



Role of Women in the Freedom Struggle

For Prelims: [Non-Cooperation Movement](#), [Quit India Movement](#), [Rani Laxmibai](#), [All India Women's Conference](#), [Savitribai Phule](#)

For Mains: Role of women in India's nationalist movements and revolutionary activities, Gender and social reform during the Indian freedom struggle.

[Source:IE](#)

Why in News?

As India marked its [79th Independence Day](#), it is crucial to recognize the **pivotal role played by [women in shaping the nation's freedom struggle](#)**. These women fought not only against British rule but also against the social restrictions that sought to keep them invisible.

What was the Role of Women in the Freedom Struggle?

- **Active Participation in Mass Movements:** Women, inspired by the symbol of "Bharat Mata," united across regions and communities, strengthening nationalist sentiment and mobilizing support against British colonial rule.
 - [Non-Cooperation Movement \(1920-1922\)](#) women boycotted British goods, promoted khadi, joined marches, and courted imprisonment, demonstrating courage and political awareness.
 - [Salt Satyagraha \(1930\)](#) icons like **Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Nehru** led marches, **picketed salt shops, and mobilized rural women**, integrating women into the mainstream struggle.
 - [Quit India Movement \(1942\)](#): Women organized rallies, spread nationalist messages, ran underground Congress radios, and maintained movement continuity during arrests of male leaders.
- **Revolutionary Contributions:** Leaders like **Pritilata Waddedar and Kalpana Dutta** actively participated in Chittagong raids, attacks on British establishments, and underground revolutionary networks.
 - [Rani Laxmibai](#), Matangini Hazra, and Kanaklata Barua became symbols of sacrifice, inspiring mass participation.
 - Women smuggled arms, distributed pamphlets, and coordinated covert resistance efforts, highlighting strategic acumen.
- **Leadership and Organizational Role:** Formation of women-centric organizations like [All India Women's Conference \(AIWC\)](#) and **Women's Indian Association (WIA)** provided platforms for political activism and social reform.
 - Leaders such as **Sarojini Naidu, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Sucheta Kriplani** guided protests, represented India internationally, and fostered a culture of female leadership in politics.
- **Social Reform and Gender Empowerment:** Icons like [Savitribai Phule](#), promoted women's

education, legal equality, property rights, and dismantled restrictive practices like purdah and child marriage.

- Empowered rural and urban women through **khadi promotion**, literacy drives, and participation in civil society, linking social reform with political activism.

Who were the Iconic Women Leaders During India's Freedom Struggle?

- **Rani Lakshmibai:** Queen of Jhansi, fought bravely in the **First War of Independence**, (Indian Rebellion of 1857) resisted the **Doctrine of Lapse**.
- **Rani Chennamma: The Queen of Kitturu, Karnataka, led the Kittur Rebellion against the British in 1824, one of the earliest woman-led anti-colonial struggles in India.**
 - This rebellion was sparked after the British refused to recognize her adopted son as the heir under the Doctrine of Lapse.
- **Savitribai Phule:** First female teacher in India, promoted girls' education, opposed child marriage, caste discrimination, and **advocated widow remarriage**.
- **Pandita Ramabai:** Founded **Sharada Sadan for widows**; promoted women's education and suffrage; worked against child marriage.
- **Sarojini Naidu:** First Indian woman President of the **Indian National Congress**; key participant in the Salt March, civil disobedience, and the Quit India Movement.
- **Sucheta Kripalani:** Active in the **Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements**. Later became the first woman Chief Minister in India (Uttar Pradesh).
- **Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay:** Born in Mangalore, she was a freedom fighter, social reformer, and politician. She played a key role in the **AIWC**, was the **first woman to contest a legislative seat in Madras**, and persuaded Gandhi to include women equally in the Salt Satyagraha.
- **Rani Gaidinliu:** Joined the **Heraka Movement** at 13, founded by her cousin Haipou Jadonang, and took leadership after his execution, resisting **British rule** and promoting Naga identity.
- **Annie Besant:** Launched **Madras Home Rule League**, first woman Congress President in 1917, promoted education and nationalist awareness.
- **Kamala Nehru:** Participated in non-cooperation movements alongside Jawaharlal Nehru.
- **Aruna Roy:** Modern activist; instrumental in the enactment of the Right to Information Act for transparency and accountability.
- **Bhikaiji Cama:** Hoisted the **first Indian flag abroad (Germany)** and continued activism while in exile.
- **Aruna Asaf Ali:** Hoisted the **Congress flag during the Quit India Movement**, earning the title '**Heroine of 1942.**'
- **Kasturba Gandhi:** Actively involved in civil disobedience, protests, and imprisonment alongside Mahatma Gandhi.
- **Fatima Sheikh:** Pioneer of girls' education and social reform, laying the foundation for women's empowerment.
- **Rukmini Devi Arundale:** Revived and promoted Indian classical dance and arts, strengthening national cultural identity.
- **Usha Mehta:** Ran underground Congress Radio during the Quit India Movement, spreading messages of independence.
- **Bengal Women Revolutionaries:**
 - **Bina Das:** **She was an Indian revolutionary who attempted to assassinate Stanley Jackson, the Governor of Bengal in 1932, at the Convocation Hall of the University of Calcutta.**
 - She quietly protested by wearing khadi, writing about banned literature, and distributing revolutionary materials in her college. These acts challenged both the British Empire and societal norms that silenced women.
 - **Pritilata Waddadar:** Led the **Pahartali European Club attack (1932)**; embraced **martyrdom** to protest racial discrimination.
 - **Kalpana Datta:** Took part in the Chittagong Armoury Raid and documented women's equal role in revolution.
 - **Kamala Das Gupta:** **Supported the freedom movement by hiding fugitives, carrying messages, and smuggling arms.**
 - She established schools for Muslim girls in Kolkata and personally encouraged

families to educate their daughters.

- **Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain**: A pioneering feminist, she envisioned a society led by women, governed by reason and peace, and freed from the shackles of both patriarchy and colonialism in her novella **Sultana's Dream**.
- **Labanya Prabha Ghosh**: Promoted literacy as a weapon, organised reading groups, wrote for nationalist publications like Mukti, and hosted underground nationalist meetings in rural Bengal.
- **Matangini Hazra (Gandhi Buri)**: Led mass protests during Quit India Movement. Shot while holding the tricolour and chanting "Vande Mataram," her martyrdom symbolized that freedom belonged to all Indians, not just the elite.

Conclusion

Women were not mere participants but **architects of India's freedom**, combining courage, strategic action, and social reform to shape the **trajectory of the independence movement**. Their contributions exemplify the intersection of **political struggle and social liberation**.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Discuss the multifaceted role of women in India's freedom struggle.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Annie Besant was (2013)

1. responsible for starting the Home Rule Movement
2. the founder of the Theosophical Society
3. once the President of the Indian National Congress

Select the correct statement/statements using the codes given below.

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (C)

Q. With reference to Indian freedom struggle, Usha Mehta is well-known for (2011)

- (a) Running the secret Congress Radio in the wake of Quit India Movement
- (b) Participating in the Second Round Table Conference
- (c) Leading a contingent of Indian National Army
- (d) Assisting in the formation of Interim Government under Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

Ans: (a)

Mains

Q. Discuss the role of women in the freedom struggle especially during the Gandhian phase. (2016)

