

Freedom Struggle in India Role of Foreign Women Freedom Fighters

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Abstract

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 the woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater institution, is she not more self sacrificing has her not greater power of endurance, and has not greater courage without her man would not be notable. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is woman.

Keywords: Freedom struggle Role of women, Dedication of women, British Rule

Introduction

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.

- **Sister Nivedita**

Sister Nivedita was one among the host of foreign women who were attracted towards Swami Vivekananda and Hindu philosophy. Born in Ireland on 28 October 1867, she arrived in India in January, 1898, in search of truth. She 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 Ghosa Agni-sikha.

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 is now called Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' High School. She worked to improve the lives of Indian women of all 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 Sacramental 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 women'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

- **Annie Besant**

Annie Besant an Irish lady became the leader of the 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 Wood was born in 1847 in London into a middle-class family of Irish origin. She was always proud of being Irish and supported the cause of Irish self-rule throughout her adult life. Her father died when she was five years old, leaving the family almost penniless. Her mother supported the family by running a boarding house for boys at Harrow. However, she was unable to support Annie and persuaded her friend Ellen Marryat to care for her. Marryat made sure that Annie had a good education. She was given a strong sense of duty to society and an equally strong sense of what independent women could achieve. As a young woman, she was also able to travel widely in Europe. There she acquired a taste for Catholic colour and ceremony that never left her.

In 1867, at age nineteen she married 26-year-old clergyman Frank Besant, younger brother of Walter Besant. He was an evangelical Anglican clergyman who seemed to share many of her concerns. Soon Frank became vicar of Sibsey in Lincolnshire. Annie moved to Sibsey with her husband, and within a few years they had two children: Digby and Mabel. The marriage was, however, a disaster. The first conflict came over money and Annie's independence. Annie wrote short stories, books for children and articles. As married women did not have the legal right to own property, Frank was able to take all the money she earned. Politics further divided the couple. Annie began to support farm workers who were fighting to unionize and to win better conditions. Frank was a Tory and sided with the landlords

and farmers. The tension came to a head when Annie refused to attend Communion. She left him and returned to London. They were legally separated and Annie took her daughter with her.

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

• **Meera Ben And Sarla Ben**

Popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi's two English daughters also made significant contribution to the cause of freedom. Meera Men whose real name was Madeleine Slade attended the second Round Table conference with Gandhi. She sent news release concerning Gandhi's campaign to the world press for which she was repeatedly threatened by the government, but she continued her work, she undertook khadi tour through the country she was arrested for entering the city of Bombay in violation of the government order. Catherine Mary Heilman or Sarla Ben as she was better known went from village helping the families of political prisoners.

Conclusion

All these women freedom fighters in one way or the other participated wholeheartedly and with great courage in the freedom struggle in the state. Especially in organizing women volunteers, in distributing pamphlets and in doing commendable social service for the cause of the national movement. They also participated in individual Satyagraha, salt Satyagraha and No Tax Campaign. These women freedom fighters along with men fought for socio-economic values and to popularize democratic ideas. They struggled for the introduction of representative Government and also for the economic development of India and above all for the freedom of their motherland.

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