

Founding Members of the All India Women's Conference (AIWC):

- The idea for AIWC was initiated by Irish-born feminist **Margaret Cousins**, who in the mid-1920s reached out to various Indian women's groups to gather support for a united movement focused on women's education and welfare
- The inaugural conference took place in **January 1927** at Fergusson College Hall in Pune (then Poona), with around **2,000 women** participating
- **Maharani Chimnabai II of Baroda (Chimnabai Gaekwad)** served as the **first President** of AIWC in 1927
- Several prominent Indian women were among the **founding members**, including:
 - **Amrit Kaur** (later India's first woman cabinet minister)
 - **Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay**, who was one of the first secretaries of the organization.
 - Other noted founding members: **Sarojini Naidu**, **Rameshwari Nehru**, **Begum Hamid Ali**, **Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy**, and **Renuka Ray**.
- According to academic sources, key figures such as **Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay**, **Hansa Mehta**, and **Amrit Kaur** were active founding voices of AIWC. **Hansa Mehta** later served as President, while **Qudsia Aizaz Rasul** held the position of Vice President and **Renuka Ray** spearheaded legal reform efforts.

Role	Person
Founder who called for it	Margaret Cousins
First President (1927)	Maharani Chimnabai II
Founding Members	Amrit Kaur, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Sarojini Naidu, Rameshwari Nehru, Begum Hamid Ali, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, Renuka Ray
Active founding leaders	Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Hansa Mehta, Amrit Kaur
Leadership (VP, Reform)	Qudsia Aizaz Rasul (VP), Renuka Ray (legal reform)

Amrit Kaur (1889–1964)

Full Name: Rajkumari Amrit Kaur

- India's **first Health Minister** (1947–1957)
- Founding member of the **All India Women's Conference (AIWC)**
- Member of **India's Constituent Assembly**
- Freedom fighter and social reformer
- Co-founder of the **Indian Council for Child Welfare**

Early Life & Background

- Born on **2 February 1889** into the **royal family of Kapurthala** (Punjab).
- Educated in **England**, at **Sherborne School for Girls** and **Oxford University**.
- Though born into royalty, she chose a life of **public service and activism**.

Political & Social Activism

- A staunch **Gandhian**, Amrit Kaur became closely associated with **Mahatma Gandhi** in the 1920s.
- She was an advocate for:
 - **Women's education**
 - **Abolition of purdah and child marriage**
 - **Political representation for women**
- One of the **founding members of AIWC in 1927**, working to uplift Indian women through legal reforms and education.

Role in Free India

- Appointed India's **first Health Minister** by **Jawaharlal Nehru** after independence in 1947.
- Held the position for **10 years** — the **only woman** in Nehru's first cabinet.
- Key achievements as Health Minister:
 - Founded **All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)** in 1956.
 - Championed **universal healthcare, tuberculosis control, and maternal and child health**.
 - Worked on expanding **nursing education** and **family planning initiatives**.

Constituent Assembly & Legacy

- One of the **15 women** members of India's **Constituent Assembly**.
- Vocal in debates about **women's rights, secularism, and social justice**.
- Left behind a legacy as a **pioneer of public health, a freedom fighter, and a feminist reformer**.

Key Quote:

"I am deeply convinced that a well-planned and efficiently administered health service is one of the most essential functions of the State."

Death & Legacy

- Passed away on **2 October 1964**.
- Remembered as one of modern India's **foremost women leaders**.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (1903–1988)

- Freedom fighter
- Social reformer
- Cultural revivalist
- First woman to run for **legislative office in India (1936)**
- Founding member of the **All India Women's Conference (AIWC)**
- Key figure in reviving **Indian handicrafts, theatre, and folk arts**

Early Life & Education

- **Born:** 3 April 1903, Mangalore, Karnataka
- Raised in a progressive Saraswat Brahmin family that encouraged education and independence.
- Married at 14, widowed at 16 — chose not to remarry, defying social expectations.
- Studied at **Queen Mary's College (Madras)** and later at the **London School of Economics (LSE)**.

Role in India's Freedom Movement

- Influenced by **Gandhi**, joined the **Salt Satyagraha (1930)** and was **arrested**.
- First woman to be **imprisoned for political activity** during the freedom struggle.
- Organized women volunteers for civil disobedience and economic independence.
- Instrumental in mobilizing women in both urban and rural India.
- In **1936**, Kamaladevi became the **first woman** to run for political office in British India — though she lost, it was a groundbreaking move.
- Helped form the **Congress Socialist Party**.

Cultural Contributions & Social Reforms

Kamaladevi's post-independence contributions were vast and lasting:

Revival of Handicrafts

- Founded **All India Handicrafts Board**, **Central Cottage Industries Emporium**, and **Crafts Council of India**.
- Championed the economic empowerment of rural artisans and women.
- Helped make Indian handicrafts and handlooms globally recognized.

Theatre & Performing Arts

- Founded **National School of Drama (NSD)** and **Sangeet Natak Akademi**.
- Supported folk and classical arts at a time when they were undervalued.

Refugee Rehabilitation

- After Partition (1947), helped resettle **50,000+ women and children** in refugee camps.
- Set up training centres and cooperatives for displaced communities.

Awards & Recognition

Award	Year
Padma Bhushan	1955
Ramon Magsaysay Award	1966 (Public Service)
Padma Vibhushan	1987
UNESCO recognition	For cultural heritage preservation

Famous Quote:

“The purpose of life is not to reach a pinnacle of success, but to make a contribution that will endure.”

Legacy

- Often called the "**mother of the Indian cultural renaissance.**"
- She empowered Indian women and artisans through **self-reliance, creativity, and economic independence.**
- Her autobiography, "**Inner Recesses, Outer Spaces,**" offers deep insight into her journey.

Hansa Mehta (1897–1995)

Full Name: Hansa Jivraj Mehta

- **Freedom fighter**
- **Educator**
- **Social reformer**
- **Constitution-maker**
- **Women's rights advocate**
- Indian representative to the **UN Commission on Human Rights** (1947–48)
- Key member of the **All India Women's Conference (AIWC)**

Early Life & Education

- **Born:** 3 July 1897 in **Surat**, Gujarat, into a progressive and politically active family.
- Father: **Manubhai Mehta**, Dewan (Prime Minister) of Baroda State.
- Educated in **Bombay** and **London**; studied journalism and sociology in the **UK**.
- Married **Jivraj Mehta**, a physician and future **Chief Minister of Bombay State**.

International Role: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

Hansa Mehta is **best known globally** for her role at the **United Nations**, where:

She altered the language of the UDHR:

- **Original draft:** "All men are born free and equal..."
- **Hansa Mehta changed it to:**
→ "**All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.**"

This was a landmark move for **gender-inclusive language** in international law.

She was the **only Indian woman delegate** to the **UN Commission on Human Rights (1947–48)**, working alongside **Eleanor Roosevelt**.

Role in Indian Politics & Education

- Member of the **Bombay Legislative Council** (1937–39).
- One of **15 women** in India's **Constituent Assembly**.
 - Spoke out for **gender equality, uniform civil code, education, and women's rights**.
- Vice-Chancellor of **SNDT Women's University** (Mumbai) — second Indian woman to hold that position.
- Later became **Vice-Chancellor of Baroda University**, first woman to lead a co-ed university in India.
- Key leader in the **All India Women's Conference (AIWC)**.
- Advocated for:
 - Ending **child marriage**
 - Reforming **Hindu personal laws**
 - Equal rights for women in inheritance and marriage
- Helped draft several early **women's reform bills** in British India.

Awards & Honors

Award	Year
Padma Bhushan	1959
UNESCO recognition for global work on education & human rights	

Publications

- Wrote books on education, social reform, and translations of works into Gujarati (e.g., **"Gulliver's Travels"**, **"The Story of the Bible"**).

Famous Quote:

"We have always believed in the equality of the sexes. We only wanted to give it a legal shape through our Constitution."

Death & Legacy

- **Died:** 4 April 1995
- Remembered as a **pioneer of feminist thought in India**, and a **global human rights advocate**.

Rameshwari Nehru (1886–1966)

Also Known As: Rameshwari Raina Nehru

- **Freedom fighter**
- **Social reformer**
- **Women's rights activist**
- Founding member and **President of the All India Women's Conference (AIWC)**
- **Editor of "Stri Darpan"**, a Hindi women's magazine

- Member of the **Indian Constituent Assembly**
- International peace advocate and **UN delegate**

Early Life & Background

- **Born:** 1886, in Punjab (British India)
- Married **Brijlal Nehru**, a member of the prominent **Nehru family** (he was the cousin of Motilal Nehru, father of Jawaharlal Nehru).
- While associated with the Nehru family, she carved her **own path** as an activist, intellectual, and reformer.

Education & Early Work

- Educated at home, as was typical for upper-class Indian women of the time, but exposed early to **progressive, reformist ideals**.
- One of the **early champions of women's education**, particularly in **vernacular languages** like Hindi.

Role in Women's Movement

All India Women's Conference (AIWC)

- **Founding member** in 1927
- Served as **President of AIWC** in 1942
- Advocated for:
 - **Abolition of purdah**
 - **Female education**
 - **Legal reforms for women's rights**
- A key bridge between **elite women's leadership** and **grassroots activism**.

Journalism & Outreach

- Edited the Hindi women's magazine "**Stri Darpan**" ("Mirror for Women") — a platform for discussing:
 - Women's rights
 - Education
 - Social reform
 - Nationalist ideas
- This was **crucial in reaching non-English-speaking women** across North India.

Political & Constitutional Role

- Participated in the **Indian freedom movement** through both **social reform** and **political engagement**.
- **Member of the Indian Constituent Assembly** post-independence, contributing to the formation of the Constitution.

International Representation & Peace Work

- Represented India at **international peace and women's conferences**, especially after independence.
- Delegate to the **United Nations Commission on the Status of Women**.
- **President of the Inter-Asian Women's Conference** held in 1949.

Honors & Awards

Award	Year
Padma Bhushan	1955 (for social work)
Lenin Peace Prize (Soviet Union)	1961 (for international peace efforts)

She was one of the **few Indian women** to receive both **national and international** recognition in the 1950s and 60s.

Death & Legacy

- **Died:** 8 November 1966
- Remembered as a **pioneering feminist and social reformer**, especially for promoting **vernacular education, rural women's empowerment, and peace diplomacy**.

Themes of Her Legacy:

- Bridging **nationalism with feminism**
- Promoting **Hindi and regional languages** in women's education
- Advocacy at both **grassroots and international levels**

Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy (1886–1968)

- India's **first woman legislator** (1927)
- **Physician, surgeon, and women's rights activist**
- Founding member of the **All India Women's Conference (AIWC)**
- Social reformer focused on **girls' education, women's health, and abolition of the Devadasi system**
- Founder of **Adyar Cancer Institute**, one of India's first cancer hospitals

Early Life & Education

- **Born:** 30 July 1886 in **Pudukottai**, Tamil Nadu
- Daughter of a **Devadasi** mother and a **Brahmin father**, which deeply influenced her fight against **gender and caste-based injustices**
- Defied social norms by:
 - Pursuing **formal education**
 - Becoming the **first woman** to join **Madras Medical College**
 - Becoming the **first Indian woman** house surgeon at the Government Hospital for Women and Children, Madras

Medical & Social Work

- Practiced medicine but quickly expanded her efforts to **public health**, especially for **women and children**
- Advocated for:
 - **Maternal and child healthcare**
 - **Anti-tuberculosis initiatives**
 - **Education for girl children**

Political Career & Reform Work

First Woman Legislator in India

- Appointed to the **Madras Legislative Council** in **1927** — first woman to hold this role
- Used her position to push for **progressive legislation**, including:
 - Raising the **age of marriage** for girls
 - Abolishing the **Devadasi system** (temple prostitution)
 - Establishing support for **widows, orphans, and abused women**

Legislative Achievements

- Introduced and advocated for laws to:
 - Criminalize **exploitation of women**
 - Promote **girls' education**
 - Ensure **maternity leave** and better working conditions for women

Role in AIWC & Women's Movements

- **Founding member of the All India Women's Conference (1927)**
- Worked with other reformers like **Sarojini Naidu, Rameshwari Nehru, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay**
- Strong proponent of **legal reforms** to uplift Indian women

Founder of Adyar Cancer Institute

- In **1954**, she founded the **Adyar Cancer Institute** in Chennai
- One of India's **first cancer hospitals**, it remains a leading institution today
- Established to provide **affordable, compassionate care** regardless of income or social background

Awards & Recognition

Award	Year
Padma Bhushan	1956
First chairperson of the State Social Welfare Advisory Board (Madras)	1954

She was also the **first woman Deputy President of the Madras Legislative Council**.

Death & Legacy

- **Died:** 22 July 1968
- Her legacy continues through:
 - **Adyar Cancer Institute**
 - Legal reforms she helped initiate
 - Inspiration to generations of **women in medicine and public service**

Legacy in Indian Women's History:

- Among the **first Indian women to break into professional medicine and politics**
- Paved the way for:

Women's legislative participation

Public health institutions led by women

Systemic change in laws affecting girls and women

Begum Shareefa Hamid Ali (c. 1883–1971)

- Born on **12 December 1883** in **Baroda (Vadodara), Gujarat**, into a progressive Muslim family. Her father, **Abbas J. Tyabji**, was Chief Justice of Baroda State and a follower of Gandhi; her mother, **Ameena Tyabji**, notably rejected purdah early on.
- She was multilingual—fluent in Urdu, Gujarati, Persian, Marathi, English, and French—and cultivated interests in **painting, drawing, and music**.

Role in AIWC & National Advocacy

- A **founding member** of the **All India Women's Conference (AIWC)**, Begum Hamid Ali held multiple roles: **Honorary Treasurer, Chairperson of its governing body, Vice President**, and eventually its **President in 1940–41**.
- At AIWC annual sessions, she was highly regarded. For instance, she was formally appointed president during a conference where she was praised for her organizational talents and commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity, and for carrying the AIWC's message nationally and internationally.

Legislative Advocacy & Social Reform

- Actively promoted the **Child Marriage Restraint Act (Sarda Act)** of 1929, advocating that girls' marriages be delayed until they were **educated and mature**, emphasizing firsthand concerns—she had two daughters affected by the custom herself.
- Worked in villages to establish **nursing centers** and educational programs for women.
- Participated in roundtable and international forums, advocating **universal franchise** and women's political rights as early as the 1930s.

International Representation & Human Rights Work

- Represented the AIWC at the **1934 Istanbul Congress** of the International Alliance of Women, and at the **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom** in Czechoslovakia in 1937.

- In **1947**, she became one of India’s representatives at the **United Nations Commission on the Status of Women**, where she played a significant role in shaping gender-inclusive language and advocating for women’s rights as human rights.

Legacy & Recognition

- A staunch advocate for **gender equality**, **social reforms**, and **communal harmony**, she brought a uniquely Indian and inclusive perspective to both national and international women's rights movements.
- Her contributions are sadly less recognized today, but historians continue to highlight her pivotal role in advancing feminist and nationalist causes in India.

Aspect	Details
Born	c. 12 December 1883, Vadodara, Gujarat
Roles at AIWC	Founding member; President (1940–41); Treasurer; Vice President; Chairperson
Social Advocacy	Championed Sarda Act; nursing centers; female education
International Work	Istanbul (1934); Czechoslovakia (1937); UN Commission (1947)
Legacy	Pioneer of feminist-nationalist activism and international women's rights

Begum Shareefa Hamid Ali’s life is a testament to the power of inclusive leadership, bridging communal divides, and advocating for women’s rights with foresight and compassion.

Here’s a portrait of **Maharani Chimnabai II of Baroda (Chimnabai Gaekwad II)**—a truly forward-thinking queen and the very **first President of the All India Women’s Conference (AIWC)** in 1927.

Maharani Chimnabai II (1872–1958)

Background & Early Life

- Born as **Shrimant Gajrabai Devi** in **1872**, daughter of Sardar Bajirao Amritrao Ghatge Sarjerao of Dewas (Senior).
- Married **Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III** in 1885 and was thereafter known as **Maharani Chimnabai II**.

Social Reform & Women’s Empowerment

- Authored the influential treatise **The Position of Women in Indian Life** (1911), which critically examined women’s roles and advocated for educational reform and the dismantling of discriminatory practices.
- Broke social barriers by actively campaigning to abolish the **purdah system**; in a bold move during a function at Nyay Mandir in 1914, she appeared publicly alongside the Maharaja—effectively signaling the end of purdah in Baroda.

Institution Building & Advocacy

- Launched multiple initiatives for women's welfare and education in Baroda, such as:
 - **Maharani Chimnabai Stree Udyogalaya** (1914)—a vocational training center teaching skills like tailoring, embroidery, lacework, and bookbinding to create pathways for women's financial independence.
 - **Maharani Chimnabai High School**, founded around 1911, addressing the rising need for Marathi-medium education amidst increased school enrollments.
 - Other organizations included the **Mahila Pathashala**, the **Maternity and Child Welfare League**, and the **Ladies Club**—all aimed at uplifting women and girls through education, healthcare, and community support.

Leadership in Women's Movement

- Honored as the **first President of AIWC in 1927**, chosen at the founding conference held in Pune—a role attesting to her stature and pioneering leadership among Indian feminists.
- Continued her advocacy beyond the AIWC: served as the **President of the National Council of Women in India** from 1928 to 1937.

Legacy & Influence

- Passed away on **23 August 1958**.
- Remains remembered as a trailblazer in women's education, legal reform, and social transformation—her progressive ideas and tangible initiatives helped reshape opportunities for women across Baroda and India as a whole

Aspect	Details
Name	Maharani Chimnabai II (born Gajrabai Devi)
Role in AIWC	First President of AIWC (1927)
Reform Actions	Abolished purdah, wrote key treatise, founded vocational & educational institutions
Institution Builder	Established schools, vocational centers, welfare leagues for girls and women
Leadership Continuum	President of National Council of Women in India (1928–1937)
Legacy	Pioneer of women's empowerment in early 20th-century India

Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949)

Also Known As: *The Nightingale of India*

- **Freedom fighter**
- **Poet, orator, and political leader**
- **President of the Indian National Congress (1925)** — first Indian woman to hold the position

- **First woman Governor of an Indian state** (United Provinces/Uttar Pradesh, 1947–49)
- **Founding member of the All India Women's Conference (AIWC)**
- Advocate for **women's suffrage, Hindu-Muslim unity, and Indian independence**

Early Life & Education

- **Born:** 13 February 1879 in Hyderabad
- Father: Dr. Aghorenath Chattopadhyay, a scientist and educationist
- Mother: Varada Sundari Devi, a poetess
- A child prodigy — wrote poems in English from a young age
- Studied in **Madras**, then at **King's College, London** and **Girton College, Cambridge**

Political Activism

- Influenced by **Gopal Krishna Gokhale** and later **Mahatma Gandhi**
- Joined the **Indian National Congress** and played a crucial role in:
 - **Non-Cooperation Movement**
 - **Civil Disobedience Movement**
 - **Salt Satyagraha** — arrested in 1930
- **Presided over the INC session in Kanpur in 1925**, becoming the **first Indian woman to do so**
- One of the **first female political figures to speak for India abroad**, advocating **universal suffrage** at international platforms

Women's Rights and AIWC

- **Founding member of the All India Women's Conference (AIWC)** in 1927
- Promoted:
 - **Education for women**
 - **Legal rights for widows**
 - **Abolition of child marriage and purdah**
- A **bridge figure** between elite nationalist women and grassroots mobilization
- Gave impassioned speeches on **women's empowerment**, urging women to step out of the shadows

Literary Achievements

- Wrote lyrical poetry infused with **Indian imagery and nationalist themes**
- Notable works:
 - *The Golden Threshold* (1905)
 - *The Bird of Time* (1912)
 - *The Broken Wing* (1917)
- Celebrated for merging **romanticism** with **patriotism** in her poems
- Famously dubbed "*The Nightingale of India*" by Gandhi for her eloquent verse
- After independence, appointed **Governor of United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh)** — the **first woman to become a state governor** in India
- **Died in office on 2 March 1949**

Legacy

Achievement	Details
First Indian woman INC President	1925
AIWC Founder	1927
First woman Governor in India	United Provinces (1947–1949)
Title	<i>The Nightingale of India</i>
Literary Fame	Pioneer of Indian English poetry

Famous Quote

“We want deeper sincerity of motive, a greater courage in speech and earnestness in action.”