

**THE UNSUNG HEROES: WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE INDIAN NATIONAL  
ARMY DURING WORLD WAR II**

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**Abstract**

*This paper profiles the participation of women, including student activists, who followed Netaji's lead by participating in the Indian National Army. The Quit India Movement was followed by the INA (Indian National Army) activities of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and the RIN (Royal Indian Navy) mutiny which further weakened the foundation of the British Empire in India. Captain Lakshmi Sehgal of Madras was an associate and Commander of the INA's Rani Jhansi Regiment. During this period, women extended the discipline and sacrifice of their homes to the nation as a whole. Women in the early 1940s seem to have wanted to prove Gandhi right.*

**Keywords:** *Indian National Army- Indian Independence- Netaji Subash Chandra Bose- Rani of Jhansi Regiment- Azad Hind Government.*

**Introduction**

The Indian National Army was an armed force formed by Indian Nationalists in 1942 in Southeast Asia during World War II. Its aim was to secure Indian Independence from British Rule. It formed an alliance with imperial Japan. The army was first formed in 1942 under Mohan Singh by Indian Prisoners of war of the British Indian Army captured by Japan in the Malayan Campaign and at Singapore. This first Indian National Army collapsed and was disbanded in December 1942 due to differences between the Indian National Army leadership and the Japanese Military over its role in Japan's war in Asia. It was revived under the leadership of Subash Chandra Bose after his arrival of Southeast Asia in 1943.

**Formation of Indian National Army**

The role of Tamil Nadu in Indian Independence is significant in Indian history. In this science the role of Tamil Nadu in the Indian National Army is explored. Formation of the Indian National Army Subash Chandra Bose was born on 23 January 1897 in Cuttack, Orissa. Bose passed the Indian Civil Service examination for Indian government service and joined the Non-Cooperation Movement launched under Gandhi in 1921, deciding that it was better to fight for foreign domination than to

cooperate with British imperialism out of government service. After a disagreement with the leaders at the conference, he left the party and formed the Forward Bloc Party, which was arrested by the British government for overseeing his activities done and imprisoned. When Bose was placed under house arrest in 1941, Peshawar escaped, occupied Germany, and sought Hitler's help. Phone was allowed to set up and operate the Independent India Center in Germany. Not only that, he continued to broadcast his plans to India through Azad Tahit Radio. Japan defeated the Allied forces in the Far East during World War II, astonishing the world.

Rashpikari Bose, an Indian revolutionary extremist who lived in Japan and was responsible for the formation of the Indian National Army organized the Indian Independence League in Tokyo and at the Hong Kong Conference under his leadership decided to form the Indian National Army with Mohan Singh as Commander. According to the resolution, the Indian National army was launched in 1942 at Barre Park in Singapore with 40,000 Indian wars under Japanese control. Last Netaji Subash Chandra Bose was given a special welcome in 1943. The Indian National Army, led by Netaji Subash Chandra Bose, assumed command of the Indian National Army and began to function with renewed vigor. "They fought for the liberation of the country without looking". Tens of thousands of young men between the ages of 18 and 25 were enlisted in the Indian National Army. Netaji Subash Chandra Bose's heroic speeches inspired him to act with enthusiasm and vigor. Janshirani formed a battalion for women in 1943. Its commander is Dr. from Chennai. Lakshmi Swaminathan was appointed. Under his leadership a large number of women joined the Indian National Army. Apart from these he formed a division called Balasena for boys and girls. 16-years-olds were included. They undertook the task of carrying the message from one place to another. Thus Netaji Subash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army persuaded a diverse population to join the war of independence. Freedom fighters of Tamil Nadu spontaneously and actively participated in Indian National Army of Subash Chandra Bose. The total number of Indian National Army freedom fighters of Tamil Nadu is 4236 included women participated in 32.

### **Lakshmi Swaminathan**

Lakshmi Swaminathan was born on (24 October 1914- 23 July 2012 in Madras) was a revolutionary of the Indian Independence movement, an officer of the Indian National Army, and the Minister of Women's Affairs in the Azad Hind Government. Lakshimi is commonly referred to in India as Captain Lakshmi, a reference to her rank when taken prisoner in Burma during the Second World War. When she heard that Bose was recruiting women soldiers as well, she gave her name. She was ordered to from a female regiment called Rani of Jhansi Regiment, where she got the rank of captain. In 1940, she stay at Singapore, she met some members of Subash Chandra Bose's Indian

National Army. In 1942, during surrender of Singapore by the British to the Japanese, Lakshmi aided wounded prisoners of war, many of whom were interested in forming an Indian independence army. Singapore at this time had several nationalist Indians working there including K.P.Kesava Menon, S.C. Guha and N. Raghavan, who formed a council of Action. Their Indian National Army, or Azad Hind Fauj, however, received no firm commitments or approval from the occupying Japanese forces regarding their participation in the war. It was against this backdrop that Subash Chandra Bose arrived in Singapore on 2 July 1943. Lakshmi had heard that Bose was keen to draft women into the organization and requested a meeting with him from which she emerged with a mandate to set up a women's regiment, to be called the Rani of Jhansi regiment. Women responded enthusiastically to join the all-women brigade and Dr. Lakshmi Swaminathan became Captain Lakshmi, a name and identity that would stay with her for life. The Indian National Army marched to Burma with the Japanese army in December 1944, but by March 1945, with the tide of war turning against them, the Indian National Army leadership decided to beat a retreat before they could enter Imphal. Captain Lakshmi was arrested by the British army in May 1945, remaining in Burma until March 1946, when she was sent to India- at a time when the Indian National Army trials in Delhi heightened popular discontent with and hastened the end of colonial rule.

### **Puan Sri Datin Janaki Thevar**

Puan Sri Datin Janaki Thevar was born on (25 February 1925-9 May 2014). Janaki Thevar when she was young and just joined the Indian National Army. Puan Sri Datin Janaki Athi Nahappan, also known as Janaki Thevar, is founder member of the Malaysian Indian Congress and one of the earliest women involved in the fight for Malaysian (than Malaya) independence. Janaki Thevar was only 18 when she heard Subashh Chandra Bose's appeal to give whatever they could for their fight for India's Independence. Immediately she took off her gold earrings and donated them. Janaki Athi Nahappan was determined to join the Indian National Army. There was strong family objection especially from her father. But after much persuasion, her father finally agreed. Janaki Athi Nahappan is among the first Indian women to join the Indian National Army organised during the Japanese occupation of Malaysia to liberate India. Having been brought up in a well-to-do family, she initially could not adapt to the rigors of army life. On her first day, the food served made her city.

However, she gradually got used to military life and her career in the Regiment took off when she ranked first in the officer's examinations. She became Second in Command of the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, which was the women's wing of the Indian Army. She later came to be the author of the book on the unit. After World War II she emerged as a welfare activist. Janaki found the Indian National Congress's fight for Indian independence inspiring and joined the Indian Congress Medical

Mission in then Malaya. Through her involvement with the mission, she visited rubber estates throughout the country and learned much about the plight of the Indian community in early Malaya. This experience made her aware of the need for some political organization within the Indian population in Malaya. In 1946, Janaki helped John Thivy to establish the Malayan Indian Congress, which was modelled after the Indian National Congress. The party saw Thivy as its first president. Later in life, she became a distinguished senator in the Dewan Negara of the Malaysian Parliament.

“We may be the softer and fairer sex but surely I protest against the word ‘weaker’. All sorts of epithets have been given to us by man to guard his own selfish interests. It is time we shattered these chains of men along with the chain of Indian slavery”- Janaki Thevar. Wrote 17- year-old Janaki in a Malayan Newspaper, giving voice to these aspirations.

**DETAILS OF INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN LIST IN  
TAMIL NADU**

S.NO	NAME	NATIVE PLACE	WORK	ARMY SECTION
1	Abirami	Cikkal	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
2	Angammal	Madurai	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
3	Chinnammal	Chennai	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
4	Chinammal	Thirupuvanam	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
5	Devaki	Vallam	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
6	Govindammal	Erumaipatti	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
7	Guruvammal	Guruthamadam	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
8	Helian	Thiruvallikeni	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
9	Jeyalakshmi	Chennai	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
10	Kalimuthammal	Karathal	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
11	Kamatchi	Kandithampettai	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
12	Kaveriammal	Gurugampatti	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
13	Krishnaveni	Vizhupallam	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
14	Lakshmi Devi	Allivalam	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
15	Mangalammal	Pathalakudi	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
16	Maragathm	Pudhuthirupuvanam	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
17	Madhuram	Angarakadampanur	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
18	Muthammal	Madurai	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
19	Nagammal	Kandaramanickam	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
20	Pazhaniyi Ammal	Pidaranpatti	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
21	Parvati	Kudavasal	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
22	Pattammal. M	Rayapuram	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
23	Pattammal. P	Cuddalore	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
24	Pattammal. R	Paingakadu	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
25	Radhammal	Red hells	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
26	Rukumani	Chennai	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
27	SarasvathiAmmal	Madurai	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
28	Subaranjitham	Chennai	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
29	Thanapakkiyam	Orathanadu	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
30	Valli	Moovanallur	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
31	Vijayam	Arupukottai	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment
32	Vellaiyammal	Viyasarpadi	Sepoy	Rani Jhansi Regiment

**Sources:** H.K.Ghazi, Who's Who of Freedom Fighters of Tamil Nadu, Vol.III, Madras, Govt of Tamil Nadu, 1973.

**Conclusion**

The present study had presented the role of women in the Indian National Army including student's activists, who followed Netaji's lead by participating in this movement. Captain Lakshmi Sehgal of Madras was an associate and Commander of the INA's Rani Jhansi regiment. During this period, women extended the discipline and sacrifice of their homes to the nation as a whole. Women in the early 1940s seem to have wanted to prove Gandhi right.

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