

# Rajkumari Amrit Kaur

Rajkumari Bibiji Amrit Kaur Ahluwalia was an activist in the Indian freedom struggle who became the nation's first Health Minister following independence.

She is widely remembered for the reforms brought about during her tenure as well as her advocacy for women's rights.

This article will give details about Rajkumari Amrit Kaur within the context of the IAS Exams.

## The early life of Amrit Kaur

Amrit Kaur was born on 2 February 1887 in Lucknow to Raja 'Sir' Harnam Singh Ahluwalia, the younger son of the Raja of Kapurthala. Her early education was at Sherborne School for Girls in Dorset, England while she graduated from Oxford University. Upon the completion of her education, she returned to India in 1918.

Upon her return, she became more active during the independence struggle. Her father was closely associated with leaders such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Amrit Kaur was drawn to the teachings and vision of Mahatma Gandhi whom she met in Mumbai in 1919. She would go on to work as his secretary for 16 years.

## Amrit Kaur's role in the freedom struggle

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur became a vocal critic of the British rule following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. She formally joined the Indian National Congress, becoming an active member of the freedom struggle while also focusing on social reform. She actively campaigned against the devadasi system and the practice of child marriage.

Amrit Kaur was the co-founder of the All India Women's Conference which advocated better treatment of women in 1927. She was arrested by the British following her participation in the Dandi March in 1930. Following her release, she went on to live an austere life at Mahatma Gandhi's ashram in 1934, despite her noble background.

The British appointed her as a member of the Advisory Board of Education, but she resigned from the position following her involvement with the Quit India Movement in 1942 which resulted in her imprisonment.

She championed the cause of universal suffrage and testified before the Lothian Committee on Indian franchise and constitutional reforms, and before the Joint Select Committee of British Parliament on Indian constitutional reforms.

Amrit Kaur became the Chairperson the All India's Women Education Fund Association. She also was a part of the India delegation at the UNESCO conferences in London and Paris in 1945 and 1946, respectively.

## Role as Health Minister of India

Upon India's independence from the British Empire on August 15, 1947, Amrit Kaur was elected to become a member of the constituent Assembly which was tasked with the framing of the Constitution of India. As its member, she supported a proposal for a Uniform Civil Code in India along with advocating universal franchise, opposed affirmative action for women and debated the language concerning the protection of religious rights

Amrit Kaur became part of Jawaharlal Nehru's first Cabinet; she was the first woman to hold Cabinet rank, serving for ten years. She was assigned the Ministry of Health. As Health Minister, Kaur led a major campaign to fight the spread of malaria in India. She also leads the campaign to eradicate tuberculosis and was the driving force behind the largest B.C.G vaccination programme in the world.

Amrit Kaur played an instrumental role in the establishment of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi and became its first president. Kaur introduced a bill in the Lok Sabha for the establishment of AIIMS in 1956, following a recommendation made after the Government of India conducted a national health survey.

She served on the boards of governmental bodies aimed at fighting tuberculosis and leprosy. and started the Amrit Kaur College of Nursing and the National Sports Club of India.

From 1957 until her death in 1964, she remained a member of Rajya Sabha. Between 1958 and 1963 Amrit Kaur was the president of the All-India Motor Transport Congress in Delhi. Until her death, she continued to hold the presidencies of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the Tuberculosis Association of India, and the St. John's Ambulance Corps.