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Time to know about another Unsung Freedom Fighter – USHA MEHTA.

Usha grew up highly influenced by Gandhi and became one of his followers. She made an early decision to remain celibate for life and took up a Spartan lifestyle, wearing only Khadi clothes and keeping away from



luxuries of all types.

Born on March 25, 1920, in Saras, near Surat, Usha was just eight years old when she took part in her first protest. It was against Simon Commission and "The first slogan I shouted against the British was 'Simon Go Back'," she said in an interview in

Naveen Joshi's book, Freedom Fighters Remembered.

She took part in all sorts of civil disobedience campaigns - from picketing and protests to spinning cotton as a way of rejecting British imports.

"There was no need for any inspiration. The whole atmosphere was so charged that

no-one was left untouched," she once said in an interview.

In 1933, after her father retired as a judge, the family moved to Bombay, now Mumbai.

Usha also resumed her education while in Bombay. In 1939, she graduated in philosophy with a first-class degree and began to study law



Meanwhile on 09th August 1942, the call for QUIT INDIA was made...

Usha Mehta told her father that her education would have to wait and left her home to contribute to the freedom movement. She disappeared for nearly a fortnight, and when she resurfaced, she had helped set up an

underground radio station.

It seemed that the British had succeeded in silencing the Quit India movement, with more than 100,000 protestors being arrested with the prominent leaders jailed or in hiding.

Amidst this gloom, the words "This is the Congress radio calling on



[a wavelength of] 42.34 meters from somewhere in India,” uttered by Usha Mehta echoed throughout the country. Usha had resurfaced with this secret radio station. Along with her associates, Vithalbhai Jhaveri, Chandrakant Jhaveri, Babubhai Thakkar and Nanka Motwani, (the owner

of Chicago Radio, and the person who supplied equipment and provided technicians), the radio broadcast messages from prominent leaders of Congress.

There were stirring speeches from Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, Achyutrao Patwardhan and Purushottam Trikamdass etc..

When the movement was

being choked by the atrocities of the British and the vernacular press was censored yet again, the sound waves from this underground station united the people, gave them hope and strength, and urged them to continue the protest

On 12 November, Mehta recalled in an interview,

that police raided Babubhai Khakkhar's office while she was also in the building.

She said she took the broadcast material she had, and rushed to the recording studio, which was elsewhere. Two of her colleagues were busy preparing a program for that evening.

With the help of

one of Printer's assistants, Mehta said they set up a new transmitter for a final broadcast.

"We played Hindustan Hamara, then we relayed some news bulletins and a speech. Just when we were at the end of the program, playing 'Vande Mataram', we heard hard knocks on the door."

She said authorities broke open the door to enter.

"They ordered us to stop playing 'Vande Mataram'. We did not oblige them."

The British sentenced her for four years in jail and Usha was released in April 1946.

She completed her PhD from the University of Bombay, where her

dissertation was about the political and social thought of Mahatma Gandhi. She went on to teach at the Department of Civics and Politics at the University, finally retiring in 1980.

With time, Usha grew increasingly unhappy with the developments taking place in the social,

political, and economic spheres of independent India. Once, in an interview to India Today, she expressed her feelings in these words: "Certainly this is not the freedom we fought for." Usha grew disillusioned by the growing corruption in the country. "Did our great leaders



sacrifice their lives for this kind of India?"

She added that the freedom fighters of her generation felt that "once people were ensconced in positions of power, the rot would set in." However, in her words, "we didn't know the rot would sink in so soon." Nevertheless, she did

not deny the achievements of free India since the independence: "India has survived as a democracy and even built a good industrial base," she said. "Still, it is not the India of our dreams".

She was conferred the Padma Vibhushan, in 1998.

In August 2000, although she was

suffering from fever, Usha participated like she did every year in the anniversary celebrations related to the Quit India Movement in August Kranti Maidan. She returned home weak and exhausted.

Two days later, she joined the abode of Maa Bharati on 11 August 2000 at the age of 80.

#VANDEMATARAM

