



Research Paper

## Role of Vijaylakshmi Pandit in Freedom Struggle

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*If the Women of India arose, no one could stop the country's march to freedom"<sup>1</sup>*

- M.K. Gandhi

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Cheiro, the internationally known palmist, has declared in his book, *The World Predictions*, no doubt with some sense of justification that the freedom of India will be won by the women of India.<sup>2</sup>

Vijay Lakshmi Pandit is one of the most dynamic personalities in India. She has enlivened the political atmosphere of our country with her feminine charms, deep thinking, and clear understanding of the social and political problems of India. Her successful career as a minister in the United Provinces of India was a wonder, her victorious tour as an unofficial ambassador to the United States of America was a miracle. If Gandhiji has an Inner Voice, Vijaya Lakshmi seems to possess an Inner Power. Off and on, inside and outside the British Jails, she has called upon hidden springs to sustain her in the darkest days of life.<sup>3</sup>

Vijaylakshmi Pandit who suffered privations and hardships in the struggle for freedom, was born on August 18, 1900 and she gives the name Swarup Kumari (Beautiful Princess). She is the great daughter of a very great father Pandit Moti Lal Nehru, a leading lawyer of Allahabad, who became one of the prominent national leaders. Both her father and mother Swaroop Rani Nehru were ardent supporters of the national cause. In fact it would be right to say that the young and old in this family held the cause of the country dear to their heart. Her father said that patriotism was in the blood of his daughters.<sup>4</sup>

Vijaylakshmi had her education at home. At the age of fifteen she, for the first time, attended the Congress session at Bombay in the company of her parents. She witnessed her father presiding over the Congress Session of 1919 at Amritsar.<sup>5</sup>

Vijaylakshmi's political interests were further accentuated when she was married to Ranjit Pandit, Bar at Law, on May 9, 1921. At that time she changed her name to Vijaylakshmi Pandit. He was one of the followers of Gandhiji. She attended the Congress of 1929 at Lahore which was presided over by her brother Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru. She was a witness to the passing of a resolution whereby the goal of the Congress was changed from Dominion Status to complete Independence.<sup>6</sup>

Vijaylakshmi took active part in the civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 and 1931-32. She delivered lectures, and led processions. "The Abhyudaya", dated 6th November, 1930, reports on an address by Smt. Vijaylakshmi Pandit to the women of Prayag. She says, "your sons, your husbands and your fathers are in jails... Like faithful wives, come out and go to jails.. you are made of wax... we should not fear lathis."<sup>7</sup> A notice was served on her prohibiting her from taking any part in the movement. Unaffected by the threat she continued her activities. She was arrested on January 27, 1932 and was sentenced to one year's imprisonment. She was elected to the Allahabad Municipal Committee in 1935 and was elected the same year as chairman of the Education Committee.<sup>8</sup> She also served as vice President of the Women's League for peace and freedom.

Vijaylakshmi Pandit contested elections in 1936 from Kanpur.<sup>9</sup> She was elected and appointed Minister for Local Self Government in the Uttar Pradesh Cabinet, on July 29, 1937.<sup>10</sup> As a minister Vijaylakshmi took keen interest in the health and educational services and tried her best to make these facilities available to the wider public.

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In 1940, Gandhiji started individual Satyagraha and allowed only a chosen band of workers to participate in it. Vijaylakshmi was one such privileged person. She was arrested, but was released after four months imprisonment.<sup>11</sup>

When the Congress launched Quit India Movement. Vijaylakshmi became active and went about kindling the fire of freedom in the hearts of thousands of people in 1942.<sup>12</sup> She was released in 1943. She went to America and addressed a number of meetings upholding the cause of her country. She addressed a meeting at New York on a January 1945 and thus : whatever differences may exist between the various races of India, they cannot be ironed out so long as the British dominate the country.<sup>13</sup> She condemned fascism and upheld the ideals of democracy. She criticised the British Government for its failure to tackle the outbreak of famine in Bengal. She courageously criticised President Roosevelt for not supporting India in her national struggle. Her speeches were widely reported in England. Amery described her statement that "India was a vast concentration camp" as fantastic. She challenged Amery to disprove it. She also exhorted the English to lay down white man's burden which they had borne long enough.<sup>14</sup>

Tragedy struck her with the death of her husband after his last imprisonment in 1944. As he had left no will, she was left virtually penniless, as Hindu widows had no inheritance rights. His brother claimed all his investments and earnings and made everything in his custody.

Lakshmi Means Goddess of Gold, the name is completely applicable to Mrs. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit. She was not only born with a golden spoon in her mouth but she also dished out gold to others. She took active part in Indian freedom struggle and also in national and international politics. She was imprisoned by the Britishers on three different occasions in 1932-1933, 1940 and 1942-43. After independence, she was the first Indian woman to be elected as President of the United Nations Assembly in the year 1953. She has the honour of being the first woman to represent her country in two important world capitals – Moscow and Washington. She was also India's High Commissioner in London, and Indian Ambassador to Ireland and Spain. Vijaylakshmi Pandit who was a great freedom fighter and political leader passed away on 1 December, 1990. During her life, she actively participated in India freedom struggle and politics also. She kindled the fire of freedom in the hearts of thousands of people.

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