

HEROES WHO LIT THE FLAME OF REVOLUTION FOR INDIA'S FREEDOM

India's freedom struggle is unique in a sense that it was not led by only a handful of leaders. It was a mass movement as people cutting across genders, castes, creed, religion and regions came together to drive out the foreign oppressors from this land. These sagas of courage, selflessness and determination, continue to inspire us and make us proud even after more than seven decades of independence. There was only a burning desire to free the country from the shackles of slavery. Their sacrifices and the amount of pain and hardships they endured cannot be put into words. India owes and will remain indebted to them for the independence in 1947.



The spark of revolution created by countless freedom fighters through their supreme sacrifice not only mobilized the masses for the cause, but shook the foundations of the British Empire. The Indian freedom struggle is replete with the valor of so many fighters who sacrificed everything to see their country free. The story of India's freedom struggle would remain incomplete sans the role of women revolutionaries. No way, were they second to their male contemporaries. The Amrit Mahotsav of Azadi is being celebrated to revive the immortal saga of such true heroism and to inculcate the spirit of patriotism

among the new generation and to connect them with new India, which reflects our core values and our rich culture. The country is constantly on the move towards self-reliance. The 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' started on the 75th anniversary of independence is an important step towards self-reliance, which the Government of India has decided to celebrate till 15th August 2023. In this series of the Amrit Mahotsav of Azadi, we introduce some of the heroes who not only played an important role in getting independence for the country but also contributed significantly for the all-round development of the nation before and even after independence.

DR. RAJENDRA PRASAD: A SCHOLAR AND A MAN OF HUMILITY

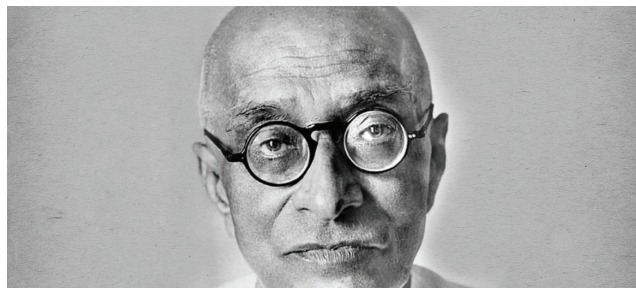
Born: 3rd December 1884, Died: 28th February 1963



Looking at the answer sheet of a student, an Examiner once said: 'The examinee is better than the examiner.' The student was none other than Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India who was always a brilliant student. There is hardly any student of Bihar who did not have to hear either at home or school that he should study like Rajendra Babu. People of his era vouch for his sharp memory power and say that he could recall each and every incident of his life effortlessly. He is believed to have written his 1,900-page biography without jotting down notes in any diary. He penned down the chapters of his history in his biography spontaneously as if the events occurred a day before. Rajendra Prasad was born on December 3, 1884 in a small village Ziradei in Chhapra district and became a lawyer. However, Gopal Krishna Gokhale's ideas had a deep impact on Rajendra Prasad and he joined India's freedom struggle. When Mahatma Gandhi started the 'Salt Satyagraha', Rajendra Prasad also joined it along with many Satyagrahis and later he also actively participated in the 'Quit India Movement'. When the country became independent in 1947, a constituent assembly was formed for the purpose of drafting the Constitution for India and Rajendra Prasad was made its president. When the Constitution was adopted, he became the President of India. His term as the President of India lasted from 26th January 1950 to 14th May 1962. He was the only President to serve two terms. While being the President, Rajendra Prasad attended the program of Somnath temple on May 11, 1951. Somnath temple, which was invaded several times in the past, was inaugurated after the reconstruction. In 1962, he was awarded the 'Bharat Ratna', the highest civilian award.

C. RAJAGOPALACHARI: A GIFTED LAWYER, BUREAUCRAT AND STATESMAN

Born: 10th December 1878, Died: 25th December 1972



Swami Vivekananda once visited a hostel. There he asked a student why "Lord Vishnu is depicted with sky-blue skin." The student replied: "His character represents that he is Infinite like sky and ocean." Swami Vivekananda was very impressed with the answer of the student who was none other than Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, known to the world as C. Rajagopalachari or Rajaji. Rajagopalachari was born on 10th December 1878 in Thorapalli village in the Salem district of the then province of Madras (now Tamil Nadu). He was a lawyer, skilled bureaucrat, well-known diplomat and statesman. He was greatly influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and his principles of truth and non-violence during the freedom struggle. In 1930, when Gandhiji undertook the Dandi March, he also broke the salt law. He was also against the caste system and fought against it throughout his life. Rajagopalachari was also the first Indian-born governor-general, as all previous holders of the post were British nationals. He contributed significantly to the promotion of Hindi in South India. In 1950, Rajagopalachari became the Home Minister in the Jawaharlal Nehru-led government after the country became independent. He later took oath as the Chief Minister of Madras in 1952. However, due to ideological differences with Nehru, he later broke away from the Congress and formed a new party of his own. He named his party as 'Anti-Congress Swatantra Party'. Rajagopalachari was awarded India's highest civilian award 'Bharat Ratna' in 1954 for his contribution to the society. During his imprisonment, he wrote a book called 'Meditation in Jail' and also had written 'Ramayana' in Tamil. He died on 25th December 1972.

SUBRAMANIAM BHARATHI: A PIONEER OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND SYMBOL OF NATIONAL UNITY

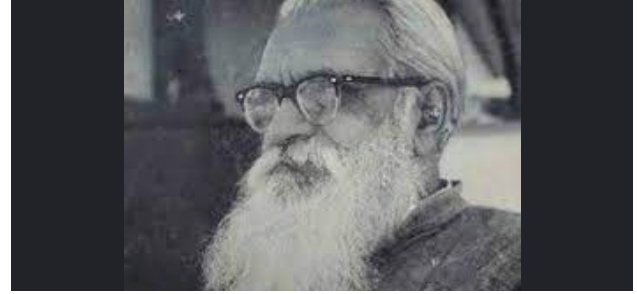
Born: 11th December 1882, Died: 11th September 1921



Once in a class, the teacher asked a student, "We have heard, you are Kalmegh. Recite a poem." The student immediately replied, "Sir, Kalmegh showers on his own and not on orders." This student who gave such an answer to the teacher was none other than Subramaniam Bharathi whose few verses from one of his poems were recited by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from the Red Fort on 15th August 2018. It was एल्लाररुम् अमरनिलई आईडुमनान, मुरईअई इंदिया उलागिरिक्कुओ अलिवकुसम i.e., India will show the entire world the way to get rid of all kinds of bondage. A large number of people in the South had joined the freedom struggle, influenced by the writings of Bharathi who was born on December 11, 1882. He was not only a pioneer of women's empowerment and a symbol of national integration, but was also a Tamil poet, known as 'Mahakavi Bharathiyar' whose patriotic poems inspired the masses during the Indian freedom struggle. It is a rare feat that he was awarded the title of 'Bharathi' by the king of Ettaya Puram court at the age of just 11. After that he was known as Subramaniam Bharathi. The new style and melody of expressions, simple words, local idioms and songs in the poetry of Mahakavi Bharathiyar took Tamil literature to an altogether different pedestal. He was also a fighter, social reformer and journalist who was also involved in the Indian freedom struggle and took great care of the poor and downtrodden. He considered Swami Vivekananda's disciple Sister Nivedita as his mentor and he turned into an even stronger supporter of women's freedom and empowerment after meeting her. Bharathi, who had a good grasp of several languages, including Tamil, English, French, Sanskrit, Hindi and Telugu, had announced as the editor of Chakravartini, that the goal of the magazine was the empowerment of women. Subramaniam Bharathi died on 11th September 1921.

DATTATREYA BALKRISHNA KALELKAR: AN ARDENT PATRIOT AND EXPONENT OF HINDI LANGUAGE

Born: 1st December 1885, Died: 21st August 1981



Dattatreya Balkrishna Kalelkar, who made a significant contribution to the development and promotion of the Hindi language, was an ardent patriot who travelled all over India and wrote his travelogues in Gujarati, Marathi and Hindi. His travelogues are so precise that the readers feel transported to the location and feel connected. A close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, Dattatreya Balkrishna Kalelkar is popularly known as Kaka Kalelkar. In Kaka Kalelkar, one could find a writer, educationist, journalist, scholar, social reformer and historian. Born on 1st December 1885, Kaka Kalelkar participated in the freedom struggle to free the country from subjugation. As an educationist, he founded the Gujarat Vidyapeeth in Ahmedabad and was also its Vice-Chancellor. Kaka Kalelkar initially used to write in Gujarati and later shifted to Hindi completely. He worked a lot for the uplift of Hindi and along with eminent personalities like Maithili Sharan Gupt, Hazari Prasad Dwivedi and Seth Govinddas played an important role in making Hindi the official language. The result of their efforts was that Hindi, written in Devanagari script, was adopted as the official language of the Republic of India on September 14, 1949. In the 1950s, the first Backward Classes Commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Kaka Kalelkar. However, it had many ups and downs and several decades later in 2017, the 123rd Constitution Amendment Bill was introduced in the Parliament by Narendra Modi's government. In August 2018, the Bill got the assent of the President and finally the National Commission for Backward Classes got constitutional status. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1965. He died on 21st August 1981.

RAJNARAYAN MISHRA: A FEARLESS REVOLUTIONARY WHO EMBRACED GALLOWS AT 24

Born: 26th August 1920, Died: 9th December 1944



Rajnarayan Mishra, who blew the trumpet of revolution, had made life difficult for the British. As a revolutionary, he had vowed not to tolerate British servitude and sacrificed himself for freedom. Annoyed by his revolutionary methods, the British government hanged him at 4 a.m. on December 9, 1944. It is believed that the hanging of Rajnarayan Mishra was the last execution by the British government in India. It is said that when Rajnarayan Mishra was being hanged, he was asked about his last wish. At that time he had expressed two wishes, one that he himself would hang the noose around his neck and secondly that his body should be handed over to his revolutionary comrades. Rajnarayan Mishra was born on 26th August 1920 at Bhikhampur village of Tehsil Mitauli area in Lakhimpur Kheri. Youngest of the five brothers, he tried to drive away the British by collecting arms at the age of only 22. In his bid to loot weapons in 1942, the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur Kheri got killed in firing after which he left the village. After this incident, the British tortured his family a lot. Eventually, he was arrested from the Gandhi Ashram in Meerut in October 1943. He was sentenced to death on 27th June 1944. But he was unmoved. When he was hanged on 9th December 1944 at the age of 24, this great son of Mother Bharati had the slogan of 'Inquilab Zindabad' on his lips.

TOGAN NENGMINJA SANGMA: A WARRIOR OF GARO HILLS

Born: Not Known, Died: 12th December 1872



When the British wanted to capture the Garo Hills in 1872, Togan Nengminja Sangma fought bravely and held them for several days. A great revolutionary warrior of India, he was an inspiration to the Indian freedom fighters who attained martyrdom in the battlefield. He was born in Samanda village near Shillong's Williamnagar. At that time his village was surrounded by dense forests and mountains. After India's first war of independence in 1857, the British were conspiring to capture the entire country and were moving rapidly and this included Meghalaya and Garo Hills as well. But it was not acceptable to patriot Sangma. At that time, he declared: "We won't let the British rule our territory. We will not let our people become their slaves." Soon he started his campaign and formed an army of youths. He exhorted the youths to prepare for sacrifices to protect the motherland. He started visiting villages to campaign against British rule and instilled a sense of patriotism in the minds of the people. However, Sangma and his accomplices had nothing but traditional shields, swords, spears, bows and arrows etc. to take on the rampaging British forces. Despite this, the freedom-crazy Sangma and his comrades attacked the British camp and set it on fire. The British did not have any inkling of such an attack. Later, the British conspired against Sangma and called him for talks. As he arrived at the meeting point, he was gunned down. The freedom fighter of Mother Bharati was martyred but his comrades continued the fight. However, this did not last long and the British captured the entire Garo Hills. Even today the people in the Garo region remember the sacrifices of Togan Nengminja Sangma and observe his death anniversary as 'Swatantra Soldier's Day'. ■