

PRITILATA WADDEDAR: POLITICS OF REMEMBRANCE



UPASHANA SALAM

If you aren't familiar with Pritilata Waddedar or can't fathom why her achievements need to be celebrated and her death commemorated, blame the mainstream narrative of the Indian resistance against British colonialism that makes sparse mention of the first woman martyr of India's independence movement. While Pritilata is given a fleeting mention in history texts, Bollywood films have committed an even more grievous crime. They have distorted her role in the Chittagong uprising, heavily focusing on an inaccurate portrayal of her as a sexual, romantic interest of the main lead, blatantly disregarding her political role as a revolutionary who played an active part in upsetting the balance of colonial power in India.

When Pritilata Waddedar sought to join the Surya Sen-led Indian Republic Army, women's entry into supposedly masculine spaces, like revolutionary groups fighting against British imperialism, was strictly restricted. Kalyani Bhattacharjee's *Jibon Adhyayan* explains that even though revolutionary nationalist groups called upon their female counterparts to join the cause by acquiring necessary physical skills, most of them followed a "programme of physical culture and social works", where women were taught "manly arts" like fencing, cycling and boxing, they were also asked to acquire "womanly" skills such as first-aid and nursing so they could essentially play a background role of caregiver to the male freedom fighters. As pointed out by Nirad C. Chaudhuri in *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, this dual standard was also a form of rejoinder against the British colonial perceptions of the "effeminate Bengali". In fact, Masterda Surya Sen had himself asserted that even though he was not opposed to the idea of women joining the resistance movement, he

never thought that they could be of much use except as "sympathisers and behind the scene helpers."

In this scenario, Pritilata and other female freedom fighters like Kalpana Dutta, actively worked to disprove the British emphasis on the low status of women in India, by evoking the image of the Goddess Shakti and urging women and the larger Indian society to take up arms and join their "brothers" in the fight against imperialism. Indian women were already on the forefront of the Swadeshi movement, as they boycotted foreign goods and marched in rallies, but their roles were largely relegated to such auxiliary tasks. Before joining the IRA, Pritilata joined Deepali Sangha, headed by Leela Nag, in Dhaka, which was set up with the express purpose of mobilising women to be politically conscious. However, Pritilata was not interested in the work that such women's organisations did. She understood that in order for her and other women like her to be considered equal to their male compatriots, she needed to be involved in direct combat. As Sarmistha Dutta Gupta writes in her article *Death and Desire in Times of Revolution*, published in *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, this desire in itself indicates that Pritilata had "accepted the division between the 'social' and the 'political' and internalised the ideological position that the work of women's organisations was 'social' and never equal in importance to the 'political work done by men'."

In an attempt to change this perception of women as the weaker, more vulnerable sex, Pritilata and Kalpana Dutta knew that they could not accept the position of "uninitiated" members that the IRA offered them and so were ready to prove that they could be instrumental in plans that involved direct attacks against the enemy force. Pritilata first met Surya Sen in 1932, and the leader noted that even though it was raining heavily, "both when she came and when she left and it was muddy all around, not even once did she stumble. Just this one meeting was enough to convince us of these strengths of hers" (Nirmal Sarkar, *Surya Sen O*

Pritilata Rachana Sangraho). Pritilata had to perform overtly "masculine" tasks, such as scaling walls, hiding in jungles and diving in ditches, without showing any sign of discomfort or fear to prove that she was capable to handle arms and would not flinch in the face of imminent death.

Her first major job after joining the IRA was to offer emotional support to freedom fighter Ramkrishna Biswas, who was arrested and sentenced to death for the assassination of Inspector Tarini Mukherjee. Disguised as his sister, Amita Das, Pritilata met Biswas 40 times until his death, and wrote that she felt "ten times more inspired to fight for freedom" after meeting the revolutionary on death row. She also took part in attacks on British Telephone and Telegraph offices and the capture of the reserve police lines, disguising herself as a man to join her fellow fighters.

In essence, Pritilata had to 'defeminise' herself to establish that she was equal to her male counterparts, which, as explained by Sharmishta Das Gupta, went against her more "gentle, introverted, 'feminine' persona, as she liked to write, could sing well and had a literary bent of mind."

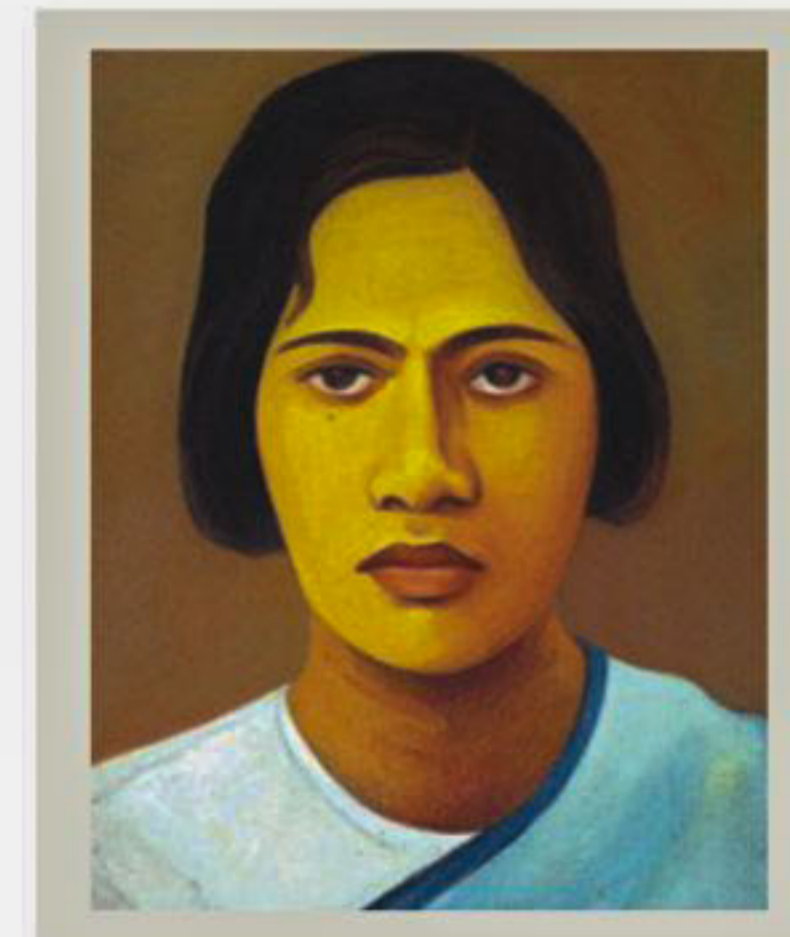
Young freedom fighters like Pritilata also had the added responsibility of preserving their "chastity," and ensuring that their moral dignity was preserved at any cost. Thus, even though they might have felt an attraction toward any man in their group, they had to keep it to themselves, without revealing their feelings to even the subject of their admiration. In her piece titled 'Pritilata wrote about her relationship with Nirmal Sen, Surya Sen's second-in-command, with whom she spoke of her meetings with Ramkrishna Biswas as well as how she negotiated her feelings towards her family and her motherland. In fact, when Sen was killed in a sudden police attack, Pritilata could hardly stop herself from running to him when she heard his cries, as she wrote, "I just couldn't bear his heart-wrenching cries. If I could only just be with him once in those last minutes, I don't know what he might have told me. But God didn't let me see him before he breathed his

last." Yet, their feelings toward each other was mostly kept within themselves, as the environment within revolutionary groups was strictly de-sexualised, and every member was aware that they had to marginalise all other loves in view of their love for their country; in short, these revolutionaries were only permitted to function as political beings.

When Surya Sen planned an attack on the Pahartali European Club, which had a sign-board that read "Dogs and Indians not allowed," it was decided that a woman would head this mission. After Kalpana Dutta was arrested seven days before the attack, Pritilata was assigned to lead the

members of the IRA in Chittagong after the Pahartali attack, Pritilata urged every woman of India to "get themselves ready to face all dangers and difficulties and join the revolutionary movement in their thousands." She had further declared that if women "are yet less fit it is because they have been left behind."

Pritilata's decision to join the movement was a conscious political choice; her intention to die a martyr was well-planned and properly thought-out. It is thus saddening when we see such a woman being relegated to the role of a romantic interest whose only reason for joining the resistance movement against colonial British



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operation, and she was accordingly trained for this in Kotowali. On September 23, Pritilata headed towards the club with her eight-member team. Each member of the group was given potassium cyanide and Pritilata expressly requested Sen to allow her to swallow the pill if they were arrested. She dressed as a Punjabi sardar on D-Day and attacked the club at around 10.45 pm. The attack was a success but Pritilata was injured when a policeman shot at her. In order to avoid getting arrested by British police officers, she swallowed cyanide and breathed her last, aged 21, almost instantaneously.

In "Long Live Revolution," cited as her last testament found by the police on her body, and later distributed as pamphlets by

was her attraction toward another freedom fighter. Pritilata was much more than just a nurse or a sexual object as portrayed in the media; she wanted her death to mobilise women to join the fight against imperialism, to prove detractors wrong about their abilities. In a patriarchal society where only the achievements of men are mostly heralded in our master narratives, Pritilata's role might have somewhat been diminished to a supporting one. In our small, insignificant way, we salute the woman who fought valiantly for her country and sacrificed her life so that voice of a woman would matter in the narratives written by men.

The writer is a journalist at *The Daily Star*.

Why gender equality is the most critical of all the global goals



PHUMZILE MLAMBO-NGCUKA

At the end of this month, thousands of representatives from all over the world will gather in New York. They will witness the launch of the most ambitious universal effort since the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The reshaping and re-stating of the "larger freedom" of those rights in a new agenda has a deadline of 2030 for a fairer, more sustainable world, with the drive to achieve full equality of men and women at its center.

It is a threshold moment. Many constituencies, far broader than governments alone, have deeply invested hope and expectation that we have learnt enough, are committed enough, to make this new agenda a success. Through it, we seek to impact some of the key challenges of the 21st century, such as poverty, inequality and violence against women. Women's empowerment is a pre-condition for this.

We know now that without gender equality and a full role for women in society, in the economy, in governance, we will not be able to achieve the world we hoped for. These are the changes for which governments have repeatedly signed their support, with international protocols on non-discrimination, and on different aspects of rights and global goods. To date, that support has not been felt all the way through society; consequently results have fallen short of aspiration.

We have extensive information on what needs to be done. In 2015 we conducted a review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on its 20th anniversary. As many as 167 countries reported their own successes in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. These reports are in effect national blueprints for action.

Their assessments revealed important gains in some areas, such as new or amended legislation to eliminate discrimination against women and other barriers; improved enrollment by girls in primary and secondary education, and progress in reducing maternal deaths. But advances were unacceptably slow in other vital areas, such as increasing women's access to decent work or equal pay; no country has achieved gender equality.

There has been a critical gap between those who draw up the commitments and those who carry them out. Gender ministries tend to be underfunded and lack the influence and weight of larger and stronger ministries, such as foreign affairs or treasury functions.

This is where we intend to learn from history – and change it.

On September 27, we ask the highest leaders in each land to take personal responsibility for their commitment to change the trajectory of gender equality and empowerment of women. We ask those who make the undertakings to be the ones to lead their implementation. We believe this level of engagement is crucial to create a new cycle of history.



We have already started this path through the HeForShe campaign that identifies IMPACT champions in top leadership positions, in government, academia and multinational corporations. Each leader has made game-changing undertakings – of a new order of magnitude – that will bring institutional change to their own arena that is replicable elsewhere.

No other issue on the sustainable development agenda will receive this level of special attention. No other issue is as critical to the success of the new agenda as a whole.

The ambition of the 2030 Agenda must be matched with an equally ambitious level of investment with transformative financing commitments, including dedicated funding for

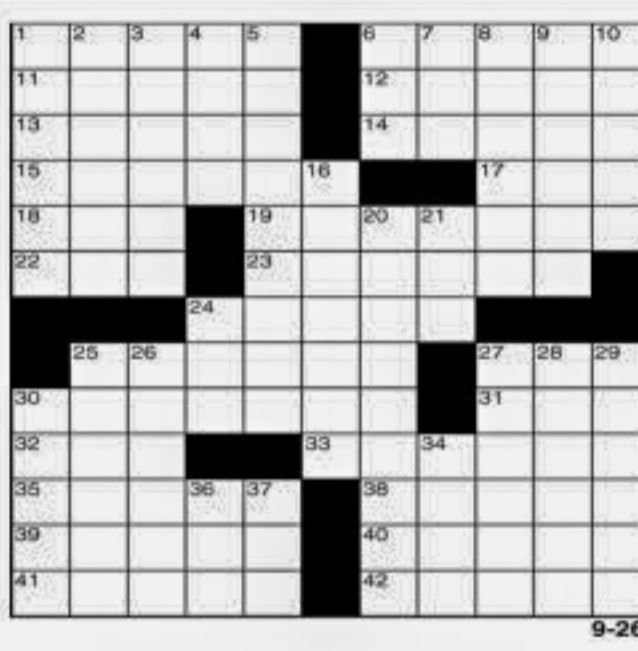
women's-rights organisations. This can only happen if governments increase budget allocations across all sectors, states meet their official development assistance commitments, and all other sources of funding are mobilised to achieve gender equality.

As we move toward September's threshold moment, I invite all Heads of States and Governments to prepare for the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit 2015 with commitments that are truly visionary, that break barriers, provide solutions, and so put themselves, and the world they lead, on the right side of history.

The writer is UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN Women.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Basic ideas
 - 6 Put in stitches
 - 11 Big singing group
 - 12 Get up
 - 13 More dreadful
 - 14 Fosse forte
 - 15 Offering a view
 - 17 Atlantic catch
 - 18 Flamenco cheer
 - 19 Frat parties
 - 22 Take home
 - 23 Sign up
 - 24 Boarded
 - 25 Flight units
 - 27 Recuperation site
 - 30 Spanish dishes
 - 31 "Mazel --!"
- DOWN**
- 1 Baptized boy
 - 2 Eaves dripper
 - 3 Parade site
 - 4 New driver, often
 - 5 Get a gusher
 - 6 Blue
 - 7 Pitching stat
 - 8 Reacts to a sour note
 - 9 Chaperone
 - 10 Monopoly cards
- 16 Middle**
- 20 Hardly mention**
- 21 Collins ingredient**
- 24 Lass**
- 25 Much of Niger**
- 26 Brewing need**
- 27 New York's -- Island**
- 28 Packing a punch**
- 29 Wards off nervousness**
- 34 Place to put in**
- 36 Dedicated work**
- 37 Homer's neighbor**



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

L	A	S	E	R	W	A	F	E	R
A	L	O	N	E	E	L	A	T	E
G	I	L	D	A	D	A	N	T	E
D	U	D	E	S	T	S	T	U	D
D	R	I	P	A	N	K	A		
R	O	E	B	R	E	A	S	T	S
A	U	R	A	E	O	N	T	O	P
W	E	S	T	E	R	N	I	D	O
T	H	R	U	S	C	O	T		
A	C	H	E	G	O	O	F		
T	O	R	A	H	P	R	O	O	F
O	P	E	R	A	E	T	U	D	E
M	E	E	T	S	C	A	R	E	D

Office of the Registrar
Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University
Trishal, Mymensingh

Invitation for Tender (Goods)

1. Ministry/Division	Ministry of Education.		
2. Agency	University Grants Commission of Bangladesh.		
3. Procuring entity name	Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University.		
4. Procuring entity code	Not used.		
5. Procuring entity district	Mymensingh.		
6. Invitation for	Tender for goods.		
7. Invitation ref No.	JKKNIU/REG/SMR/914/14/15-16/01		
8. Date	20/09/2015		
KEY INFORMATION			
9. Procurement method	Open Tendering Method (National).		
FUNDING INFORMATION			
10. Budget and source of funds	GOB		
11. Development partners (if applicable)	N/A		
PARTICULAR INFORMATION			
12. Project/programme code	Not used.		
13. Project/programme name	N/A		
14. Tender package No.	G1		
15. Tender package name	Supply of Stationery Materials.		
16. Tender publication date	23/09/2015		
17. Tender last selling date	13/10/2015		
18. Tender closing date and time	14/10/2015 at 02.00pm		
19. Tender opening date and time	14/10/2015 at 02.30pm		
20. Name and address of the office			
Selling tender document	Sonali Bank, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University Branch, Trishal, Mymensingh.		
Receiving tender document	Office of the Registrar, 1 st Floor, Administrative Building, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Trishal, Mymensingh.		
Opening tender document	Office of the Registrar, 2 nd Floor, Administrative Building, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Trishal, Mymensingh.		
21. Place/date/time of pre-tender meeting	Pre-tender meeting shall not be held.		
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER			
22. Eligibility and qualification of tenderer	The tenderer may be from all countries in the world except Israel.		
23. Brief description of goods	Lot-1: Supply of Stationery Materials. Lot-2: Supply of Printing Materials.		
24. Brief description of related services	N/A		
25. Tender document price	Lot-1: Cash Tk. 500/- (five hundred only). Lot-2: Cash Tk. 300/- (three hundred only).		
Identification of lot	Location	Tender security amount in Taka	Completion time
Lot-1: Supply of Stationery Materials	JKKNIU Campus at Trishal, Mymensingh	BDT 20,000.00 (twenty thousand) only	Fifteen (15) days from the date of NOA
Lot-2: Supply of Printing Materials		BDT 5,000.00 (five thousand) only	
PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS			
27. Name of official inviting tender	Md. Fazlul Quader Chowdhury.		
28. Designation of official inviting tender	Registrar (Add. Charge), Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Trishal, Mymensingh.		
29. Address of official inviting tender	Office of the Registrar, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Trishal, Mymensingh.		
30. Contact details of official inviting tender	Telephone: 09032-56272 Electronic-mail address: fqdrchy@gmail.com Facsimile: 09032-56270		
31. The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders without assigning any reason whatsoever.			

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