

CHAPTER-V

ROLE OF WOMEN IN QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT (1942-1947)

POLITICAL CONDITIONS OF THE PERIOD

The year 1939 witnessed the beginning of the Second World War in Europe. England declared war on the German Reich on September 3, 1939, professedly in defense of democracy and the weak nations. And yet Britain did not want to grant freedom to India which was her dependency. India had no independent foreign policy and had to follow the one laid out by England. Lord Linlithgow, the then Governor General of India, proclaimed India to be at war with Germany the same day (September, 3 1939). The Congress ministries in office were not consulted and as a mark of protest they resigned.

The Indian National Congress had made clear in its election manifesto, as far back as 1936, its “opposition to the participation of Indian in an imperialist war.”¹ This stand of the Congress was further emphasized by the working Committee of the Indian National Congress which met in September 1939. The working Committee held that the “declared wishes of the Indian people have been deliberately ignored by the British government” and while the committee unhesitatingly condemns the latest aggression of the Nazi Government in Germany against Poland the issue of war and peace for India must be decided by the Indian people.

The Congress Working Committee also demanded from the government a clear declaration of its war objectives and a promise of independence for India. India would be ready to render help to the British government in her perilous hour if these demands were acceded to. However, the demands of the Congress were rejected. The

Congress then decided to propagate against and obstruct people from rendering any help in the war effort. To intensify its campaign Mahatma Gandhi launched an individual Satyagraha. It was “to carry on non – violently and openly anti war propaganda” and “to preach non – cooperation with the government in their war efforts.”²

As a result of this campaign, which was opened by Vinoba Bhave on October 17, 1940, thirty thousand men and women courted arrest. The campaign continued till the end of the year when the Government had to release the political prisoners in view of the prevailing situation. The Japanese were at the doorstep of India and the fate of the British was in jeopardy.

Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to India with seemingly new proposals to win over the popular support. But Cripps’ proposal was rejected by all parties. All hopes of a settlement receded to the back ground and Cripps’ Mission, instead goodwill and calmer atmosphere, left ill – will and bitterness among the Indian people.

In a mood of desperation, the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution in July 1942, calling upon the British to withdraw from India. The All India Congress Committee which met in Bombay on 7th and 8th August 1942, endorsed this decision. It resolved “to sanction for the vindication of India’s inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on the widest possible scale so that the country might utilize all the non – violent strength it had gathered during the last twenty – two years of peaceful struggle.”

The people were in defiant mood and they were encouraged by the British reverses at the Japanese hands. The suffering of the war refugees and the inhuman

treatment meted out to them further incensed them. As a matter of fact force and intimidation had been used incensed them. As a matter of fact force and intimidation had been used against those who had shown reluctance in contribution to war funds.

Gandhiji was arrested on August 9, 1942 and he left a brief but significant message to the nation in three words: "Do or Die." This message became a motto for the millions and a source of strength and sacrifice which was increasingly demanded at the altar of freedom. The moment the news of Gandhiji's arrest was received; there were Hartals in Bombay, Ahmadabad and Poona. By August 11, 1942, this infection had spread all over the country. Alongside also people took out processions, held meetings and demonstrations; the universities closed down for want of students. Industrial labour in Ahmadabad, Bombay, Kanpur, Indore, Bangalore and Mysore, struck work.

The movement affected the rural areas as well. In several places people declared themselves free, courts and offices were seized, and police stations were occupied. Flags were hoisted on secretariat buildings, courts and other Government offices. The Government machinery was paralyzed in several districts mainly in Bihar, Central Provinces, Andhra, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Assam and parts of Bengal.

The Government reacted with counter measures. It enacted "the Penalties Enhancement Ordinance, Collective Fine Ordinance, the Special Court Ordinance, the whipping Ordinance." These ordinances legalized certain forms of plunder, loot, flogging and even killing of political offenders. Searches were made and properties confiscated. Congress offices and its funds became the property of the Government. India had become a "big prison."³

Leaders were arrested in the first round up and in their absence women carried on the movement and bore the brunt of the British wrath. The women not only took out processions and held demonstrations but also organized camps in which they were given training in civic duties, and first aid, educated on democracy and Indian constitution. Training in lathi and drill was also imparted in these camps. The women organized Political Prisoner's Relief Fund and collected large amounts. Some women went underground and directed the movement from there. In every province their were stories to tell about the heroic part played by women.

ASSAM

The women of this province took prominent part in this movement. It was perhaps the sudden unbounded passion for liberty which made them take over command of the battle for freedom. "The struggle waged by Assam to break down the shackles of slavery", observed Mitra and Chakraborty in 'Rebel, India', "is largely a struggle for Assam's womanhood."⁴

It was on September 20, 1942 that Kanak Lata Barua, a girl in her teens, marched towards Gohapon Thana, at the head of five hundred people to occupy the Thana building. She was asked to leave the premises by Rabati Mohan Shome, the Officer In – charge, Police Thana, but she boldly replied: "Unless the Thana Officer and his men wanted to act as the servants of the people they must clear out and allow the people to take possession of the place."⁵

The Daroga threatened her that firing would be ordered if she did not move. She was not discouraged and told him to do his duty and she would do hers. She was fired in the chest which killed her and the flag was taken by her male comrade

Mukunda who was also shot dead. Many more were killed, one of the women killed was pregnant and six others were injured.

There was another elderly woman, Bhogasweri Phoo Kanani, who went to see her granddaughter Ratna Prbha, carrying the national flag proceeding towards the Congress office to attend a social feast. The Congress office was then seized by the Government. The flag was snatched from the unwilling hand of the girl, but the grandmother unable to bear this, got hold of another flag and hit the official with it. The next minute she was shot dead.

The women's organization sprung up under Smt. Annupriya Barua and Sudhalata Dutta, as a result of excesses committed by the military and police. The women visited the terrorized areas and encouraged and cheered the people. Again it was left to the women to face the military and armed police and to lead processions in places like Gohapur, Barapujjia, Thok and Brahampur.

It was in Assam that "Free India's Fighting Force" was organized. Women also joined this force and they took charge of providing amenities. They organized the Red Cross First Aid parties and distributed warm clothing, bandages and many other things to the workers and countrymen all over Assam. The Government later broke up the organization but the women carried on their work.⁶ Tezpur is another place in Assam where women from surrounding villages paraded the streets of the town, sang songs, shouted slogans and hoisted the tri – color.

In some places the women were treated inhumanly when they refused to disclose to the police the whereabouts of their relatives who were underground. Mrs. Anna Prava Barua bore police torture for two long years. Failing to arrest her husband

the police took charge of all her possessions including the image of the family deity. The police would visit in the night and lift the mosquito net to see if Barua was there. As a result it became impossible for the female members and specially Anna Prava Barua to sleep with ease and privacy.

Ten thousand women of village Bajail came out enmass on October, 7, 1942, to meet at the Pata Churkuchi Police Station platform. The women sang national songs and hoisted the national flag. The police tried to disperse them, but without success. They also requested the police officials to resign their posts.

On January 26, 1943, one thousand women gathered to celebrate the Independence Day. Since public meetings were banned they called a prayer meeting at Kirtan Ghar. Chandra Prabha Saikiani was dragged out and arrested while delivering a lecture. The 'Prasad' was mixed with dust and the police also assaulted some of the women of whom Sita Bhuwaneswari Devi was the worst affected.

BENGAL

The women of Bengal had been participating in the freedom struggle ever since the battle began. The people of Midnapore District played a notable part in the movement of 1942. The Tamlauk sub – division had organized itself against the Japanese invasion. They raised an army of volunteers which included men and women. Several camps were opened to give training to those who joined the ranks. Local relief committees were formed. A Khadi Center was also organized where four thousand spinners were working. Most of these were women. A National Government was formed within the limits laid down by the Congress Committee. It was assisted by the various Ministries. The National Government kept on functioning till August 8,

1944. It was dissolved at the instance of Gandhiji. The women of Tamlauk division took out processions and in one of these seven women were arrested and two years rigorous imprisonment was awarded to each.

One such procession was led by a seventy – three year old lady Smt. Manangini Hazra. The percussionists wanted to occupy the Thana. The police hit her hands but she did not let the flag drop. Instead she exhorted the officials to cease firing and to give up their jobs to join the freedom movement. A bullet was at which killed her. Seventy – four women of this division were raped by the Government employees. One of them died as a result of the assault. Women with daggers tried offer resistance collectively; which proved effective.

It was reported on November 7, 1842, that forty – three persons were killed and seventy wounded in the Tamlauk sub – division. The houses of people engaged in political activities were set on fire. In some cases the women were not allowed to leave the houses. After setting fire to the houses the police or military remained on guard. The women had to be rescued by volunteers through back doors or by ladders thrown over the roof. On January 9, 1943, six hundred soldiers surrounded three village of Masuria Dalmasuria and Chandipur in Mohishadal Thana. Those soldiers not only plundered the villages but also committed criminal assault on 46 women in a single day.⁷

The women started an organization called Bhagini Seva Sangha with the object of protecting their chastity and honor. Some of them faced the soldiers and the police with weapons. Two ladies were prosecuted under the Arms Act for drawing out daggers in self – defense.

KALPANA DUTTA

Kalpana, who was arrested for her revolutionary activities in 1932, was released in 1937, when the Provincial Autonomy was introduced in the country. Special efforts for her release were made by Rabindranath Tagore, C.F. Andrews and Matatma Gandhi. In the Midnapore Jail Gandhiji met her. Writing about herself in her book Chittagong Armoury Raiders Reminiscences, she said: “Gandhiji came to meet me in the Presidency Jail. After a little conversation Gandhiji spoke to me ‘Nazimuddin is extremely angry with you and says none of the Chittagong Armoury Raid cases would be released, but yet I am trying for you. She was released in 1939. She busied herself in studies and also engaged in communist propaganda. She worked in labour areas and Dhobi Para. Kalpana worked in the kisan Sabha office and later joined the Tramway workers’ Union office as a whole time worker.

Kalpana joined a post – graduate course. By this time the Second World War broke out, the authorities ordered her to leave Calcutta within twenty – four hours and interned her in her house in Chittagong. Her activities at this time were to carry on the secret work of the party and see to its efficient running. It included the dispatching of all Provincial Committee and Central Committee circulars, books and papers to different areas, fixing up shelters and dumps in the town, organizing distribution of leaflets etc. In 1941 the restrictions on her activity were relaxed.

UTTAR PRADESH

Following repressive measures adopted by the Government, the Congress office was seized by the police. On August 10, 1942, a group of girl students raided the office and took possession of it.

Batches of girl student toured the districts and rendered whatever relief and succor they could to the people. Women of respectable Hindu families were asked to leave their houses at the point of bayonets including the mothers of the newly born babies. They were asked to part with their ornaments. In some cases the ornaments were removed from their bodies forcibly. In Samanwal village of District Ghazipur an Ahir woman was shot down when she was running away from the soldiers.

It was reported from Banaras that the ladies who had suffered at the hands of police related lamentable stories. In some cases she women were dragged by their long hairs; they were asked to perform sit – ups; no food was given to them. In one case a child of was roasted alive before his mother’s eyes. Some women were tortured to disclose the whereabouts of their husbands. Nine students were extended from Banaras Hindu University for actively participating in the movement.⁸

PUNJAB

The Punjab energetically responded to the call of Mahatma Gandhi – students, both boys and girls, unhesitatingly came forward in the field. It was in the city of Lahore that on November 10, 1942, one hundred and four students were arrested. This number included twenty – two girls. The girls were courageous, they distributed the badges. The girls even did not pay any heed to the heed presence of the police and did not get into the police van till they were told by their principal to do so. At the police station they were asked several questions:

Q. what is your name?

A. Bagi No. 1, 2, 3... 22.

Q. What is your father’s name?

A. Gandhiji.

Q. What is your mother's name?

A. 'Bharat Mata'.⁹

In Amritsar the girl's students were given a highly objectionable treatment.

RAJKUNARI AMRIT KAUR

During the movement Rajkumari Amrit Kaur played a leading role in organizing processions and protest meetings. Rajkumari came from the royal family of Kapurthala State. She was the daughter of Sir Harnam Singh and was born in 1886 in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. Her mother was one of the pioneer social workers and the daughter not only learnt to fight for social freedom but also for the political freedom of the country. Amrit Kaur had most of her education in England and was a keen sportswoman. On her return to India she set about organizing sports and games in the Punjab. Gokhale was a great friend of Amrit Kaur's father. She says "The flames of my passionate desire to see India free from foreign domination were fanned by him."¹⁰ Rajkumari Amrit Kaur first came in contact with Mahatma Gandhi in the stirring days of Martial Law in 1919. She later became his secretary, a place she occupied for sixteen years.

Amir Kaur was instrumental in bringing about the birth of All India, Women's Conference in 1926 and she was its secretary for many years. In the year 1932 she gave evidence before the Lothain Committee on Indian franchise and later, as a member of a delegation of Woman's Organization, she testified before the joint Select Committee of Parliament on Indian Constitutional Reforms.

The Rajkumari took an active part in the Salt Satyagraha and was arrested in Bombay. Later when the Communal Award was announced, she condemned it and moved the following resolution at a conference of the All Indian Women's Conference held on December 23, 1932: "This conference stands united (i) in its protest against the Communal Award as touching the womanhood of India, and (ii) in its demand for a system of joint electorates."¹¹ The Rajkumari went to Bannu in the North – West Frontier Province to advocate the cause of the Congress. She was convicted on July 16, 1937, by the Assistant Commissioner, Bannu, on a charge of sedition and was sentenced to imprisonment till the rising of the Court and to pay fifty rupees fine.

Amrit Kaur was most active during the Quit India movement in 1942. She led processions day after day. One procession was subjected to ruthless lathi charge in Simla. From August 9 to 16 the processions led by her were subjected to lathi charge fifteen times.

The Government could not let her be free and finally she was arrested at Kalka. She was taken by car to Ambala Jail and was allowed to take with her a bedding roll, a bag containing her spinning wheel, her Bible and Gita, which she insisted on taking and her brass vessel for drinking water. Her suitcase containing clothes was not allowed with her and she had to manage for more than one month with one change of clothes. The filth in the jail was indescribable. Pigeons and rats were her constant companions. There was a foul smelling latrine in the living room which she refused to use on hygienic grounds. She had bathed in the open.

The food was very bad. She was unable to eat it. Within a week she was put on the hospital list. In eight weeks she lost one stone weight and had to be sent back

to Simla. Here she remained interned for twenty months. She lost her brother while in jail. Her letter to her sister – in – law was not even allowed to be sent. After India attained independence, she was Cabinet Minister in the Government of India.

AMAR KAUR

Amar Kaur, wife of Mohan Lal, an advocate of Gurdaspur who renounced his practice in response to Gandhiji's call in 1921, entered public life at the same time. Next year, Amar Kaur shifted to Layallpur with her husband and started her real political work. She went about in the district advocating the cause of the Congress, and according to Dobson, the then Deputy Commissioner, she "had set the agitation fire ablaze in the whole district."¹² The next movement came in 1930 and this brave lady started her work in Jalandhar district and was ultimately arrested at Banga on charge of sedition.

In the year 1932 Amar Kaur attended the Political Conference at Lyallpur where a number of arrests were made but somehow or the other she escaped arrest. Amar Kaur and Adarsh Kumari, daughter of Lala Pindi Das, a veteran Congress worker and many others found a novel way of disturbing the authorities. On their way from Layallpur to Lahore on August 23, 1932, they pulled the chain in the running train at Badami Bagh Railway Station, a couple of miles from Lahore. After stopping the train they shouted slogans like "Inquilab Zindabad," "Bideshi Mal Boycott" and "Gandhi Ki Jai."¹³ They exhorted other passengers to join them in their Endeavour to free the country.

Amar Kaur and others were tried and sentenced to five months imprisonment and a fine of forty rupees each. Amar Kaur was awarded one month's extra

imprisonment for stopping the train. The Lahore Bar filed a revision and the High Court ordered that they could be released on furnishing a security of five hundred rupees each pending the decision of the case. Amar Kaur and Adrash refused to come out on bail and decried the action taken by the High Court Bar. Amar Kaur did not restrict her activities to the Punjab only. She visited North – west Frontier. She was arrested and convicted at Bannu for her political activities.

Following the policy of individual Satyagraha launched by Gandhiji in 1940, Amar Kaur offered Satyagraha at Kasur in Lahore District. She was released from jail only to be rearrested in September 1942. During this period she organized women's training camps in Lahore and Amritsar for which she was arrested. The treatment meted out to the political prisoners was humiliating. So she, along with Satywati, decided to organize demonstrations in Jail. They were able to hoist a national flag on the jail gate on October 9, 1942. This enraged the jail authorities and these two ladies were transferred to Ambala District jail.

Amar Kaur's husband was not allowed to see her. While in Ambala jail she became ill. Her husband again approached the authorities to see her but permission was refused. She was released in April 1944 in shattered health, after one year and four months in jail.

PUSHPA GUJRAL

Punshpa Gujral is yet another woman of Punjab who took prominent part in the movement of 1942. Her interest in political work began in 1919, but she became active only during the movement of 1930. At this time she was elected President of

the City and District Congress Committee. She collected funds for the families of political prisoners.

Pushpa Gujral went to jail for the first time in 1940 for offering Satyagraha and was sentenced to six months imprisonment. The year 1942 witnessed the passing of famous Quit – India resolution and the family was active again. Pushpa was arrested along with the whole family. She was sentenced to six months imprisonment. Pushpa Gujral became the Convener, Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee (women) and was also associated with many other social work agencies. She is member of the Punjab State Social Welfare Advisory Board.

NORTH – WEST FRONTIER PROVINCES

The freedom movement had taken such a strong hold amongst the women that even Purdah – stricken Bannu was no exception. They took out processions and marched proudly raising slogans against the alien usurper. The procession was taken out as a mark of protest against the arrests of Hindu – Muslim merchant for giving food and shelter to the Khudai Khidmatgars. It was the first demonstration arranged by the women in the history of the province and as a result it had far reaching effect on the people.

SIND

The women of this area took out procession. The police of Karachi adopted new methods to harass them. The women were abused and they were taken away to far off places and released in the middle of night. The City Magistrate, Rup Chand, while conducting the case of girl, slapped her on the face because she refused to apologies. Two girl volunteers entered the city Magistrate’s Court and ordered him in

writing to vacate the post as he had been found incompetent. Copies of this order were distributed in the court. Both of them were arrested, tried and were convicted to long terms of imprisonment.

MADHYA PRADESH

In every province novel methods were being tried to do away with the foreign yoke. In this province women approached officials and members of the bar on Raksha Bandan Day and requested the former to resign and the latter to refrain from attending the courts. In these province women of the village Chimur had to suffer a great deal at the hands of the police and military. On August 19, 1942, a special train with 200 European soldiers and fifty Indian constables reached Wardha. The sepoys and soldiers plundered the property of the inhabitants. Women were raped. In many cases they were able to save themselves by putting a united front. There are reports of cases where women in advanced stages of pregnancy or in confinement or in menses, and girls to tender age were raped by them.

Enquiries were made into the happenings at Chimur by a committee composed of officials and non – officials. It was revealed that thirteen women were actually raped and some of them were raped by more than one European. Four girls were also molested. One of them was molested by one European soldier and later by one Indian soldier. They took her ring and ten rupees from her mother. The wife of the sarpanch (chairman of village panchayat) who was pregnant was also raped.

ANASUYABAI KALE

Anasuyabai Kale's interest in public work began in 1920 when she organized Bhagini Mandal, a women's organization. Later she was an active member of the All

– India Women’s Conference. Anasuyabai Kale became a member of the Central Provinces Legislature in 1928 and was its Deputy Speaker – an office from which she resigned as a protest against Gandhiji’s arrest in 1930 in connection with Salt Satyagraha. Anasuyabai took active part in the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930. She was imprisoned for her political activities.

When the popular ministries were installed in 1937 Anasuyabai became the Deputy Speaker of the Madhya Pradesh Legislature. She had to resign from this office again in pursuance of the Congress policy regarding the Second World War. Quit – India movement saw her in the field of active politics. It was due to her efforts that life of twenty – five young men, who were associated with Ashti Chimur chapter of the annals of the freedom struggle of 1942, were saved. After India gained independence Anasuyabai became a member of the Central Legislature.

BOMBAY

Bombay was the first province which was affected by the political upsurge and it was in the vanguard of the fight for freedom.

SAROJINI NAIDU

Mrs. Naidu of the fame of Dharasasna Salt raid was again active during this period. In this course of these few years Sarojini Naidu strove hard to bring the two communities closer. She addressed meetings and spoke from various platforms. Addressing a political conference at Vellore (Madras) she said: “The Hindus and Muslims are the two eyes of the nation and if both eyes were to be focused together on the Swaraj image under the leader ship of Mahatma Gandhi, freedom would be theirs ere long.”¹⁴

Sarojini was arrested on December, 3, 1940, for taking part in the individual Satyagraha inaugurated by Vinoba Bhave. She fell ill and had to be released 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. Sarojini came out of the Aga Khan Palace in shattered health and remained inactive for ten months after her release in March 1943.

Sarojini appeared in public again on January, 7, 1944, and addressed a meeting at Bombay. Later in the month, on January 26, 1944, she came to Delhi on her way to Lahore. As soon as she reached Lahore railway station, a notice was served on her by the Punjab Government prohibiting her from making any public speech or taking part in a procession, or writing to the newspapers. She returned the notice with the remarks that she was already under the instruction of her doctor, whom she was obeying and was not addressing any public meetings or joining any processions. Therefore so far as she was concerned the order was non – existent.

Immediately after India attained independence, Sarojini had the privilege of being the first woman Governor of Uttar Pradesh in 1947, one of the largest States of India. She occupied this place upto March 1949 when death took away this nightingale, ambassador of Hindu – Muslim unity and the champion of women's rights.

KAMLA DEVI CHATTOPADHYAYA

Kamla Devi, who had participated in the Salt Satyagraha actively, now took her place in the movement again. In fact, this soldier of Satyagraha army was never tired and continued her work throughout the period. 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 Indian.

After India attained independence, Kamla Devi's interest was diverted from politics to cooperative movement. She has sponsored the Indian Cooperative Union. She set up the Theatre Centre of India, a federation of theatre organizations all over the country. She was awarded Padma Bhushan in 1955. Kamla Devi is, at present, chairman of the All – India Handicrafts Board. His contribution in reviving the traditional cottage industries of the country has been great.

MIRABEN (MADELEINE SLAEDE)

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 belonged to an aristocratic family of Great Britain. Madeleine Slade had a good education, but she changed her interests very often. In the year 1923 she moved to Paris and “was living a life of thoughtless luxury in those days, idling away the time between London, Paris and Berne. Her parents were well – to – do and she had nothing to worry except the pursuit of pleasure and the ways to appreciate and enjoy the life that was bestowed on her by her parents.”

During this period 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.”¹⁵

Slade took one year to get prepared to come to her new master. She sent for Khadi so that they could get the necessary garments made before she came to India. She also spent her days and nights reading the Hindu scriptures. After she was fully prepared she came to her new home. Her parents tried to dissuade her but of no avail. She came to India in 1925. Here she was given a new name, Miraben. Miraben 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. She did not stop her work.

As soon as Miraben came back from England she started on a Khadi selling tour throughout the country. When she returned, Mira was ordered by the Government of Bombay not to enter the city. She defied the order and was arrested. She was charged under Section 21 of Emergency Ordinance and sentenced to three months imprisonment. Miraben went to England again in 1934 to educate the people of England in Gandhiji’s philosophy. 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.

In 1946 Miraben was appointed Special Advisor to the Government of Uttar Pradesh for “Grow More Food” campaign. From 1947 to 1960 she was Advisor for Development. She was running an Ashram at Rishikesh in the Himalayas. She died some time back.

KHURSHED BEHN

Khurshed Bhen, a famous organizer of the volunteer Army in 1930, went to the North – West Frontier Province in 1940 to spread the gospel of non – violence amongst the people there. She went from village to village, meeting the Pathans, Pirs, Maliks and Khans and spoke to them of the cruelty of kidnapping people. She met the members of the Hindu community also instilling in them the spirit of courage and bravery. At the close of the year she wanted to go to walo Tangi, a tribal territory and sought the Government's permission to cross the border. When the government did not respond she informed the Government of her intention of crossing the border. In an attempt to cross the border she was arrested on December 4, 1940, and was tried. She was sentenced to pay a fine of one thousand rupees or in default thereof to undergo three months imprisonment. However, she preferred to be imprisoned rather than pay the fine. After the expiry of her sentence she was extend from the Frontier Province and was interned in Bombay.

Khurshed challenged the validity of such an order in a letter dated March 31, 1941. But the Government did not pay any attention to her protest. She was later allowed to move within the Bombay Presidency. This relaxation could not satisfy her as she wanted to move out of Bombay. Khurshed was willing to accommodate the Government as regards its policy of extending her from North – West Frontier Province, but she could not possibly be extending from other parts of the country. Khurshed Behn finally decided to defy the Government orders and accordingly informed the authorities on July 31, 1941, of her intention of leaving for Wardha On August 1, 1941. She, however, could not reach Warda. Khurshed was arrested on the day of her departure and was sent to Central Jail, yerwada, (Pune).

Khurshed also took part in the Quit – India Movement. She made a careful study of the atrocities committed by the police. Bombay was greatly affected by the 1942 movement. In addition to the usual processions, Women’s Day was celebrated. Three processions were taken out in Ahmadabad. A procession was lathi – charged and seventy – six women were arrested.

On a similar occasion in the month of October, processions of women from ten different parts of the city started. The police attacked one such procession and seized the national flag. As a result the women squatted on the road refused to move unless the tricolor was restored to them. The police answered with ruthless teargas attack. Some women fainted while others got hurt. One Satyawati mehata was seriously injured on her head with the bursting of a gas cylinder and had to be removed to hospital. About eighty men were injured but volunteers were prohibited from giving water to the wounded.

The women of Bombay took out processions on the 9th of every month, the 9th August being the day of Gandhiji’s arrest. The police had made arrangements to meet them. Exactly at the appointed hour, Jayshriben came out. No sooner did she come out than she was arrested along with other ladies. As they were being arrested a procession of Desh Sevikas appeared on the scene. They were arrested and their arrest served as a signal for spontaneous processions. The procession was lathi – charged. A girl of fourteen years tried to hoist the flag but was beaten by the police. Another girl, named Manfule, was also beaten for a similar attempt. The police opened fire on these women processionists five times and total arrests numbered two hundred and fifty.

USHA MEHTA

Bombay kept up the struggle through Radio. Usha Mehta was one of the prominent workers of the Congress Radio Conspiracy Case. Usha had a leaning towards the Congress session but this time when the famous Quit – India resolution was passed she was present and was a witness to this important decision. It was her great desire to do something to make this resolution a success. Picketing of foreign cloth shops and liquor shops was distasteful to her. She wanted to do something different.

Usha Metha's dream was realized when some friends decided to run a secret transmitting station. "It appealed to me immensely and I jumped at the idea and plunged into the movement in spite of staunch opposition from my father who being a government servant did not approve of my idea and who wanted me to finish my education." Nothing deterred this brave girl, not even the danger it presented to her father who was a Judge at the time.

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 done through the radio for the cause. It was felt that press would be censored and as such the required propaganda could easily be done through the radio for the cause. It was Babubhai and Usha who first started working for the radio. Money had to be obtained. A women 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.

Another group led by Vithalbhai K. Jhavari, now one of her editors of the birthday volume on Gandhiji, was also trying to set up another transmitter. Besides these two, there were several other groups. Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, a famous socialist leader, was in the know of these groups and tried to coordinate the work. The most active group was Babubhai's in which Usha worked.

The Congress Radio had its own transmitter, transmitting station, recording station, its own call sign and last but not least a distinct wave-length. It started broadcasting on August 14, 1942. "This is the Congress Radio calling on 42.84 metres from somewhere in India".¹⁶

It was not easy to fool the police, so the workers of the Congress Radio had to change their abode very often. Usha describes how they camouflaged their moves. "Fortunately for us, one uncle from upcountry or our sister or some other relative would come to our rescue. Uncle wanted a flat for one month. One of his nephews would go and hire it, take the entire luggage there and would anxiously wait for him. But by the time uncle was expected another flat would have to be hired for some other fictitious purpose. Every time the process was to go from the broadcasting station to the railway station and from there again to the new transmitting station. This has to be done every fortnight or so. Once Babubhai and I found a very good place; quite safe according to us. We were extremely happy at the idea that we would be able to carry on at least for a month or two. We went to the owner to pay the rent. A queer apparatus was lying there. We said 'Sethji, what is this supposed to be?' "A detecting machine to catch the illegal radios," came the reply. 'Detecting machine', I exclaimed in my mind, but I took care to see that the face did not betray the expressions. Babubhai cleverly joined him in abusing all those who did such illegal acts and we

were off. We thanked our stars or having been cautioned in time. The first words of Babubhai were “Behn, we are saved from the tiger’s jaws.”¹⁷

Babubhai had warned me not to be in white Khadi sari that day but I had insisted on it. Since that day, however, I changed my dress slightly so as to be less conspicuous. Usha Mehta was mainly assigned the task of broadcasting news and giving talks in Hindustani. It was this broadcasting station which first gave the news of Chittagong bomb raid, Jamshedpur strike and the news about atrocities in Ashti Chimur. In the speeches, attempts were made to clarify and explain the Congress stand both from the national and international points of view. Broadcasting on world peace it said; “The Congress sends her message of goodwill and peace to all the people of the world who are suffering, to countries still resisting and to countries betrayed by their own governments. India is at present suffering.”¹⁸

Explaining the Quit – India Movement the comments were “So far we were conducting a movement, but now we are conducting a revolution. In a revolution, there is victory or defeat. This revolution is not of one party or community, but of the whole of India, we hope you will not rest content till the British Empire is burnt to ashes. The speeches were mostly delivered by Dr. Lohia.

However, this Radio could not function for a long time. The government came to know of it and raided the place on November 12, at night. The Superintendent of Police and his military technicians and a troop of fifty odd policemen came to take possession of the belongings of this broadcasting station. The entry of the Deputy Commissioner did not worry the brave soldiers and they did not even care to move from their seats. Babubhai and Usha Mehta along with many others were arrested in this Radio Conspiracy case. The police tried its best to get the details, Om Usha

Metha but she refused to answer any question relating to this subject. During the interrogation period she was also kept in the lock – up. Describing the life in the police custody she says: “The lock – up period is perhaps the most trying time in the life of a prisoner. During the day you have to face the policemen and at night your only possible activity could be either to kill the bugs or to kill time. Again it is humanly impossible to sleep in a cell full of filth, dirt and nauseating smell.”¹⁹

“In spite of six months continuous interrogation the police could not get any information from her and finally charged her with agreeing in conspiring among and between overselves and others, to do or cause to be done illegal acts like possessing, establishing, maintaining and working illegal wireless telegraph without lawful authority or excuse prejudicial acts and spreading prejudicial reports.”²⁰

The case was Emperor versus Babuhai Khakar, Vithalbhai Jhavari, Usha Mehta, Chandrakant Jhavari, and Nanak Motwant. “Throughout the trail” says Usha Mehta, “we enjoyed so much that I am tempted to say that it was a golden period of my life. All along, we used to chew chocolates or peppermints unperturbed by the efforts of the Prosecutor who was hard at proving the case against us. The revelations of the approvers likewise failed to disturb our equanimity.”

The case was decided and Usha Mehta was sentenced to four years imprisonment. She remained in the jail till April 1946. After her release in 1946 she took to teaching and later obtained her doctorate degree on thesis on the “Social and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi”.

KASTURBA GANDHI

Bombay witnessed a martyr's death. Kasturba Gandhi, who had shared the responsibilities of the freedom struggle with Gandhiji, died as a prisoner on February 24, 1944. She could not even get the required medical help. It was after a great deal of correspondence by Gandhiji that physicians of her choice were choice was allowed to attend her.

HANSA METHA

Hansa Mehta plunged into the freedom struggle early in life. Greatly inspired by the leaders of the she day she travelled all over India, meeting women to create awareness among them. This, however, was disliked by the British Government. The *Abhodaya*, dated August 30, 1930, reported on a trick played by the railway authorities to send engines to drown the voices of the people shouting 'Inquilab Zindabad' on the arrival of Kamla Nehru and Hansa Metha at Delhi Railway station. The engines were made to hoot non – stop.

An eminent educationist and a dedicated social worker, she believed that unless there was improvement in the quality of life of women, social reform was not possible. Her tremendous contribution in the field of education won her many distinctions. She was the first woman Vice – Chancellor in India (Baroda University) and was actively associated with the All India Women's Conference since its inception. The *Times of India*, in its issue of August 15, 1947, described the unprecedented scenes of enthusiasm on the ushering of the freedom of India at the hour of midnight. In the Constituent Assembly "Pandit Nehru made a speech which was at once notable and a masterpiece of literature." After the oath of dedication, the

report says, “Smt. Hansa Mehta presented a national flag to the Constituent Assembly on behalf of the women of India.”

MRIDULA SARABHAI

Mridula Sarabhai was a renowned political and social worker. She was the daughter of Sarla and Ambalal Sarabhai, the fabulously rich industrialists and philanthropists of Ahmadabad. She became a prominent worker in the cause of freedom, in 1927. Like other people of her time, she was deeply moved by Gandhiji’s message and participated in the Salt Satyagrah (1930), the Rajkot Satyagraha (1938), and was in and out of prison several times. She worked actively during the I.N.A Trials in 1946. She played commendable role in the restoration of abducted women during the communal riots, which shook the country in the wake of the partition of India in 1947.

KARNATAKA

Consequently upon the arrest of Gandhiji the Congress leaders of Isur and neighboring villages formed Panchayats and called upon officials to resign. The Patil of Isur refused to resign. A party of children took over the papers and other things and thus relieved him of his duty forcibly. As a result the village was raided by the Inspector of Police. The children summoned the police officials and asked them to wear Gandhi caps and remove their hats. The sub – Inspector however ordered a lathi – charge on children. A girl, the daughter of Shanker, removed his hat and replaced it with a Khadi cap. The Sub – Inspector shot at the girl who was wounded. This enraged the villagers, and they attacked the police party and killed the Sub – Inspector and Amildar. A trial followed. Fourteen persons were sentenced to be hanged and

twenty – three, including three women, sentenced to transportation for life. The High Court confirmed the death sentence on five and the transportation for life. “The High Court confirmed the death sentence on five and the transportation sentence on three women”.²¹

The students took active part in the movement. The share of the girl students in these activities was by no means small. The government dealt lathi blows and indiscriminate beatings on these laws – defying students. Thirty – two girls were severely beaten at Kumtha Adoni²² (Karnataka). Balamakki Bamakka, the old mother of two influential merchants, led a procession with a flag and Gandhiji’s photo. She appealed to the Sub – Inspector of police who stopped the procession to resign and lead the movement against the government. She was arrested.

At Dharwar, on October 23, 1942, two lady students, Hemlata Shenolikar and Gulvade, entered the District Courts and hoisted the tricolor on the Judge’s seat. Gulvadi addressed the members of the Bar presents in the court and summoned the Juge and asked him to resign and dissolve his court within eight days otherwise he would be tried as a traitor. The police came on the scene. Gulvadi escaped. However, Shenolikar was sentenced to pay a fine of fifty rupees or to suffer imprisonment for one month. She refused to pay the fine and preferred to go to jail. Gulvadi again came to Dharwar Bar and addressed it again exhorting them to support the cause of independence. She was arrested and was sentence to pay fine one hundred and fifty rupees or to undergo three months imprisonment.²³

SUCHETA KRIPLANI

Sucheta Kriplani's interest in politics dates back from the days she was a lecturer in Banars University in 1934. Her marriage to Acharya J.B. Kriplani, then General Secretary of the All India Congress, further accentuated her interest. She left her job in the Banares University and plunge 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 came out 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 Kriplani as Secretary – In charge. She issued circulars to the Pradesh Congress Committees to organize 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 meetings at regular intervals in mohallas so that the uneducated, ignorant women were kept informed regarding war and the Congress activities. The information could be given through hand bills and bulletins.

Another work under taken by this Department was organising a volunteer Corps. The volunteers were taught simple drill, first – aid and the art of self – protection in an emergency. The crops were also required to help the refugees when they came to the town or left it.

In the towns a Central Committee with branches in each mohalla was formed. The Committee through its branches had to (a) convey to each home the day – to – day instructions of the local Congress Committee, (b) collect information regarding the difficulties of the mohalla and convey them to the Congress Committee, (c) arrange to teach spinning to the mohalla women, (d) arrange lectures on useful general information, (e) organize a short course of Physical culture with special emphasis on how to evade personal assaults, (f) find out cases of assaults and oppression on women, explain the victims that such incidents were not to be kept secret under false ideas of modesty and honour, give publicity to such incidents and render help in bringing criminals to books, be they civil or military, and (g) keep in touch with men's Volunteer Corps to be able to ask for assistance in any emergency.

The Mohalla Committee had to make arrangements to teach carding, spinning etc. It had supply charkhas and cotton, take the spun yarn and arrange for the weaving of cloth. In addition to this work, the Women's Department was to undertake to (i) study the difficulties of women and their causes and cures, (ii) try to increase the membership of women and devise ways and means of securing their active cooperation in various Congress activities, (iii) coordinate the activities of women Congress workers, (iv) suggest ways and means of increasing the capacity of women workers so as to take up more responsibility when called upon to do so, (v) suggest ways and means to Congress women representatives for their effective working in local government bodies, assemblies and institutions for constructive work like Khadi, village industries, labor, kisans, and (vi) to keep in touch with women's activities in India.

Suheta Kriplani 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 under took 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 Kriplani 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. Sucheta Kriplani was a member the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly and later became a member of the Lok Sabha. She had been the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh.

Mrs. ARUNA ASAF ALI

Aruna has been an ardent soldier of the army of freedom fighters. She became prominent during the days of Salt Satyagraha. She went about addressing meetings, preparing salt and she also led processions. The Chief Commissioner of Delhi was greatly alarmed by her activities. As a consequence he prosecuted her not for sedition “but for being a vagrant having no ostensible means of livelihood.” She was asked to furnish security for good behavior, which she refused. Aruna was arrested and was sentenced to one year’s imprisonment. A few months later most of the political prisoners were released under the Gandhi – Irwin Truce. The government, however, did not think advisable to release Aruna who was in Lahore jail.²⁴ Her women co prisoners refused to leave on the ground that unless Aruna was released they would not move. Gandhiji had to intervene and the prisoners left Aruna in jail. Later in response to a strong public agitation, Aruna was released after a few days. Aruna was

again arrested in 1932. In addition to imprisonment, she was fined two hundred rupees. Failing to get the fine so imposed, the police adopted a novel way of taxing her patience. They seized several of her most expensive sarees.

This time Aruna was lodged in the Delhi District jail. The political prisoners were being treated callously as a consequence of which Aruna took the lead and went on hunger strike. The authorities conceded to the demand of the political prisoners, but Aruna had to suffer heavily. She was transferred to Ambala jail and was kept there in 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 interested and formed her own ideas about the programme and methods of achieving freedom. 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.

Soon after the arrest of the members of the Congress working Committee and other leaders on August 9, 1942, Aruna presided over the national flag hoisting ceremony 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. 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 politics of revolution."

Aruna was one of the most important figures of the movement of 1942. For all this period of four years she evaded arrest and was successful. She carried on her

activities underground. It was on September 26, 1942, that the property of Mrs. Asaf Ali and Jugal Kishore Khanna was forfeited by the Delhi Administration after the expiry of one month's notice during which they were ordered to surrender themselves. Aruna's property, that is her house, was auctioned for twenty thousand rupees and her car for three thousand and five hundred.

The attitude of the government did not deter Aruna. 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.

Aruna edited *Inquilab*, a monthly journal of the Indian National Congress, Eastern Zone, along with Rammanohar Lohia. In the March 1944 issue of *Inquilab*, Aruna called upon the fighters for freedom "to choose his field or work and if the aim is common do not allow any academic and therefore futile arguments on question like violence and non – violence to divert your attention from the stern realities of today. This revolution is the most opportune moment for taking stock and making preparation for our next effort. I want every student and youth to think and feel as soldiers of the revolution that is to come."²⁵

Aruna was able to earn the admiration of many a government servant for her courage and resourcefulness. Pyarelal writes; "An English man who was also a government servant meeting her accidentally at the house of a friend, after hearing from her the story of her adventures, instead of informing the police complimented her for her courage saying, he himself would have done the same thing in similar circumstances."²⁶

A prize of five thousand rupees was announced by the authorities for her capture. Aruna became ill. Hearing of her failing health Gandhiji wrote to her “I have been filled with admiration for your courage and heroism. I have sent you a message that you must not die underground. You are reduced to a skeleton. Do come out and surrender yourself and win the prize offered for your arrest. Reserve the prize money for Harijan cause.” Aruna, however, could not reconcile herself to surrender and kept on working in spite of her bad health. She came out in the open when warrants against her were cancelled on January 26, 1946.

Aruna explained in a public meeting at Calcutta that she remained underground primarily for the reason that she had to go to several places in order to preserve and promote the spirit of national organization that was being attacked by the government.

In February 1946, Aruna suggested the creation of a new Azad Hind Army in India under the banner of Congress to organise revolutionary movement for the overthrow of British rule in India. She said, “We have no place for mere intellectuals, we want practical people who can carry the message of independence throughout the whole length and breadth of the country.”²⁷

Yursuf Mehrally while writing about her in the *Tribune* observed, “The heroine of 1987 was the Rani of Jhansi, that of the 1942 revolution in undoubtedly Aruna Asaf Ali”.²⁸ Aruna Asaf Ali became the Mayor of Delhi Corporation in 1958, a place she occupied with distinction.

WOMEN IN THE INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY

It was about the first decade of the century that the revolutionary and terrorist activities were at their peak in India. Some of the revolutionaries escaped to other countries such as Japan, China, Siam and Malaya to avoid repression at the hands of the British Government and with the object of perfecting their plans for liberating their country. The most important person was Rash Behari Bose who sought asylum in Japan after throwing a bomb on Lord Hardinge in 1911.

The number of revolutionaries increased with the passage of time, and the local population of South – East Asia which consisted to three million people strengthened the revolutionary movement with men and money. There were several organizations established by the Indians in this area. Ghadar party was active in Shanghai. In Bangkok, Taji Bharat Cultural Lodge was the centre of revolutionary activities. The important revolutionaries were S. Amar Singh, Pritam Singh and Chanda Singh.

Japan declared war on Britain and America in December 1941. It was on December 15, 1941, that Captain Mohan Singh of the Indian Army, now known as General Mohan Singh, with fifty-four companions met Pritam Singh near Jitra Cantonment. Mohan Singh and his companions promised to sacrifice their lives for the freedom of India. This was the beginning of the Indian National Army.

The Indian Independence League was formed on January 16, 1942, at Kuala Lumpur. Later branches were founded in Thailand and other places. By now the number of Indian prisoners at Kuala Lumpur was five thousand. Captain Mohan

Singh addressed them and exhorted them to join Indian National Army to fight the British in Malaya and elsewhere.

Ever since the formation of the Indian Independence League the Indian women in East Asia helped to further the cause of India's Independence League. Indian women assisted in the preparation and collection of bandages, first filed dressings, collection of funds and articles required by the troops and inspiring young men and women to do their duty in the critical hour.

In March 1943, Women's Section of the Indian Independence League was inaugurated. Mrs. M.K. Chidambaram was elected Chairman and Miss Saraswati as Secretary of the Women's Section, Indian Independence League, Singapore. Dr. Lakshmi Swaminathan was appointed Secretary at the Headquarters. These ladies toured the various parts of Malaya, Thailand and Burma to open branches and to enlist volunteers. Ultimately all branches of the Indian Independence League started Women's Section. The work of the women for the major part was of collecting funds and providing amenities to the soldiers. But with the arrival of Subhas Chandra Bose there came a revolutionary spirit in the organization.

It was on July 9, 1943 that Subhash Chandra Bose addressed a meeting and asked for men and women volunteers. He felt that women must be ready to share the burden of freedom's battle. "This caught the imagination of the Indian women folk" and a beginning to start a women's Regiment was made, which later popularly came to be known as the "Ranee Jhansi Regiment."²⁹

A women's camp was started on October 23, 1943, in Singapore which was followed by many more in Malaya and Bruma. They were given training in nursing,

social service and general welfare work. The military part of the training consisted of (1) drill, (2) weapon training, (3) tactics, (4) map reading consisted (5) general subjects. They were trained to use rifles, bayonets, sub – machine guns, machine guns, revolvers, grenades, swords and daggers.

The women wore the soldiers' uniforms and had to observe strict military discipline. They were taken out on route marches and had to cover between 6 to 40 miles at times. Their day began with the singing of the National Anthem and common prayer for the liberation of Hindustan. They would, day after day, re – affirm their pledge too “I shall fulfil our objective in the court of the face of all difficulties, I shall sacrifice myself, my body, soul and properties, all for the fulfillment of my pledge. I promise I shall not do Netajee. I shall obey all the orders of superiors with heart and soul. I shall keep in good condition all the weapons Netajee has given.”³⁰

The women of Ranee Jhansi Regiment were keen to go on active service. So they sent a representation to Subhas Chandra Bose, the Supreme Commander of the Indian National Army, “It is you, who taught us that there is no distinction between men and women. It is you who gave us training fit for men folk, have inspired us with courage and moral stamina required for actual warfare. We have received complete training. In these circumstances why should we not be sent to the battlefield without delay.” This was signed with blood drawn from the fingers of the signatories.³¹ The first batch was sent to Maymo (Bruma) in the beginning of 1945. The members of the Jhansi Regiment could not take part in actual fighting as the Indian National Army was retreating at that time. Before Netajee left for Malaya he issued orders that the regiment be disbanded and members sent to their homes.

DR. LAKSHMI SWAMINATHAN (MRS. SEHGAL)

Lakshmi Swaminathan was an important woman of the Indian National Army. She was in Singapore at the time when the call of Netajee came. She responded to this call with wholehearted enthusiasm. She was the Commander of the Ranee Jhansi Regiment and also the Minister of Social Welfare and Medicine in the Azad Hind Cabinet.

As the Commander, of the Ranee Jhansi Regiment, Lakshmi was designated as Lt. Colonel. When the Indian National Army collapsed she did not surrender to the British. She was captured and later placed under arrest. Her Regiment was disbanded in 1945 and most of the girls were sent away to Singapore from Rangoon. Lakshmi Swaminathan was sent to Rangoon Jail. There was a great deal of agitation for her release and the government had to yield and released her on the condition that she would not make any public speech.

Lakshmi, however, defied the order and spoke on the anniversary day, October 21, 1945, of the Azad Hind Fauj and said the object for which the Azad Hind Fauj was formed had still to be achieved. She also organized a protest meeting against the Indian National Army trails at Delhi. Her activities did not please the authorities and she was served with a notice and asked to go to Kalawe. On November 14 a second notice was served on her and the next morning she was flown to Meikilita from where she was taken to Kalawe in a military car. Lakshmi was released the next year. She came to India and married Captain Sehgal of the Indian National Army.

TOWARDS THE GOAL

Throughout the war period most of the Indians, wherever they were, continued their efforts to free themselves. The leaders of the major political parties were in jail for two years between 1942 and 1944. The Government was still reluctant to open negotiations with Indian leaders on constitutional set up. The Labour Party of England became critical of the policy of the British Government regarding India, and condemned it for its failure to arrive at some workable Solution. In December 1944 the Labour Party passed resolution wherein urged the government for the resumption of negotiations with Indian leaders with a view to securing a place for India as a self – governing member of the British Commonwealth.

The next year was significant for it witnessed a new British offer which was announced by Lord Wavell the then Viceroy, general elections in Great Britain (July 1945) with Labor Party in power, and ending of the Second World War. During this period Indians became more important than ever before. The war hand caused a lot of dislocation in the daily life of the people. The food was not only expensive but scarce as well. In some places there was famine. The war also gave opportunity to Indian soldiers to handle new machinery and armament. The trial of the men of the Indian national Army further fanned the fire of nationalism. There were widespread demonstrations and clashes with the government against the trials.

Early next year came the uprising of the sailors of the Indian Navy at Bombay which slowly spread to other seaports. This uprising claimed the lives of several people. By now clement Attlee had replaced Winston Churchill the war time Prime Minister. Attlee made an announcement in February that a Cabinet Mission would leave for India to assist the Indian leaders to draw up a new constitution. The Cabinet

Mission arrived in India on March 24, 1946 and held discussions with the various political parties and with the Indian Government. The leaders could not come to a common understanding. As a consequence the Cabinet Mission had to give their own formula for solving the constitutional deadlock.

The cabinet mission offer was accepted by the Muslim League in its entirety by a resolution on May 6, 1946. The Congress, however, only approved the portion relating to the constitution making on June 26, 1946. The government, therefore, had to announce that the interim government could not be formed on account of the difficulties arising out of the stand taken by political parties. The decision of the government annoyed Jinnah and the Muslim League passed their famous Direct Action Resolution in which both the Congress and British Government were condemned for the breach of faith. Serious riots between Hindu and Muslims broke out in many parts of the country.

It was on August 12 that Lord Wavell invited Pandit, Nehru, the President of the Indian National Congress, to form the interim government. Elections to the Constituent Assembly were also held and it met for the first time in New Delhi on December 9, 1946. It had fifteen women members. The Muslim League refused to participate. The Constituent Assembly however went on with its work. Attlee made the following announcement on February 20: "His Majesty's government wish to make it clear that it is their definite intention to take necessary steps to affect the transference of power to responsible Indian hands by a date not later than June 1948."³²

Lord Wavell was replaced by Lord Mountbatten on March 24, 1947, as Viceroy. The situation at this time was very tense as a strong agitation for partition

was set in motion by the Muslim League. It became evident that the unity of India could not be maintained and Jinnah and the Muslim League would have nothing less than Pakistan.

The Mountbatten plan which amongst other things provided for the partition of India was accepted by the Muslim League on June 9, 1947 and by the All India Congress Committee on June 15, 1947. The Indian Independence Act was passed by the British Parliament on July 18, 1947. This Act marked the end of the British rule in India.

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