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Comparative Analysis of Two Unsung Warriors: Velu Nachiyar And Bhikaji Cama

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Abstract

Velu Nachiyar and Bhikaji Cama were two incredible yet unsung warriors of India who fought against colonial rule. In spite of belonging to different time periods, they shared a common objective to challenge the British Empire. This paper highlights comparative analysis of their contributions, challenges and long lasting impact on the nation's freedom movement.

Keywords

Velu Nachiyar, Bhikaji Cama, Unsung Warriors, Women Revolutionaries, Guerrilla Warfare, Political Diplomacy, British Colonial Rule, Indian Freedom Struggle, etc.

Introduction

History of India was shaped by numerous revolutionaries, many of whom remain obscured in mainstream historical chronicles. Velu Nachiyar and Bhikaji Cama were among them who protrude as two commanding yet unsung warriors who fought against the British colonial rule in their own methods. In the 18th century, the queen of Sivagangai, Velu Nachiyar was recognised as the first Indian lady to execute war against the colonial rule using armed resistance. Whereas, in the 19th-20th century, Bhikaji Cama played a vital role in globalising the freedom struggle movement of India through her political and diplomatic activities.

Although their time, methods and approaches were different, yet they exhibited outstanding zeal and persistence in their tussle against British despotism. While Velu Nachiyar led her army and used guerrilla tactics to retrieve her kingdom, Bhikaji Cama circulated nationalist movement and mobilized international support for country's Independence. Nonetheless, due to limited documentation, their efforts and struggles persist unnoticeable compared to other recognised freedom fighters.

This paper aims-

- To analyse the historical roles of Velu Nachiyar and Bhikaji Cama in India's Independence movement.
- To compare their contributions and struggle as women leaders.
- To explore the reasons behind their less recognition in mainstream historical narratives.

- **VELU NACHIYAR^{1,2}**

Veeramangai (a Tamil word- means 'a brave woman') Queen Velu Nachiyar was born on 3rd Jan 1730 AD at Ramanathapuram in Tamil Nadu, and the only daughter of King Chellamuthu Vijayaragupatha Sethupathy and Queen Sakkandhai Muththaththal of the Ramnad Kingdom. She was trained in the skills of using weapons and martial arts, such as Valari, Silambam (fighting using sticks), horse riding, and archery. She was multilingual and had learned from Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Urdu, English, and French. Thus, this brave princess received excellent training in all war techniques. She married the King of Sivagangai (also known as Sivaganga) at the age of sixteen, with whom she had a daughter named Vellacci.

After the British soldiers and the son of nawab of Arcot conquered Sivaganga and killed her husband, Muthuvaduganathaperiyar Udaiyathevar, in 1772 AD, she escaped with her daughter and lived at Virupachi near Dindigul for eight years under the protection of Palayakaarar Kopaala Naayakkar, and built her army and got support of Gopala Nayaker and Hyder Ali as well as the Marudhu Brothers to wage war against the EIC and regained her Kingdom in 1780, and ruled the ten years. She is also credited as the first person to apply the human bomb through a dedicated woman warrior and adopted daughter of her, named "Kuyili" who in the battle, upon finding the ammunition depot, dousing herself with inflammable oil, walked into the arsenal and lit herself. When the whole place was ablaze, the British army got a humiliating defeat and left the place for good and never turned back.

As a forerunner of secularism and following the restoration of her Kingdom, Nachiyar expressed her deep gratitude for the support provided by Sultan Hyder Ali by constructing a mosque at Sarangani. The Sultan conveyed his true friendship by building a temple inside his palace.

As the Tamil Queen, Nachiyar breathed her last on Dec 25, 1796, AD, played a vital role in the native resistance against the British in the last quarter of the Eighty-five years earlier than "Jhansi ki Rani" Lakshmibai (1828-58 AD) in India. Hence, she was the first woman freedom fighter in Indian History. Nation paid tributes by issuing a commemorative postage stamp on Dec 31, 2008, AD to that "Ranbhumi ki Naika."

- **BHIKAJI CAMA^{3,4}**

Madam Cama aka Bhikaji Cama, a legendary figure who first hoisted India's flag on foreign land, was born on 24th Sept. 1861 AD, at Navsari in Bombay Presidency (British India) in a large, affluent Parsi Zoroastrian family. Her parents, Sorabji Framji Patel and Jaijibai Sorabji Patel, were well off in the city of Bombay (now Mumbai), where her father Sorabji Patel was a lawyer by training and a famous merchant by profession. Bhikaji attended the Alexandra Native Girls' English Institution, a school built in 1863 AD by Manochjee Cursetjee Shroff (1808-87 AD), a reformer and outspoken champion of women's education.

At the age of 24, on 3rd Aug. 1885 AD, she married Rustom Cama, a wealthy, pro-British lawyer and son of the famed KR. Cama (Kharshedji Rustji Cama), and aspired to enter politics. Madam Cama's relationship was strained by her husband because of opposing views regarding the British Raj. Her husband adored the British and saw their 'Raj' (Rule) as beneficial to Indians, whereas Bhikaji believed that the British had ruthlessly exploited India for their own gains. Therefore, the marriage was not harmonious, and Madam Cama became more involved in nationalist efforts.

In September 1896, a famine followed by a bubonic plague broke out in Bombay. While helping to save plague victims, she caught that plague herself and survived only to be so weakened that, in 1902 AD, she was advised to move for recuperation to London. She met well-known Indian nationalists such as Dadabhai Naoroji [the founder of the Indian National Congress (INC) and the first Indian to be a British member of parliament],

Shyamji Kishna Varma (S.K. Varma) and Lala Har Dayal. As a secretary, in February 1905, she helped the Indian Home Rule Society. She also attended several meetings at London's Hyde Park.

When she thought about her return to India, she received a message from the British that her return would only be prohibited if she declared to end all nationalistic activities. However, she refused to do so and decided to remain in foreign soil. Even when banned from India and Britain, she published, wrote, and distributed revolutionary literature to spread vigilance about the Indian Independence struggle. In 1907 AD, she participated and unfurled the flag, which was co-designed by S.K. Varma and herself at the meeting of International Socialist Parties in Stuttgart (Germany). Here, her tri-colored flag represents the eight provinces and the Hindu and Muslim faiths within India. She was also an advocate of gender equality and women's rights. She travelled a lot to spread her ideas all over the world.

After World War-1 (1914-19), she petitioned the British government to return to India and agreed to stop all her revolutionary activities. In November 1935 AD, at 74, she finally returned to India but breathed her last on 13th Aug. 1936 AD, and left her assets to the Avabai Petit Orphanage for girls.

This "Mother of the Revolution" (called by Indians), on 26th of Jan. 1962 AD means on the 11th Republic Day of India, the Indian Posts and Telegraphs Department issued a commemorative stamp in her honour.

Comparative Analysis of Their Contributions

	Velu Nachiyar	Bhikaji Cama
Mode of Resistance	She used the Armed resistance and military leadership modes.	She preferred political, diplomatic and revolutionary activities.
Strategies and Methods	She introduced the Guerrilla Warfare and alliances with Indian Emperors for direct combat to colonial rulers.	She introduced the political advocacy, propaganda and international diplomacy to dethrone the British rule.
Impact on Freedom Struggle	She became the inspiration for later armed revolts especially for women leaders.	She strengthened the nationalist agitation among Indian especially in foreign.

Challenges Faced By Both Warriors

Velu Nachiyar and Bhikaji Cama faced several challenges such as their own colonial suppression, social norms and limited recognition in their own respective time spans.

- **Social Stigma**

- Velu Nachiyar, as a widow, fought against the British and their allies for reclaiming her throne. In male-dominated society, she convinced male warriors and local rulers to support her military campaigns.
- Bhikaji Cama not only did revolutionary activities for India's freedom but she had also fought against the societal expectations that cramped the women existence to domestic roles.

● **Suppression from British Authorities**

- The Britishers actively trying to suppressing Velu Nachiyar, and forcing her into exile, but she staunchly with her determination even getting the constant threats to her life and empire.
- Similarly, the British were monitoring, restraining and blocking Bhikaji Cama's Movements. Even exiled from India, she continued her revolutionary activities constantly in abroad as well.

Conclusion And Future Implications

In a nutshell, we can state that the legendary personalities, Velu Nachiyar and Bhikaji Cama, reflected the multifarious perspective of India's independence movement. Operating in different time periods and using diverse ways, both ladies played immense roles in outdaring British rule. Still they are not as widely recognised as figures like Sardar Patel, Mahatma Gandhi, Rani Lakshmi Bai, Mangal Pandey, or Annie Besant.

● **Future Implications**

- Spread the awareness about their (i.e. Velu Nachiyar and Bhikaji Cama's) in school curricula, history and social studies textbooks.
- There's a growing demand for historical revisionism that delves different voices.
- Empower modern women's participation in leadership roles by introducing these warrior women's aspiring stories.

By reconsidering the contributions of Velu Nachiyar and Bhikaji Cama, we honor their sacrifices and also inspire future generations or ages especially to women to be steadfast for themselves and fight for justice, liberty, equity and national integrity.

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