate on editing the Arya. Having to leave Pondicherry during the War, she spent most of her time in Japan where she met the poet Rabindranath Tagore. Finally she returned to Pondicherry and settled there in 1920. After November 24, 1926, when Sri Aurobindo retired into seclusion, she founded his ashram with a handful of disciples living around the Master. With Sri Aurobindo's full approval she became the leader of the community, a position she held until her death. The Trust she had registered after Sri Aurobindo's death in 1950 continues to look after the institution.

The experiences of the last thirty years of the Mother's life were captured in the 13-volume work The Agenda. In those years she attempted the physical
transformation of her body in order to become what she felt was the first of a new type of human individual by opening to the Supramental Truth Consciousness, a new power of spirit that Sri Aurobindo had allegedly discovered. Sri Aurobindo considered her an incarnation of the Mother Divine, hence her name "the Mother". The Divine Mother is the feminine aspect (Creative Energy) of the Divine consciousness and spirit. She took charge of Ashram in Pondicherry in 1926. She was the inspirer of Auroville, the international town near Pondicherry. It was to serve as a meeting place for the followers of Shri Aurobindo. Paying her tribute to the Mother at a woman’s gathering in Kanpur the late Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi said: “The Mother was a dynamic lady, who came from France and adopted the Indian culture. She played an important role in motivating women like Mrs. Annie Besant and Mrs. Nellie Sen Gupta; The Mother had also contributed to enrich India’s age-old heritage and culture”

29. Annie Besant (October 1, 1847 – September 20, 1933):

Annie Besant also became involved in Indian Nationalism and in 1916 established the Indian Home Rule League of which she became President. She started a newspaper, “New India”, criticized British rule and was jailed for sedition. She came to be associated with rationalistic Congress group of workers who did not appreciate Gandhi’s views. She got involved in political and educational activities and set up a number of schools and colleges, the most important of which was Central Hindu College High School at Banaras which she started in 1913.

Annie Besant an Irish lady became the leader of the Theosophical Society. In 1902 while in London she criticized England for the conditions prevalent in India. In 1914 she joined the Indian National Congress and gave it a new direction. The idea of
the Home Rule League was first discussed by her. She with the radical Congress leader Tilak presented a memorial to Montagu on December 18, 1917 which gave equal rights to women in the matters of political franchise. She was the first woman president of the Congress and gave a powerful lead to women's movement in India. Annie Besant was born in 1847 in London into a middle-class family of Irish origin.

Annie began to question her own faith. She turned to leading churchmen for advice. She even went to see Edward Bouverie Pusey, leader of the Catholic wing of the Church of England. He simply told her she had read too many books. Annie returned to Frank to make one last effort to repair the marriage. It proved useless. She finally left for London. Divorce was unthinkable for Frank, and was not really within the reach of even middle-class people. Annie was to remain Mrs Besant for the rest of her life. At first, she was able to keep contact with both children and to have Mabel live with her. She got a small allowance from Frank. Her husband was given sole custody of their two children.


Merabehn popularly known as Mahatama Gandhi’s English daughter also made significant contribution to the cause of freedom. Merabehn (Madeleine Slade) did not actively participate in the political struggle, but supported the cause of the freedom of India. She was the daughter of Sir Edmund Slade and was born in 1892. She read a book written by Romain Rolland, a French philosopher, on Gandhiji. The book greatly influenced Madeleine Slade. She has herself described how the change came about: “Then something happened one night. I had never thought of religion before but it came all of a sudden. I read this book and I decided then and there that if possible I must give life to Gandhi and to India. Accordingly she wrote to Gandhiji
requesting him if she could join the Ashram in India and serve for the rest of her life”. She came to India in 1925. She devoted her life to human development, the advancement of Gandhi’s principles and the freedom struggle in India. In doing so, Gandhi gave her the name Mirabehn, after Meera Bai, the great devotee of Lord Krishna. In India she was sent to Kanya Gurukul at Dehradun where she studied Hindi and scriptures and taught English there.

Mirabehn went to England in 1931 with Gandhiji when he went to attend the second Round Table Conference. During this period she sent news releases concerning Gandhiji’s campaign to the press in England, America, France, Germany and Switzerland. The Government sent her warning that unless she stopped sending news to foreign countries she would be arrested. But she did not stop her work.

Mirabehn came back from England she started on a khadi selling tour throughout the country. She was arrested for entering the city of Bombay in violation of the government order. She was again arrested during the Quit-India movement of 1942 along with Gandhiji and was confined to Aga Khan Palace for twenty-one months.


Nellie Sengupta was among the English women who came to India to dedicate her life for its people. Though an outsider she proved herself as a true Indian patriot. She was born on 12 January 1886 as the daughter of Frederick William Gray and Edith Henrietta Gray. While studying in England, she met Jatindra Mohan Sengupta an Indian patriot. They fell in love and were married. After her marriage, she adopted her husband’s country as her own and associated sincerely with her husband’s work to
literate India from the bondage of British imperialism. Nellie abandoned the land of her birth and fought against the colonial rulers of her motherland for the sake of her husband. She was a dedicated life partner who whole-heartedly sided with her brave husband on all occasions during their hours of happiness and sorrow. There was doubt among her in-laws whether she would be able to adjust herself in a joint Indian family. But soon Nellie dispelled this doubt by adjusting quickly to the Indian joint family life. They proved to be an ideal couple not only in family life but also in the political field. Her father in law was so impressed with her behaviour that he wrote a letter to Nellie’s mother, that she was nothing but prize addition to his joint family and a worthy partner of his son.

She was the inspiring power behind all his activities in the political field. Mahatma Gandhi and Sarojini Naidu also inspired her. During the non-cooperation movement she was arrested while selling khadi in Chittagong (now in Bangladesh). Thus she had to endure prison life for the cause of her husband. She helped her husband when he was involved in the strike of the Bengal Assam Railway men as well as steamer service workers in support of the tea plantation labourers who were stranded in Chandpur and were brutally tortured by the British police. When the health of Jyotindra Mohan deteriorated, Nellie continued his political work. During the days of the Civil Disobedience Movement Nellie accompanied her husband on political tours to Delhi and Amritsar. Jatindra Mohan was arrested for delivering a political lecture. She purposely delivered a speech at a banned meeting in Delhi. She was arrested and put in prison for four months.

Nellie was elected Congress President in 1933. It was recognition for her valuable contribution to the cause of India’s independence. Later Nellie was elected
alderman of Calcutta (Kolkata) Corporation. After the partition of India, she stayed in her husband’s paternal house. She devoted herself to social welfare work. She was elected unopposed to the East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) Legislative Assembly from Chittagong. She was brought to India for special medical treatment during the last days of her life. In spite of the best treatment made available, she breathed her last on October 23, 1973.

32. Margaret Cousins (1878–1954):

Margaret Cousins was an activist and freedom fighter. Born at Boyle in County Roscommon, Margaret was educated there and in Derry. She studied music at the Royal Irish Academy and worked briefly as a teacher. In 1903 she married the poet and philosopher James H. Cousins who shared her interest in theosophy. That year James became a Theosophist. She joined the Irish Women’s Franchise League, and in 1910 went as a delegate to the Parliament of Women in London, where she was briefly imprisoned for throwing stones at 10 Downing Street. In 1915 James got an offer to come to Madras and edit Annie Besant’s New India; Margaret decided to accompany him and work for the Society. Soon after her arrival she began to take a keen interest in all matters related to improving the status of women. She was the first non-Indian member of the Indian Women’s University, Pune, in 1916. She envisioned and established in 1917 the first women’s organization in India, the Women’s Indian Association, with 2,100 members in the Madras Presidency alone, which she used very effectively to exert pressure on the government to grant voting rights to Indian women. The association, of which more than 40 branches were established, prefigured the All India Women’s Conference, which came into being in 1926. The year 1918 was a watershed for the women’s movement in India, with a delegation of women,
including Margaret, meeting Edwin Montagu and Lord Chelmsford to demand greater reforms for women. That same year women were granted, though conditionally, the right to vote, and in 1926 she saw to it that they were also granted the right to stand for election the Vidhan Sabha of Madras. This ensured that they could both vote as women and vote for other women.

Margaret also edited the journal Stree Dharma for many years. In 1932 she protested the government’s policy of rule by ordinance, and went to jail for a year. There she used to lead other prisoners in singing Annie Besant’s nationalist revision of the British national anthem - ‘God Save Our Motherland’. She contributed to the founding of the Lady Irwin College in Delhi, and helped in setting up many smaller schools, colleges and foundations. In 1936 she served as president of the AIWC. She organised many institutions like the Madras Seva Sadan and Children’s Aid Society. She organised a women’s deputation to Mr. E.S. Montagu, Secretary of State for India, at Madras, which made the first demand for franchise for women in India. In 1943 she was struck down by paralysis, and many admirers came to her aid with support and sympathy.

The list of great women whose names have gone down in history for their dedication and undying devotion to the service of India is a long one. Gandhi squarely summed up the strength of womanhood in his tribute to the gender: To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man’s injustice to women. If by strength is meant moral power then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Without her man would not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is woman.