

RUKMANI LAKSHMIPATHI –The First Female

Prisoner of Salt Satyagraha

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ABSTRACT:

The Freedom struggle of India is not a war of rage or a progression under a single leadership with single propaganda. Though some of our national leaders followed extremism for obtaining freedom from British domination, our country is known for obtaining freedom by following Ahimsa. Millions of Indians spilled their blood and sacrificed their lives to protect our mother country from the reign of the British crown. Under a prominent leader of our nation, Mahatma, a major population of India followed the principal of non-violence and actively participated in the Indian independence movement. Among all the Female participants of the Indian Independence struggle from Tamil Nadu, Rukmani Lakshmipathi was pioneer lady who raised from the south to hail the Freedom Spirit of the Indians.

Key Words: *Women freedom fighter – Salt Satyagraha – Prisoner- MLA -Minister-Activist*

INTRODUCTION:

Indian obtains freedom from the British by the Indian Independence Act of 1947 that partitioned The British ruled India into two dominion names India and Pakistan. Behind the announcement of India's Independence by Clement Atlee, Prime Minister of the UK, there was a lot of constant and solid protests were taken place in India to oppose the domination of British rule in our land. The self-less participation of the Indian mob in the struggle for Independence made the British leave the country. All the Martyrs who sacrificed their valuable lives for the country with freedom to live. However, many leaders who led the freedom struggle movements were got forgotten or shaded by the people in the passing time, it's our duty to remember them and it's an honor to rewrite about them. Rukmani Lakshmipathi is one of the prominent freedom fighters of India and she is one of the pioneer women who participated in politics from the British era.

Research Methodology:

This paper is based on a quantitative study that deals with the Primary and Secondary sources which include the books of eminent historians & authors and articles from online and offline sources.

EARLY LIFE & EDUCATION:

Rukmani Lakshmipathi was born to an agriculture family whose grandfather is a landlord in Madurai. She was the Daughter of Huggahalli Srinivasa Rao Choodamani. She was born with silver-spoon on 6th December 1892. She was born in a family with political influence and her guardian was the Dewan of Cochin state. She was graduated from women's Christian College, Madras and she was the one among the first batch of women students school graduated from women's Christian College. There are only forty students were admitted fine the first batch of B.A in women's Christian College, Madras .From the very young age, she was infused with the thoughts of nationalism , social justice , and the national independents movement. While she studying she was participated in various freedom struggle progress and women's rights programs. Like the birds of the same flock , she was deeply inspired & influenced by eminent national leader's such as Mahatma Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu ,and Rajagopalachari.

INTER-CASTE MARRIAGE:

Rukmani was a girl of progressive thoughts from a young age and she set herself as an example to the society on empowerment and equality in many ways that also reflect in her marriage life as well. She married an MMC doctor who later turned his interest in Native Indian medicine named Dr. Achanta Lakshmipathi, who is a widower and also a freedom movement enthusiast. They met in a library which is opposite to his clinic and fell in love with each other. Their marriage gave a shock-wave to the whole Madras presidency because inter-caste marriages were not prominent in that period. She had two sons and four daughters with his husband Lakshmipathi, her first son was passed at a young age due to some health condition. Later, she devoted her life more to the nation than her family.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:

Rukmani Lakshmipathi joined Indian National Congress in 1923 at her 31 age and she had an active role in organizing the Youth League of the INC. However, she entered into social welfare activities way before she joined Congress. In 1911 she participated in the Women's movement and became the secretary of the Bharat StreeMahamandal. In 1917, she joined the Women's India Association (WIA). When she entered active politics in 1923, the first action done by Rukmani was donating all her jewelry to the Harijan Welfare Fund. It is unbelievable for the women of her age even this age to donate all the jewels, who already had four girl children, but she did it heroically. As an Indian representative, Rukmani Lakshmipathi attended the International Women's Suffrage Congress at Paris in 1926. She actively participated in political

activities which are based on the Khadi movement, abolition of Child-Marriage, and Liquor prohibition. She used to wear Khadi and taught others to spin the Spindle and wear Khadi and so she makes a positive impression on others by wearing Khadi. Rukmani Lakshmipathi did not hesitate to confront the British, She vehemently opposed the Simon Commission. In 1929 at an organized meeting in the Madras beach, Rukmani ferociously orate against the commission, and celebrated a hypothetical Independence Day on January 26, 1930, by raising Tricolor in Triplicane, which is the bravest action done by a woman and that brought her into the front line of freedom struggle.

IMPRISONED FOR SALT SATYAGRAHA:

The principle of Satyagraha followed by Gandhi attracted more women into the Indian Freedom Struggle. On the other hand, Gandhiji gave priority to women to participate in Sathyagrahas to achieve their political independence. Under the Civil Disobedient Movement, to oppose the Salt Tax, Gandhi started his march to Dandi on 12 March 1930 for breaking the Salt Law. At that same time, under the leadership of Rajagopalachari, a march to break the Salt Law was conducted in Tamilnadu from Tiruchirappalli to Vedaranyam. Rukmani Lakshmipathi was a selected one among the 100 Sathyagrahis who were chosen for salt Satyagraha in Tamilnadu. They started their march on 13th April followed by Gandhi and reached Vedaranyam on 28th April 1930. Many frontline leaders including Rajagopalachari were arrested for the violation of the Salt Law during the protest, while all the prominent leaders got arrested one by one, Rukmani Lakshmipathi courageously lead the march that reached Vedaranyam. On May 15, 1930, Rukmani Lakshmipathi picked a handful of salt from Vedaranyam and got arrested on the same day for treasons against the British Empire. That made Rukmani Lakshmipathi the first woman to get arrested for the Salt Satyagraha as well as Civil Disobedient Movement throughout India. The Indian Ladies magazine praised her bravery for meeting the Lions inside the cave. She was taken to Vellore prison and imprisoned for one year. In the prison, as a political prisoner, she got the privilege of writing letters to home, among them 30 of those letters were preserved at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

LEGISLATIVE ACHIEVEMENTS:

After facing much more agitation and jailing for Civil Disobedient Movement, she actively participated in politics as a member of the Indian National Congress. In 1934, she was elected to the Madras Legislative Council by winning a by-election. During 1935-36, she was appointed as the Vice president of the Tamilnadu Congress Committee and was elected Municipal Councilor. She presided over the Tamilnadu Provincial Committee held at Karaikudi in 1936. After winning the 1937 election, Rukmani Lakshmipathi became the first women member of the Madras Presidency Legislative Assembly. And then, she became a member of the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress. In 1938, she visited Japan as a Member of the Good Will Mission. She was elected as the Deputy Speaker of the Madras Legislative Assembly and then she held the position of the Deputy Speaker from 1937 to 1945. In January 1941, Gandhiji called on the Individual Satyagraha Movement. Rukmani Lakshmipathi was one of the 21 handpicked Sathyagrahis by Mahatma Gandhi himself to stand

on a bench in an important spot in the town and shout out a slogan that opposed the British government. When she was arrested and submitted to the court where she made a statement: "Let the women in India follow the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and maintain the honor and dignity of the Motherland." Not only she was arrested, but she was also stripped off of her people's representative posts. When Independence was fast approaching, After the World war, Under the Congress Ministry, when T.Prakasam became the Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency in 1946, Rukmani Lakshmipathi served as the Minister of Public Health and she was the First Female Minister of the Madras Presidency from May 1946 to March 1947. She was also served local bodies like corporations of Madras and the Chingelpet District Board. Further, she served as an Honorary Presidency Magistrate at Madras.

DEMISE:

After a long struggle for Independence, Rukmani was chosen to hoist the National flag in the Congress Office at Royapettah to commence Independence Day. In Independence India, Rukmani Lakshmipathi continued to be an MLA till her death on 6th August 1951. On her memory and to honor her service to the nation, a Road in Egmore, Chennai has been renamed after her. In 1997, the Government of India issued a postage stamp in her honor.

CONCLUSION:

After 74 years of Independence, it's our prime duty to honor and remember the prominent leaders who sacrificed a lot for our country. Like Rukmani Lakshmipathi, there are more progressive women who set themselves as an example for future generations by their selfless services to the country as well as the society. Rukmani Lakshmipathi was a great social reformer who worked for the upliftment of women in society. And so, she always remained an active social reformer, an advocate of the extension of the Elementary Education Act, Adult Education, and compulsory Female Education. Without them; we shouldn't be living like this for sure.

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