

Role of Women in Freedom Struggle in Karnataka

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ABSTRACT:

The role of women in the freedom movement is unique in Karnataka. Neither in the pre Gandhi period nor in the Gandhi era did women join the cause of their country and give their lives. Gandhi's period of freedom struggle in Karnataka began around 1920. Gandhi's visit to Belgaum in 1924 left a lasting impression on the freedom fighter. They also participated in Self Satyagraha, Salt Satyagraha and No Tax movement. Women's freedom struggles with men for socio

economic benefits and the spread of ideas of freedom. Queen Channamma of Kittur ushered in India's era of resistance against the British.

Key words; Freedom, Women, Struggle, Fighter, Movement.

Introduction:

Thus Queen Channamma of Kittur started an era of revolt against the British in India. During this period of struggle, Karnataka had been mainly distributed among five different administrations, apart from more than fourteen other smaller princely states. The five administrations were the Bombay presidency, the Madras presidency, the Mysore princely State, the Nizam's and Coorg. In spite of this kind of indifferent and uneven proposition, Kannada speaking people responded positively to the political awakening and participated actively in the freedom movement. Belgaum, Dharwad, Karwar and Bijapur districts known as Bombay Karnataka, formed the Southern part of the Bombay presidency. As part of the Bombay presidency, these four districts were considerably influenced by the political awakening in that presidency, which was administered by the British. Mysore was an enlightened princely state and responded in its own way to this national call. "The name of Kittur Rani Channamma has become a source of inspiration to all. She was the first Indian woman warrior to fight the British". Gulbarga, Raichur and Bidar districts formed part of Nizam's State. No one could do anything about Nizam's rule till late in the forties. After independence, however, by police action it was incorporated into the Indian Union. The Coastal South Kanara (Dakshina Kannada) and inland Bellary

districts were in the Madras presidency. They were so far apart, that there was no contiguity between the two districts. Coorg, though contiguous with Mysore, was entirely cut off from other parts of Karnataka. So far as political activity was concerned, it was administered by the Government of India through a Chief Commissioner.

Historical Background:

As noted earlier, besides Mysore and the Kannada Districts in the Nizam's state, there were nearly a dozen small princely states like Sondur, Savanur, Ramadurg, Jamkhandi, Mudhol, Akkalkot. These princely states which were separate and independent administrations were surrounded on all sides by British Indian provinces. These territories came under the influence of political agitation and upheal that came from the British administered territories. It was only natural that the people of these states shared the political aspirations for freedom and democracy of their fellow citizens living across their borders. The political upsurge in British India could not, therefore, leave the people of princely states unaffected.

Karnataka State has contributed a lot in the freedom struggle. Kannadigas are very well known for bravery and courage. They have believed and continue to believe that freedom is more valuable than their life. When one speaks of freedom, one is sure to remember Karnataka rulers, namely, Kadambas, Hoyasalas, Chalukyas of Badami, Vijayanagar Kings and many more for their love and dedication for freedom. Dr. D. C. Sarkar says, " Ever since the growth of Chalukyan dynasty from 6th century, Kannadigas have played a remarkable and memorable role in the history of freedom movement". There is also some evidence of Karnataka Kings who also ruled in Bihar, Bengal and other parts of India. The sacrifice made by women is a unique feature of the culture of Karnataka. One can remember, Attimabbe of 10th century, Akka Mahadevi of 12th century, Gangambika of Vijayanager, Onake Obavva, Rani Kittur Channamma and Belavadi Mallamma. The first woman who revolted against the British rule in India in 1824 was from Karnataka and she was Rani Channamma of Kittur. The 17th century poet Sarvajna of Karnataka has eulogized, in his compositions in triplets called as "Vachanas", Kannada culture and its supremacy. He was called as the 'pole star' or Karnataka culture. He has stated in his compositions that freedom is must to one and all and that they need not have any sort of

bondage. In his “Vachanas” he has very eloquently depicted the patriotism and faithfulness of the people of Karnataka. He firmly believed that one must sacrifice for the sake of his country.

Important Women Freedom Fighters:

The role of women in the freedom movement is unique in Karnataka. Both in Pre-Gandhian period and during the Gandhian period, women participated very actively and sacrificed their lives for the cause of their motherland. The Gandhian era of freedom struggle in Karnataka began roughly from 1920. As in all human historical events, there is bound to be some emphasis upon leadership of prominent personalities who stand out because of their greater initiative or forceful personality or organising abilities. The freedom struggle from 1920 to 1947 was led by Mahatma Gandhi, whose leadership attracted men and women of all walks of life. Gandhiji's visit to Belgaum in 1924 left everlasting impression upon the freedom fighters, and many women became staunch followers of Mahatma Gandhi. The leading women participants in the freedom movement in Karnataka were Umabai Kundapur, Bellary Siddamma, T Sunandamma, Kamaldevi Chattopadhyaya, Nagamma Patil, Krishnabai Panjekar, Subbavva Jois, Yashodharamma Dasappa, Padmavati Bidari, Jayadevitai Ligade, Sitabai Ramchandra, Madagaonkar and Shakuntala Kurtakoti.

Umabai Kundapur was a pioneer among the women freedom fighters of the Gandhian era. She came from Bombay and settled in Hubli, in 1923. Her father-in-law Sri Anand Rao Kundapur was himself a Nationalist and encouraged young Umabai to participate in social and public life. Unfortunately, as she became a widow at an early age, she made up her mind to spend her life in the service of the nation. Her stay in Bombay provided an opportunity to listen to the speeches of great nationalist leaders of the Congress. In Hubli, she came into contact with Dr. N. S. Hardikar, who was the main leader at that time in Hubli. The Bhagini Samaj and Tilak Kanya Shala were engaged in creating national awakening among women and trained women for national movement. After a few years, Umabai took the responsibility of these centers. Umabai's service in creating national awareness among women on the eve of Gandhiji's visit to Belgaum in 1924 was highly commendable. She toured all over Karnataka and brought women volunteers to the annual

session of the National Congress. For all these activities she was appointed as Chief Leader of the women's wing of the Seva Dal. Umabai once again toured Karwar district for Salt Satyagraha movement. In 1932, for her great courage in mobilizing the crowd, she was appointed the Director for the non-cooperation movement on 26th Jan. 1933. She was arrested for Satyagraha. After her release from jail, she continued to be associated with Adult Education and other social programmes. Bellary Siddamma is another name to remember for her active participation in the freedom movement. She was born in 1903 in Dhundasi village in Haveri taluka. Her father canndled in her the national spirit. She also had a spiritual bent of mind. She was married to Bellary Murigeppa who was also a staunch nationalist and follower of Gandhiji.

The first important event which shocked Bellary Siddamma and drove her to public life was the death sentence passed on Mallappa Dhanashetti and his comrades. In spite of the efforts of leaders of the state, they were hanged. This incident inspired many more youngsters to participate in the freedom movement. It was at this time that Siddamma declared that the British should be driven out of India and independence should be gained at any cost. She was really a very brave woman. She toured all the neighboring villages of Davangere and Chitradurga and addressed men and women in their own language and sought their co-operation. Because of her excellent work in organising women volunteers, she was soon recognized as a prominent state level leader in the Mysore State. Her association with Sardar Veeranagouda Patil, K. F. Patil, Nagamma Patil, S. Nijalingappa and T. Siddalingaiah enabled her to enlarge her activities. Her first important public activity was her participation in the memorable Shivapur Congress session held in April 1938. It was the first session of the princely Mysore State congress. In that session, the leaders who hoisted the national flag were arrested and imprisoned on 12th April 1938. Bellary Siddamma unfurled the national flag and the very next moment she too was arrested. She was the first lady arrested by the Mysore State police. After her release, she traveled widely all over Karnataka and Mysore. She mainly concentrated her activities in the rural areas. Her second major political activity was her participation in the programme of cutting of toddy trees in Turvekere in Chitradurga district under the leadership of S. Nijalingappa in Quit India Movement. She was very active in undertaking underground

work. In recognition of her service to women and to the nation a Tamrapatra was awarded to her.

It was in 1933 when Mahatma Gandhi visited Karnataka for the second time as part of his countrywide tour to educate people against untouchability. He was received at Mangalore by the leading Congress leaders among whom were Sardar Veeranagouda Patil and his wife Nagamma. Their presence was significant because they were already aware of the cause for which Mahatma Gandhi was dedicated. They had by that time opened a Harijan Balika Ashram in Hubli on the lines of the one at Sabarmati, the second of its kind in the whole of India. She traveled in all the neighbouring districts and selected Harijan girls for her Ashram. She addressed both men and women in a meeting at Byadagi and called on the people not to extend any cooperation to the Government and the Government arrested her on the same day. Jayadevitai Ligade was the granddaughter of Sri Mallappa Warad who was closely associated with Lokamany Tilak, M. G. Ranade and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Jayadevitai along with her mother participated in the salt satyagraha movement. Her area of freedom struggle was confined to the districts of Bidar, Gulbarga and Raichur. She organized the National Movement against the Nizam of Hyderabad, an oppressive ruler and a stooge of the British Raj. In 1946 Jayadevi tai addressed a huge crowd at Zahirabad near Basavakalyana.

Kamaladevi was born on April 3, 1903 in an affluent family in Mangalore. Her marriage with Harindranath, brother of Sarojini Naidu, created a flutter in the orthodox circle and led her to fame and popularity on the national scene through the stage. She got many opportunities to meet great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Gokhale and Pandita Ramabai. In Pune, she offered her services in organizing women volunteers. She also participated in the salt satyagraha. She was in charge of Seva Dal in 1931. Her main task was to organize and train women for a variety of jobs from first aid to fire fighting, to face lathis and bullets. Thus, after training herself, Kamaladevi returned to Mangalore in 1934. She organized unions and Adult Education drives. She aroused political consciousness and organized the congress committee. She also participated in Quit India Movement. After independence, she devoted her entire life to social work. In recognition of her noble service, she was honored with Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1966. Krishnabai was a leading

woman freedom fighter. She was born on 8th August 1906 at Honnavar. After completing her education, she started a primary school and Mahila Samaja at Dharwad. Krishnabai participated in the Swadeshi Movement. She soon became well known for her courage and indomitable will and the Dharwad District Congress Committee requested her to go round to enlist participants for the Salt Satyagraha. She moved from village to village inspiring people by her speeches. In 1932, she was arrested for anti-Government speeches. In 1940, she was the Vice-President of Karnataka Pradesh congress committee.

In 1942, she was again sentenced for one-year imprisonment for her anti-British rallies. Subbamma was wife of M. N. Jois who was a dedicated congress worker. Along with her husband, she participated in the “No Tax Campaign” in Karwar district and salt Satyagraha. She took active part in the flag hoisting and pamphlet-distributing programmes in which quite a good number of women used to participate under the inspiring leadership of Gouramma. Later, women played an important role in “No Tax Campaign Movement”. Later on she looked after an Ashram established by K. A. Venkataramaiah opened for the children of satyagrahis, at Shimoga. Subbamma also participated in the Shivapur congress session.

Yoshadharamma Dasappa enjoyed a unique place among the first generation of women freedom fighters of Gandhian era. She was the wife of Sri. H. C. Dasappa, a prominent congressman from the former Mysore State. Yashodharamma's first confrontation with the Government took place at Shivapur Congress session held on 10th April 1938. It was the first session of the Mysore congress. She along with other women participants guarded the flagpole for which she was arrested. She also played an important role in underground activities. Yashodharamma wrote speeches for the satyagrahis to oppose the decision of the Government to name the building of the town police of Mysore after Hamilton, who was known for his cruelty and inhuman treatment of those who participated in Nationalist activities. T. Sunandamma from Doddaballapur was closely associated with leaders like T. Siddalingaih and T.Narasimha Iyengar in starting the Niggers youth League in 1936. Once Sardar Vallabhabhai Patel was invited to address the league. T. Sunandamma and her husband were closely associated with its functioning in the Shivapur Congress Session. T. Sunandamma was a leader of volunteers. There she led a batch of women clad in white to

defend the national flag. She took active part with Yashosharamma Dasappa in the Town Hall Satyagraha at Mysore.

Conclusion:

Especially in organizing women volunteers, in distributing pamphlets and in doing commendable social service for the cause of the national movement. They also participated in individual Satyagraha, salt Satyagraha and No Tax Campaign. These women freedom fighters along with men fought for socio-economic values and to popularize democratic ideas. They struggled for the introduction of representative Government and also for the economic development of India and above all for the freedom of their motherland.

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