

# Usha Mehta

Usha Mehta was a freedom fighter known for her role in setting up the Congress Radio, an underground radio that functioned during the Quit India phase of the independence struggle.

Congress radio played a crucial role in coordinating the various protests when the senior leadership were arrested by the British colonial authorities

This article will give details about Usha Mehta within the context of the Civil Services Examination.

## Early Life of Usha Mehta

Usha Mehta was born in Saras village, located in the Surat district of Gujarat on 25 March 1920. She was five years old when she first visited Mahatma Gandhi's ashram at Ahmedabad.

Barely at 8 years, she began an active member of the Indian freedom struggle with one of her first protest being against the Simon Commission in 1928.

Usha was born in Saras village near Surat in Gujarat. When she was just five years old, Usha first saw Gandhi while on a visit to his ashram at Ahmedabad. Shortly afterwards, Gandhi arranged a camp near her village in which little Usha participated, attending sessions and doing a little spinning.

Usha's father was a judge under the British authorities therefore her participation was limited to a certain extent but this hurdle was overcome when he retired in 1930. She became even more actively involved when her family shifted to Mumbai in 1932 by distributing clandestine bulletins, publications and carrying messages to jailed leaders

In 1939 she graduated from Wilson College in Bombay but her study in law came to an end when she would join the Quit India movement in 1942. It was also around this time when she became a proponent of the Gandhian philosophy, adapting a Spartan lifestyle and forsaking all luxuries. This would help her on the path to come.

## Usha Mehta's role in the Freedom Struggle

The Quit India movement was announced by the Indian National Congress (formed on December 28, 1885) and slated to commence on 9 August 1942. The British authorities pre-emptively arrested all the leaders including Mahatma Gandhi in order to derail the movement, but junior leaders like Aruna Asaf Ali still went ahead with the event, hoisting the national flag at Gowalia Tank ground and thus starting the Quit India movement

On 14 August 1942, Usha and her close associates began the underground Congress Radio, a clandestine radio station that went on air on 27 August. The radio broadcasts recorded messages from Gandhi and other prominent leaders of the freedom movement. The messages were played across India by the Congress Radio. The British tried to clamp down on the Congress Radio but its location was changed daily to avoid detection. But they were eventually found on 12 November 1942, and all its organisers including Usha were arrested.

She was held in solitary confinement and offered incentives to betray the movement but it was of little use. During her trial, she chose to remain silent and did not answer any questions put forward by the prosecution even to the ones that would have saved her. She was sentenced to four years imprisonment at Yervada Jail in Pune. She was released in 1946 at the orders of Morarji Desai, who was at that time the home minister in the interim government.

Although Congress Radio functioned only for three months, it greatly assisted the movement by disseminating uncensored news and other information banned by the British-controlled government of India. Congress Radio also kept the leaders of the freedom movement in touch with the public.

## Later Years of Usha Mehta

Upon India's independence, Usha Mehta continued to be socially active in spreading Gandhian thought and philosophy. In the ensuing years, she authored many articles, essays and books in English and Gujarati. The Government of India associated her with a number of celebrations during India's 50th anniversary of freedom. She was elected the president of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, a trust dedicated to the preservation of Gandhian heritage.

The Government of India conferred on her Padma Vibhushan in 1998, the second-highest civilian award of India.

In August 2000, although she was suffering from fever, Usha participated like she did every year in the anniversary celebrations related to the Quit India Movement in August Kranti Maidan. She returned home weak and exhausted. Two days later, she passed away on 11 August 2000 at the age of 80, survived by her elder brother and three nephews.

To this day Usha Mehta and her role in the Congress Radio is remembered as it kept the movement going despite all obstacles that came in its wake.