

Bhikaiji Cama

Bhikaiji Rustom Cama was a prominent figure in the Indian Independence Struggle. She is famous for hosting the precursor to the Indian National Flag on foreign soil.

For this act, she came to be known as the 'Mother of the Indian Revolution'.

This article will give details about Madam Bhikaiji Cama (also spelt Bhikaji Cama) within the context of the Civil Services Examination.

Background of Bhikaiji Cama

Bhikaiji Cama was born on September 24, 1861, to Sorabji Framji Patel and his wife Jaijibai Sorabai Patel. Her father was a merchant by profession though he had been trained in law as well as being an influential member of the Parsi community.

She attended the Alexandra Girl's English Institution and by all accounts was a diligent student. On 3 August 1885, she married Rustom Cama. Her husband was a pro-British Lawyer who aspired to enter politics one day. Bhikaiji Cama at this point spent most of her time in Philanthropic and social work.

Role in the Freedom Struggle

During her visit to London, Bhikaiji Cama came into contact with Shyamji Krishna Varma, Indian nationalist known for his speeches he gave in Hyde Park. She met Dadabhai Naoroji. The president of the British committee of the Indian National Congress (founded on December 28, 1885).

Bhikaiji Cama relocated to Paris, where—together with S. R. Rana and Munchers Shah Burjorji Godrej—she co-founded the Paris Indian Society. Together with other notable members of the movement for Indian sovereignty living in exile, Cama wrote, published and distributed revolutionary literature for the movement, including *Bande Mataram*, which was in response to the colonial ban on *Vande Mataram*. Her works were smuggled into India through the French colony in Pondicherry.

During the second Specialist Congress at Stuttgart, Germany on 22 August 1907, she described the devastating effects of British Colonialism and how it had caused devastating famine bringing the economy of India to ruin. In her appeal for human rights, equality and for autonomy from Great Britain, she unfurled what she called the "Flag of Indian Independence". Her flag, a modification of the *Calcutta Flag*, was co-designed by Cama, and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, and would later serve as one of the templates from which the current national flag of India was created.

Following the assassination of William Hutt Curzon Wyllie in 1909, the authorities in London began cracking down on Indian nationalists living there. Bhikaji Cama was in Paris at the time and the British did request her to be extradited by the French but they refused. Vladimir Lenin reportedly invited her to reside in the Soviet Union years later but she declined.

France and Britain became allies when World War I broke out in 1914 and all members of the Paris India Society except for Cama and Singh Rewabhai Rana left the country. She took residence with Rana's wife in Bordeaux. Rana was arrested briefly while trying to incite British Indian troops on their way to the front. In January 1915, Rana and his family were exiled to the Caribbean island of Martinique while Bhikaiji Cama was sent to Vichy in Southern France. She was allowed to return to Bordeaux on account of her failing health and on the condition she reports weekly to the Police Station.

Cama remained in exile in Europe until 1935, when, gravely ill and paralysed by a stroke that she had suffered earlier that year, she petitioned the British government through Sir Cowasji Jehangir to be allowed to return home. Writing from Paris on 24 June 1935, she acceded to the requirement that she renounce her activities. Accompanied by Jehangir, she arrived in Bombay in November 1935 and died nine months later, aged 74, at Parsi General Hospital on 13 August 1936.

Legacy of Bhikaiji Cama

Bhikaji Cama has the distinction of being first Indian to unfurl a precursor of the Indian National Flag. The flag which had designed originally would be a blueprint upon which other variants of the Indian national flag would be based on. Along with being an ardent independence activist, she was also an advocate for woman's rights and the universal suffrage.

Several Indian cities have streets and places named after Bhikaiji Cama, or Madame Cama as she is also known. On 26 January 1962, India's 11th Republic Day, the Indian Posts and Telegraphs Department issued a commemorative stamp in her honour.

In 1997, the Indian Coast Guard commissioned a Priyadarshini-class fast patrol vessel ICGS Bikhaiji Cama after Bikhaiji Cama.

Following Cama's 1907 Stuttgart address, the flag she raised there was smuggled into British India by Indulal Yagnik and is now on display at the Maratha and Kesari Library in Pune.

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