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## Media Messages and the Freedom Struggle of India

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### Abstract

The freedom struggle of India is rich reservoirs of the contributions made by the known and lesser known in a poignant struggle, which marked passion, valor, and a strong resolve in gaining independence. The participation enveloped people from all contexts and regions.

This struggle brought men, women, students, and children together, who got immortalised in the pages of history through their zealous engagements in different movements. The 1942 Quit India Movement, popularly known as the August Kranti had leaders and persons who became part of the struggle in India and abroad. It had brought into its fold, many eminent men and women, who adopted different methods in working towards the attainment of swaraj. In this regard, Subhash Chandra Bose took an initiative, in mobilizing women from all walks of life and age groups. He formed a women's regiment that was led by women, designed solely to take an active part in the forthcoming combat against the British. This method of forming a women's regiment was very unique in our freedom struggle. This women's regiment took an active part in transmitting messages with the help of the radio. The themes on which woman spoke on the radio was related to patriotism and their daily routine as soldiers, training for taking an active part in fighting the British. Radio as assistive technology was been increasingly used by both men and women from inside and outside India. Even though the operators were different, the commonality was the cause they stood for i.e. Swaraj. The present paper would discuss the use of this technology particularly by women of the Rani Jhansi Regiment and the one being operated from within the country.

**Keywords:** Regiment, Soldiers, Radio, Message, Broadcast.

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## **Introduction**

The power to connect all  
The power to disseminate  
The power to stimulate  
The power to arouse patriotism  
The power to weave unity in diversity  
Ah! The radio, the radio, the radio.

The radio broadcast by men and women instilled motivation and patriotism among people from all walks of life for winning swaraj. It was a reflection of passion, courage, and commitment for a dear cause of freeing the country from the colonial yoke. It also reflected that men and women were an integral part of the freedom struggle of India. While it is an acknowledged fact that the strategies and methods followed by leaders were different, but the cherished result that was aspired for, was freedom, nothing short of complete independence. In this struggle, assistive technology in the form of radio was used to spread messages of patriotism and arouse people to fight against discrimination and exploitation of any form. The broadcast was gendered as men and women contributed to the same. The radio was a choice that most of the freedom fighters were comfortable with. Its reach and access covered people from different segments of the society. The use of radio as a source of news and entertainment had an interesting journey. In the year 1920 the first radio set was imported to India and two stations became functional in Bombay and Calcutta focussing more on broadcasting news. The All India Radio (AIR) was established in the 1930's and the news transmitted was controlled. Gradually the number of radio expanded and the number crossed 100,000, particularly with the rise of the under-ground radio stations. Some that were discovered by the police were shut down and its operators were cruelly dealt with. The local radio was so rigorously monitored that each underground broadcast had to be very cautious in its operation.

Thus, radio along with other print media was increasingly mobilised by the freedom fighters in establishing an emotional connection with people from all age groups to come together in winning swaraj. The home and the hearth, especially in the context of women were no longer an impediment in giving vent to their patriotic zeal. The present paper highlights the use of audio as a powerful method in mobilising people of all age groups to win independence.

The freedom struggle of India is a story of the contributions of men and women who were committed to their mission of achieving Independence. They were passionate and confident in their commitment to a cause. A variety of approaches was adopted in pursuing their dream for swaraj. They sought approval of their ideas by expressing them through print and audio technology. In this very context, the radio played a very significant role in disseminating their thoughts very often in the form of messages.



One of the significant movements wherein the radio played a very crucial role was the Quit India Movement of 1942, popularly known as the August Kranti.

## **Women and Radio**

The radio broadcasted messages that were filled with patriotic fervor. Interestingly the radio that was being operated by the freedom fighters was from India and the other was from outside India. The one being operated from India was managed by both men and women. The main eminent woman personality who was associated with it was Usha Mehta. Along with her, the other associates were Vithalbhai Jhaveri, Chandra Kant Jhaveri, Babubhai Thakkar, and Nanka Motwani. The radio transmitted stirring speeches of eminent personalities such as Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyut Rao Patwardhan, Purushottam Trikamdas. It is significant to note that Usha Behn and her associates took care to move the location of the station on a daily basis to avoid detection by the authorities. The station was maintained by donations from trade associations, cotton merchants, grain dealers, and business houses. The other one was, the Azad Hind radio which was part of the German radio service, in its first broadcast the transmitted news and patriotic messages were in English, Gujarati, Marathi, Bengali, Pashto, Tamil, Persian and Telugu. It was managed by men and women. The women who contributed in giving messages were part of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. The message on strategies to be adopted for the attainment of independence was also broadcasted from Singapore. The Azad Hind Radio was first aired on January 7, 1942.

The messages transmitted from both the radio had patriotic elements for motivating people to fight for swaraj. Both the radio ended their broadcast by singing Vande Mataram which became our National Song. Some of the messages that were transmitted by women broadcasting from the Azad radio are mentioned below:

“Brothers and Sisters in India... You have been listening to the voice of your brothers in the Army of liberation for the last so many days. You have heard even some of your sisters from this station. Today I feel proud in having been given an opportunity to tell you some of my innermost feelings regarding the emancipation of our motherland... How well the saying goes, “fortune turns like wheel.” In my school-days, when I first read it, I could not understand it well. But this Malayan war has shown me a practical example of it.”<sup>1</sup>

“... I appeal to my sisters in India not to lag behind their brothers. If in East Asia, thousands of daughters of India can become Rani of Jhansi, lakhs of women in India can become Chand Bibi's. You need only a brave heart and patriotism for your mother country. You may be thinking the military life of ours to be very hard and trouble-some but believe me, it is most interesting.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kumar, Ravindran, The Selected works of Subhas Chandra Bose. pg. 55

<sup>2</sup> Kumar, Ravindran, The Selected works of Subhas Chandra Bose. pg. 56



S.C. Bose Papers, Group I, S. no. 47, Acc. No. 426. National Archives of India



Source- S.C. Bose Papers, Group I, S. no. 47, Acc. No. 426. National Archives of India



Making a mention of the daily routine in the regiment fully operated by women the broad cast added that,” we start our day at 5.00am, when the first gong goes. By 5.50 a.m. every volunteer has tidied her barracks and smartly dressed in khaki shirts and shorts. Then we all attend the flag Hoisting Ceremony which begins with the singing of our Flag Song “ Jhanda uncha rahe hamara” and ends with one minute silence when all our hearts are turned towards our motherland and every volunteer renews her pledge to fight on till victory is won. At 6.30 we start our parade-the first item is the Physical Training which we all take part in, with great enthusiasm , as the exercise we do are building our muscle for the more strenuous work we have to do.... Continuing with the narrative regarding training it was elaborated that... After Physical Training comes Squad Drill and Weapon Training. The afternoons are spent in lectures on military subjects, national and international politics and in studying of Hindustani etc.. Three times a week we sling our rifles on our shoulders and go out for route marches, coming back only after 4 hours. In the night after dinner, we all gather together and in our national song. ---- ... The Azad Hind Fauj is already knocking at the Eastern gate of India. The Rani of Jhansi Regiment is also eagerly awaiting the signal from Netaji when it will jump into the battlefield. This is total war and the total mobilization of men and resource is necessary to fight this war to its victory. How can we stay behind? There is great difference between seeing and hearing. You are present hearing us, but before long you will see the Rani of Jhansi Regiment hoisting the National Flag of Independence on the red fortress of Delhi and holding its victory parade in front of it.<sup>3</sup>

“My brothers and sisters in India! All the arrangements to launch this last struggle for independence are complete. The Azad Hind Fauj is already knocking at the Eastern gate of India. The Rani of Jhansi Regiment is also eagerly awaiting the signal from Netaji when it will jump into the battlefield. This is total war and the total mobilization of men and resources is necessary to fight this war to its victory. How can we stay behind? There is great difference between seeing and hearing. You are at present hearing us, but before long you will see the Rani of Jhansi Regiment hoisting the National Flag of Independence on the red fortress of Delhi and holding is victory parade in front of it.( Baljit Kaur’s, Broadcast to Indians, Y.I. Jan.16,1944)

Another Broadcast was given by Mrs.M.V. Chinnammu, a member of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, which was given in Malayalam. In her broadcast she mentioned that, “In the name of our revered Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, we have opened here a training camp for women volunteers. We are now undergoing military in the camp. When the training is over, we will be on the battlefield along with our other comrades-at-arms under the leadership of our Supreme Commander Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. We give you words that we will fight bravely against the alien oppressors with complete faith in final victory” <sup>4</sup>(Women Volunteers Broadcast, Y.I .January 9, 1944).

<sup>3</sup> Kumar, Ravindran, The Selected works of Subhas Chandra Bose. pg. 56-57

<sup>4</sup> Kumar, Ravindran, The Selected works of Subhas Chandra Bose. pg. 48-49



Source- S.C. Bose Papers, Group I, S. no. 47, Acc. No. 426. Pg No. 176.

Miss Protima Pal in her Broadcast. I. Jan.23, 1944 stated that, “I am an ordinary soldier in the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. Not a doll-soldier, nor a soldier in mere words, but a real soldier in the true sense of the term. I am a soldier in military boots and uniform, armed with modern weapons to kill the enemy of India. Perhaps some may say that whatever soft and beautiful qualities there are in the human mind are expressed in only word-“Woman”. So is it possible for woman to cultivate the hard-hearted qualities of a soldier? But I declared with the deepest conviction, that it is not only a possibility but an accomplished fact in the formation of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment.” She later added- “My sister! as a daughter of India I request you to get rid of all ties and attachment of love and affection and plunge headlong into this struggle for emancipation of our motherland, just as we have done. We must not forget that each of us is a part of the cosmic force. If we go into battle there is no power on earth which can save the British tyrants in India. India’s independence is sure and certain. To do or die”-let this be our motto.”<sup>5</sup>

The broadcast by Ms. Protima Pal can be compared to the clarion call that was given by Mahatma Gandhi at the beginning of the Quit India movement.

Captain S. Lakshmi in one of her address on the occasion of the passing out parade of the first batch of women warriors in Syonan city stated, “I am proud to have been chosen as the leader of this woman’s regiment which is named after that most illustrious heroine, Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi. We will show the British, our enemy, and the world at large that women of India are made

<sup>5</sup> Kumar, Ravindran, *The Selected works of Subhas Chandra Bose*. pg. 61-63



of the same mettle as the men of the Azad Hind Fauj.”<sup>6</sup> The parade was marked by precision, smartness and efficiency. The women soldiers went through physical training, squad drill, signalling, rifle exercises and weapon training with thoroughness of seasoned soldiers and earned rounds of applause from the large gathering present. An impressive march–past with the colour of the Regiment escorted by armed guard, climaxed the proceedings.<sup>7</sup>

The other messages that were broadcasted were by the illegal Congress Radio that was operated in India at different places. The Home Political Files at the National Archives make a mention of wavelength, frequency, time of starting, and the time of ending. Some of the excerpts of messages transmitted from the radio are mentioned below.

“Fight is going on between good and evil. Only that Indians has got a right to be pleased on the victory achieved some thousand years ago who is fighting against injustice. This fight would continue till victory is achieved. The work of the newspaper is to suppress the truth and spread falsehood. You should either not read these newspaper or you should their news are false. .... The Khudai Khidmatgars are carrying on non-violent struggle. They have suffered lath charge and firing.... The government has asked the people to return their arms but Abdul Ghaffar Khan has advised them not to return arms. The towns in Assam, Bihar and Bengal are still very active...”<sup>8</sup>

The police wireless monitoring report dated 27.10.42 was broadcasted by female as well as male. It was gathered from the broad cast that deep appreciation was accorded to the acts of the workers and peasants of Bihar who were bold enough to force open jail at certain places and get realised many prisoners. The announcement also elaborated on many go downs in Bihar and elsewhere were looted by mob and telegraph and telephone and railway communications were also cut off for many days. It was also announced that in many places the people refused to accept the currency notes with the result that the people of those places were in great difficulty..... The message ended with singing of Vande Mataram.<sup>9</sup>

## **Concluding Remarks**

Thus, the radio broadcast played a very significant role in the freedom struggle of India. It was particularly utilized in connecting the leader and the led in the Quit India movement. Interestingly the broadcast, particularly in India was rigorously monitored, but it did not deter the leaders or the messengers. They kept the commons masses aware of the events and happenings across the different regions. The one being operated from outside India i.e. the Azad Hind Radio also played a similar role in transmitting messages included happenings particularly regarding the Rani of Jhansi Regiment and the activities of the Indian National Army. While it played a crucial role in generating awareness amongst the people, we cannot conclude that it was the only method used in mobilising people from all walks of life. There were other ways of bringing people into the foray of the movement such as Prabhat pheris, distribution of leaflets and pamphlets, composing and singing patriotic songs, writing articles in local dailies, propagating the use of khadi, destroying the symbols of power related to the communication, treasury, and administration of law so on. Each

<sup>6</sup> Kumar, Ravindran, The Selected works of Subhas Chandra Bose. pg. 71

<sup>7</sup> Kumar, Ravindran, The Selected works of Subhas Chandra Bose. pg. 71.

<sup>8</sup> File No. 3/44/43-Poll (I), 1943, National Archives, New Delhi.

<sup>9</sup> Police Wireless Monitoring Report, dated 27.10.1942, File No. 3/44/43-Poll (I), 1943, National Archives, New Delhi.



activity engaging children, students, men, and women belonging to all walks of life collectively played a crucial role in making the August Kranti truly a people's movement. In addition to these, there were---- records that contained patriotic songs sung on every significant occasion for making the environment infused with patriotism. Some of the popular ones were Jana Gana Mana, Sare Jahanse Achha, Jawani ki Ret, and Vande Matram.<sup>10</sup>

The enrolment of women in the INA highlights that they were ready to move from their particularistic roles and join a universalistic position that was beyond gender stereotype. Thus they scripted their identity not in relational terms as the wife of but as an individual committed to making their country independent from the colonial power. It is significant to note that the legacy and seeds sown of women participation as soldiers in the INA, has found reflection in present times. In contemporary times, women are now been enrolled in the armed forces in the combat field. In the context of radio, its popularity as a medium of communication continues to exist with greater diversification in the content and the language of communication. Along with other information and communication technologies, it is still a people's radio.

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<sup>10</sup> File No. 3/44/43-Poll (I), 1943, National Archives, New Delhi.