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Two Revolutionary Unsung Women Freedom Fighters of India

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ABSTRACT

In the background of Indian history, women freedom fighters played a significant role in freedom movements. These are the personages remembered today for the unique combination of virtues like bravery, courage, sophistication, elegance and devotion, and patriotism. A talk about freedom movements and freedom fighters without mentioning female heroes' participation is quite incomplete. Many women revealed themselves as true warriors in this struggle for freedom and got their names imprinted on our hearts forever, but some female freedom fighters fought in either background or as supportive ones and could not get even proper acknowledgment today. Several women were there who sacrificed their lives for our nation but remained lesser-read and known women in Indian history. In this paper, the life of two such female freedom figures will be enlightened.

Keywords- Revolutionary, Unsung, Women, Freedom fighters.

I. PADMAJA NAIDU (1900-1975)

It is said that "A daughter will follow her mom's footsteps, so make sure to set a good example."
(Elizabeth George)

Padmaja Naidu, daughter of famous freedom fighter Sarojini Naidu proved it right. She was Governor of the Indian state of West Bengal between 1956 and 1967.



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LIFE OF PADAAMJA NAIDU

Padmaja Naidu was born to a Bengali mother, famous freedom fighter Sarojini Naidu from the land of patriotism, and a Telugu father, Mutyala Govindrajulu Naidu, who was a physician. Sarojini Naidu was an Indian political activist, feminist, and poet. A promoter of civil rights, women's emancipation, and anti-imperialistic ideas, she was a significant person in India's struggle for independence from British rule. She was also the first Indian woman to be president of the Indian National Congress and to be appointed as governor of an Indian state. Padmaja Naidu devoted her whole life to her nation, like her mother.

EMERGENCE IN POLITICS

Padmaja Naidu emerged in the Indian political scenario at the age of 21 when she became the joint founder of the Indian National Congress of Hyderabad. She spread the message to use Khadi and inspired people to boycott foreign goods. While participating in the Quit India movement in 1942, she was jailed. After Independence, Miss Naidu was elected to the Parliament, but she resigned from her membership on account of her ill health. She became the Governor of West Bengal. She held that high office for many years with great distinction.

HUMANITARIAN APPROACH FOR SOCIETY AND NATION

For many years Padmaja Naidu held that high office with great distinction. During her public life for a long time, she was associated with the Red Cross. She played a leading role as Chairman of the Indian Red Cross Society during the Bangladesh refugee operation. Miss Naidu was also connected with the Bharat Sevak Samaj, All India Handicrafts Board, and Nehru Memorial Fund. Her services to the Nation and especially her humanitarian approach to solving problems will be remembered.

METICULOUS COLLECTOR OF MANUSCRIPTS AND LETTERS

Padmaja Naidu, after her mother's sad demise, collected the poems written by Sarojini Naidu and published them as a book titled *The Feather of the Dawn* in 1961. "Sheela Reddy, the author of *Mr & Mrs. Jinnah: The Marriage That Shook India* acknowledges this fact in her interview **about the letters of Ruttie Jinnah to Sarojini and Padmaja Naidu—did they contain any comment on politics or Jinnah's rivals?** ⁽²⁾

Ruttie wrote letters to both Sarojini and Padmaja Naidu, but her letters to Sarojini are now lost because Sarojini, with her itinerant life, never bothered to keep the letters she received from her numerous friends and acquaintances and even her children and husband. It was from her numerous friends, acquaintances, and even her children and husband. Thanks to Padmaja Naidu,

who kept every letter she received from both her mother and Ruttie, I was able to piece the narrative of Jinnah's marriage together.

Curiously enough, when politics was so much the breath of their lives, it hardly ever entered into Ruttie's letters, especially after her marriage to Jinnah. The few passing references she makes in her letters to Padmaja are only about Jinnah's schedule and when they would have to leave for Delhi or Simla for the summer or monsoon sessions of the legislature. This could be either because of her growing alienation from his politics or, more likely, Jinnah's resistance to discussing his political concerns with his wife when they were alone and not in company. ⁽²⁾

CONTROVERSIAL STATEMENT OF PADMAJA NAIDU

In a chapter titled "Nehru and Women," Padmaja Naidu, the daughter of Sarojini Naidu, exclaims, "Nehru is not a one-woman man!" – an apt preface to the profiles of all the women Nehru allegedly had affairs with, some known (Padmaja Naidu herself, Lady Mountbatten) and some unnamed. Mathai whitewashes Nehru's complicity in most of these alleged affairs by giving us the impression that he had no choice in the matter and had to pay attention to all the fawning women falling at his feet every now and then, with one of these trysts leading to a pregnancy, a child whom Nehru decisively abandons. ⁽⁴⁾

TRIBUTE TO HER

The Himalayan Zoological Park, which was established on 14th August 1958 at Darjeeling, West Bengal, as a joint venture of the West Bengal Government's Department of Education and the Government of India's Department of Science and Technology is the park acknowledged internationally for its conservation breeding programs of Snow Leopard, Tibetan Wolf, Red Panda and other species in danger of extinction.

And as a great tribute to Ms. Padmaja Naidu for her keen service to the nation, India was dedicated on 21 November 1975 Padmaja Naidu by Indira Gandhi, and since then, it has been called Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park.

II. USHA MEHTA (1920 – 2000)



LIFE OF USHA MEHTA

Usha Mehta was born in Gujrat's Saras village near Surat. Usha Mehta's early schooling was completed in Kheda and Bharuch and then at Chandaramji High School, Bombay. She was an average student but with an intelligent mind. In 1935, her matriculation examinations placed her among the top 25 students in her class. She did her graduation from Wilson College, Bombay, in 1939 with a first-class degree in philosophy. She left her law studies in 1942 to join the Quit India Movement. After that, beginning at age 22, she participated in the freedom movement full-time.

THE SEED OF PATRIOTISM IN LITTLE USHA MEHTA

At the Age of five, Usha saw Mahatma Gandhi for the first time while visiting his ashram in Ahmedabad. Shortly afterward, Gandhi arranged a camp near her village where little Usha participated, attending sessions and doing a little spinning.

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." Usha, with other children, participated in early morning protests against the British Raj and picketing in front of liquor shops. During one of these protest marches, the police officers charged the children, and a girl carrying the Indian flag fell along with the flag. Angry at this incident, the children took the story to their parents. The elders responded by dressing the children in the colors of the Indian flag (saffron, white and green) and sending them out in the streets a few days later. Dressed in the flag's colors, the children marched again, shouting: "Policemen, you can wield your sticks and your batons, but you cannot bring down our flag."

Being a judge under the British Raj, Usha's father did not encourage her to participate in the freedom struggle. As her father retired in 1930, the restriction was removed. In 1932, at the age of 12, the family moved to Bombay, making it possible for her to participate more actively in the freedom movement. She and other children distributed clandestine bulletins and publications, visited relatives in the prisons, and carried messages to these prisoners.

INFLUENCE OF MAHATMA GANDHI ON USHA MEHTA

Usha was highly influenced by Gandhi and proved herself one of his followers. She decided to remain celibate for her whole life to serve her nation. She opted Gandhian lifestyle and started wearing only Khadi clothes, leaving a simple life without any luxuries. Over time, she emerged as a prominent supporter of Gandhian thought and philosophy.

SECRET CONGRESS RADIO, A CLANDESTINE RADIO STATION

Today, 55 years later, we have radio equipment and programs comparable to the best in the world. But how many of us know the humble beginning? After the announcement that the Quit India Movement would commence on 9 August 1942 with a rally at Gowalia Tank grounds in Mumbai. Nearly all leaders, including Gandhi, were arrested before that date. However, a huge crowd of Indians gathered at Gowalia Tank Ground on the appointed day. It was left to a group of junior leaders and workers to address them and hoist the national flag. Usha and some of her close associates began the Secret Congress Radio, a clandestine radio station, On 14 August 1942. It went on air on 27 August. The first words broadcast in her voice were: "This is the Congress radio calling on [a wavelength of] 42.34 meters from somewhere in India." Vithalbhai Jhaveri, Chandrakant Jhaveri, Babubhai Thakkar, and Nanka Motwani, owner of Chicago Radio, were some associates who supplied equipment and provided technicians to her. The Secret Radio Congress was assisted by many other leaders, including Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyutrao Patwardhan, and Purushottam Trikamdas, to spread the messages of Gandhi across the country, although on 12 November 1942, police arrested the organizers, including Usha Mehta and all were later imprisoned. She was interrogated for six months by the Criminal Investigation Department, a wing of the Indian Police during this time. She chose to remain silent over the opportunity to study abroad if she would betray the movement. she was sentenced to four years imprisonment from 1942 to 1946 due to choosing the nation. In March 1946, Morarji Desai, who was at that time the home minister in the interim government, released her, the first political prisoner in Bombay to be released. Despite the Secret Congress Radio's short life, it greatly aided the movement by disseminating uncensored news and other information banned by the British government. Leaders of the freedom movement also kept in touch with the public through Secret Congress Radio. She described her time with the Secret Congress Radio as her "finest moment" and her saddest because an Indian technician had betrayed them.

USHA MEHTA, AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Usha's failing health did not let her participate in politics or social work. Even she could not attend the official function in New Delhi due to bad health conditions. She later wrote a doctoral dissertation on Gandhi's political and social thought, earning a Ph.D. from the University of Bombay. She had a long association with Mumbai university in many capacities: as a student, as a research assistant, as a lecturer, a professor, and finally as the head of the HOD of civics and politics. She retired from the University of Bombay in 1980. Even after India's independence, Usha continued to be socially active, spreading Gandhian thought and philosophy. Over the years. She wrote many articles, essays, and books in English and Gujarati,

her mother tongue. She was elected the president of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, a trust dedicated to the preservation of Gandhian heritage. The Nidhi acquired Mani Bhavan in Mumbai, the residence of Sardar Patel's daughter Manibehn Patel, where Gandhi used to reside during his visits to the city, and converted it into a Gandhi memorial. She was the president of the Gandhi Peace Foundation in New Delhi. She also actively participated in the affairs of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. The Government of India associated her with several celebrations of India's 50th anniversary of freedom.

TRIBUTE TO USHA MEHTA FROM NATION

The Union of India conferred her Padma Vibhushan in 1998, India's second-highest civilian award.

WORD OF DISAPPOINTMENT OF USHA

Usha grew increasingly unhappy with the developments in independent India's social, political, and economic spheres. Once, in an interview with India Today, she expressed her feelings in these words: "Certainly, this is not the freedom we fought for." She added that the freedom fighters of her generation felt that "once people were ensconced in positions of power, the rot would set in." However, in her words, "we didn't know the rot would sink in so soon." Nevertheless, she did not deny the achievements of free India since the independence: "India has survived as a democracy and even built a good industrial base," she said. "Still, it is not the India of our dreams."

In August 2000, although she suffered from fever, Usha participated like she did every year in the anniversary celebrations of the Quit India Movement in August Kranti Maidan. She returned home weak and exhausted. Two days later, she died peacefully on 11 August 2000 at 80, survived by her elder brother and three nephews. One of her nephews, Ketan Mehta, is a noted Bollywood filmmaker. The other nephew is Dr. Yatin Mehta, a well-known anesthetist who was formerly the Director of Escorts Hospital and is now associated with Medicity in Gurgaon. The third nephew is Dr. Nirad Mehta, who joined the Army and is now at P.D. Hinduja National Hospital, Mumbai. ⁽¹¹⁾

III. CONCLUSION

Thus we can not avoid the struggle and contribution of all the braveheart female fighters of our nation who sacrificed their lives and everything for the nation's sake in any form. These women were the torch bearer of the female community and how they can serve the nation. They faced many severe aches, exploitation, and pains but still showed the path of courage, bravery and

intense patriotism. They all have got their names imprinted on the heart of every indian for the true spirit of patriotism.

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