

The Last Heroes: Foot Soldiers of Indian Freedom

P. Sainath

**Gurugram, Penguin Random House India, 2022 Page
XXIX+272, Rs 499, ISBN: 978-06-700-9692-3**

Reviewed By

Anant Vijaya Soni

Palagummi Sainath is one of the public intellectuals of India having international repute. His earlier book "Everybody Loves a Good Drought: Stories from India's Poorest Districts" (1996) (Hindi Title Teesri Fasal published in the year 2003) invited international attention because it encouraged all sections of society to assess national policies and roles of bureaucracy critically. P. Sainath visited some of the poorest districts of India and on the basis of field-observations, group discussions and personal interviews presented the political economy with institutionalised disparities responsible for village poverty along with atrocities experienced by peasants and landless agricultural workers belonging to dalits, adivasis and women. The reviewer did get an opportunity to read this book so that villages from Social Science perspective could be understood. At the same juncture this book is an authentic revelation of people's struggle for the continuance of social survival with dignity.

The Last Heroes, according to Professor Jagmohan Singh is an expression of "A People's History of the Freedom Struggle". 'We fought for two things - For Freedom and Independence. We attained independence' is the philosophy of this book revealed by Captain

Bhau a leader of Toofan Sena. The book enlightens readers about those ideologies which acted as tools against colonial masters. Jagmohan's narrative entitled "The Spirit of Indian Freedom @75 in the present era of neo-liberal economy is a message why history of India's freedom struggle should remain in the memories of India's commoners because they have not attained 'freedom' yet. The book besides narrative of Jagmohan comprises sixteen chapters along with A memory, Annexure I, references and acknowledgement. This book reminds the author of this review about two more books, one edited by Partha Chatterjee (Wages of Freedom: Fifty years of the Indian Nation -State, 1999, Delhi, OUP) and another by Ravi Dayal (We Fought Together For Freedom: Chapters from the Indian National Movement, 1998, Delhi, OUP). In fact, by studying such books people's roles in freedom movement almost become observable realities. Composite culture, secular outlook, gender equality and commitment towards all forms of sacrifices appear as foundation stones of India's freedom movement.

In Introductory Chapter P. Sainath raises the question, who were our 'Freedom Fighters'? and replies that a large number of brave persons like Demati Devi Sabar 'Salihan' (An Adivasi Girl) was not a part of organised politics, did not participate in Civil Disobedience or Quit India Movements. She did not go to jail either. Her village was attacked by armed British Police. The Police force destroyed homes, crops and attacked male members. Demati along with forty other women attacked the police force with their lathis and chased them down the street. Such fearless personalities are also freedom fighters. Sainath met Demati in the year 2002 when she was about ninety years old. He conducted an interview with her. Her region is dominated by feudal elements who were collaborators of the "Raj". They have benefited more from independence. The book can make any reader 'emotional' and close to Commoners. From social science perspective this book expresses the fact that India's freedom movement of this nature is intentionally excluded from textbooks so that roles of leaders could get 'desired importance'. There is need to re-imagine India based on books depicting people's involvement. The books authored

or edited by P. Sainath, Partha Chatterjee, and Ravi Dayal are evidence of why India loves composite culture, secularism, democracy and value of Justice. India's freedom movement is still a live reality which makes people 'movement persons'.

The book should be read by academia, politicians and by those who are committed to values of India's Constitution. P. Sainath deserves appreciation of high order. The book should be translated in all languages so that people's social science could be used academically for making India an egalitarian society with 'fragrance of freedom'.

Dr. Anant Vijaya Soni is Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, S.S. Jain Subodh (PG) Autonomous College, Jaipur

Email: anantvijayasoni123@gmail.com

Memory Crosswalk

Gail Omvedt: Human Rights Activist

(August 2, 1941 – August 25, 2021)

B. K. Nagla

Dr Gail Omvedt is an American-born Indian scholar, sociologist and human rights activist. Gail was a rare phenomenon in Indian academia and activism. She was an observer of the Indian social movements, participant-academic and activist who has been involved in Dalit and anti-caste movements, environmental, farmers and women's movements. She has done invaluable research, documentation and academic work that no Indian academic can match.

Background

Gail Marie Omvedt was born on August 2, 1941, into a Scandinavian immigrant family in Minneapolis, Minnesota, US and died after a prolonged illness in Kasegaon near Pune on August 25, 2021, at the age of 80. Her father, Jack, worked for years as a lawyer for Native Americans in Minnesota. Her mother, Dorothy, was a homemaker. Gail herself came from a legacy of Leftist and social justice change-makers. Her grandfather was August Omtvedt. From the 1910s to the 1950s, he was involved in local government and also served many years as a State Senator in the Minnesota state legislatures. This was a time of socialist and farmer-labour politics in the state, striking examples of successful third-party movement formations in the US. August was known as a "champion of the little people," with a "burning ambition to make his community what he hoped it could be." This history and the progressive upbringing by her parents inculcated in Gail a strong ambition to contribute to the betterment of society from the bottom up.