

Captain Lakshmi Sehgal

Lakshmi Sehgal was an activist of the Indian independence struggle and an officer of the Indian National Army (INA). She is remembered as Captain Lakshmi in reference to the rank she held in the INA

This article will give details about Captain Lakshmi Sehgal within the context of the IAS Exam

The early life of Lakshmi Sehgal

Lakshmi Sehgal was born as Lakshmi Swaminathan in the Pattambi district of Kerala on 24 October 1914. She was the daughter of S. Swaminathan, a lawyer and A.V. Ammukutty, also known as Ammu Swaminathan, a social worker and Indian Independence activist.

Lakshmi studied at Queen Mary's College and received her MBBS degree from Madras Christian college in 1938. For a time she worked as a doctor in the Government Kasturba Gandhi hospital at Chennai. When he left for Singapore in 1940 she came in contact with some members of the Subash Chandra Bose's Azad Hind Fauz

Lakshmi Sehgal's role in the Indian Army

When Singapore fell to the Imperial Japanese Army in 1942, Dr Lakshmi was aiding wounded prisoners of war many of whom were interested in forming an Indian independence army. Using the backdrop of World War II they could enlist Japanese support in overthrowing British colonial rule in India. A Council of Action was formed in this regard consisting of Indian nationalists were formed but no approvals were given from the Japanese forces were forthcoming

Things changed when Subhas Chandra Bose arrived in Singapore on July 2 1943. Lakshmi came to know that Bose was intending to draft women into the Azad Hind Fauz and requested a meeting with him. The result was mandated to set up a women's regiment named Rani of Jhansi regiment. It was accepted and upon the formation of the regiment, Dr Lakshmi Swaminathan became Captain Lakshmi, an identity that would stay with her for the rest of her life.

On 8 July 1943, Captain Lakshmi had started recruiting other women into the INA. Soon a regiment of 1500 women trained as soldiers was ready. In the Provisional Government of Azad Hind formed by Subhas Chandra Bose, Sehgal was appointed as a minister and handed over the portfolio of Women's Affairs and Rani of Jhansi Regiment.

The INA marched to Burma with the Japanese army during operation U-go in December 1944. But following the disastrous battle of Imphal, they were forced to retreat from northeast India. Captain Lakshmi was captured by the British Army in Burma in May 1945 and remained there

until March 1946, when she was sent to India to stand trial. The trials in Delhi (known as the Red Fort Trials) were a crucial turning point in the Indian Independence Struggle as it brought a new wave of nationalism and popular discontent, hastening the end of British colonialism in India.

Later Years of Lakshmi Sehgal

Captain Lakshmi married Prem Kumar Sahgal in March 1947 in Lahore. After their marriage, they settled in Kanpur, where she continued with her medical practice and aided the refugees who were arriving in large numbers following the Partition of India. They had two daughters: Subhashini Ali and Anisa Puri.

In 1971 Lakshmi Sahgal joined the Communist Party of India and represented the party in the Rajya Sabha. She organised medical aid and relief camps to help refugees during the Bangladesh crisis. She was also one of the founding members of All India Democratic Women's Association in 1981 and led many of its activities and campaign. She ran a small clinic in Kanpur was still seeing patients regularly by 2006, aged 92.

In 1998, Sahgal was awarded the Padma Vibhushan by President K. R. Narayanan.

She fought the presidential elections in 2002, being the sole opponent of A.P.J Abdul Kalam (Born on 15 October 1931) who emerged victorious.

On 19 July 2012, Sahgal suffered a cardiac arrest and died on 23 July 2012 at the age of 97 at Kanpur.

To this day she is still revered in India as a freedom fighter and the champion of woman's rights who made a significant contribution to Indian society.