

The Role Of Bellary Siddamma In Freedom Struggle Of Karnataka

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Abstract

The history of foreign domination in India is replete with a courage, sacrifice and dedication to the cause of freedom. But over the decades, the fight for freedom of the country was continued with the same dedication, singleness of purpose and solidarity. The heroes of our freedom struggle came from every corner of the country. They did not speak one language. They did not belong to one religion or one caste. They rose above these narrow loyalties and considerations and had in tense love for their motherland and keenness to see the country free. That was the single thread of unity that bound them all. Free India has been built on untold sacrifices made by numerous individuals. Freedom movement was started not merely to drive the Britishers out of India, but the struggle continued to gain recognition for our nation among the other advanced nations of the world. "Indians should be the Masters of India" was the dictum. The main aim was that the Indian had to be an equal to the world citizen. This may call as freedom movement is related to human life, namely ,traditions, economic activities, rich cultural background and goals, Gandhiji dreamt of Swaraj. In this world Swaraj means, "The wealth of the nation is being washed away, we Indians are very poor. We should come out from poverty. Although India is a rich land, people suffer from epidemic diseases. Until and unless the Britishers are driven away from India, we will not rest in peace.

Key words: freedom movement, domination, solidarity, revolt

Introduction

The word "Freedom Movement" brings vividly to our minds the saga of sacrifices made by millions some of whom laid down their lives in a blazing train of glory. Bondage, whether social, economic or political, has always evoked intense resistance the word over. The history of foreign domination in India is replete with acts of courage, sacrifice and dedication to the cause of freedom. But over the decades, the fight for freedom of the country was continued with the same dedication, singleness of purpose and solidarity. The heroes of our freedom struggle came from every corner of the country. They did not speak one language. They did not belong to one religion or one caste. They rose above these narrow loyalties and considerations and had in tense love for their motherland and keenness to see the country free. That was the single thread of unity that bound them all. Free India has been built on untold sacrifices made by numerous individuals. Freedom movement was started not merely to drive the Britishers out of India, but the struggle continued to gain recognition for our nation among the other advanced nations of the world. "Indians should

be the Masters of India” was the dictum. The main aim was that the Indian had to be an equal to the world citizen. This may be called as freedom movement is related to human life, namely, traditions, economic activities, rich cultural background and goals, Gandhiji dreamt of Swaraj. In this world Swaraj means, “The wealth of the nation is being washed away, we Indians are very poor. We should come out from poverty. Although India is a richland, people suffer from epidemic diseases. Until and unless the Britishers are driven away from India, we will not rest in peace. We should be free. We must rule ourselves and regain our soul. Therefore, we need freedom”. Freedom is related to our mind and knowledge. Freedom and responsibility are two related terms. Many national leaders have understood the meaning of “Freedom movement”. It is a matter of great pride to note that the first ever call for revolt against the mighty power of the British was given by a woman, Queen of a small state in Karnataka, namely, Kittur, which occupied then a strategic place from both political and military points of view. She is one of the greatest among the freedom fighters not only of Karnataka but also of the whole world. Queen Channamma once defeated a British force and killed Thackeray. In the second encounter with the British army, she was defeated. 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 Nizams 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:

The Congress movement and the spirit of nationalism found greater expression in areas directly under the British rule. But it so happened that more than half of

Karnataka area was under the rule of Indian princes. As noted earlier, besides Mysore and the Kannada Districts in the Nizam’s state, there were nearly a dozen small princely states like Sandur, Savanur, Ramadurga, Jamkhandi, Mudhol, and 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 upheaval 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".³ 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 Vijayanagar, 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.⁴ 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 of 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.

PROMINENT WOMEN FREEDOM FIGHTERS OF KARNATAKA:

Women Satyagrahis of Karnataka and their role in the history of freedom struggle should be written in letters of gold. They dedicated their lives to the cause of freedom of their motherland and sacrificed there all to achieve their goal. 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 organizing 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.⁵ Women played an important role in distributing pamphlets. They were enthusiastic in preparing food for the freedom lovers. The leading women participants in the freedom movement in Karnataka were – Umabai Kundapur, Bellary Siddamma, T. Sunandamma, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Nagamma Patil, Krishnabai Panjekar, Subbamma Jois, Yashodharamma Dasappa, Padmavati Bidari, Jayadevitai Ligade, Sitabai Ramchandra Madgaonkar and Shakuntala Kurtakoti.

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 Taluk of Dharwad district. Her father candled 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 shook 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 who had not so long ventured out of the four walls of the house became an inspiring speaker and a good organizer.⁸ She was really a very brave woman. She toured all the neighbouring 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 organizing 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. Siddamma sang in her beautiful tone the song 'Vande Mataram', due to which she came to prominence among all the persons gathered there. It was women like T. Sunandamma, Yashodamma Dasappa, Bellary Siddamma and Subbamma Jois who struck a serious nail in the conflicting conditions among the organizers in the Shivapur event. They declared that they were ready to face the consequences and hoist the flag leaving behind men. This was considered as not only outstanding courage of the women but even the decision which surpassed the courage of men in the love for freedom. The Sivapur Flag Satyagraha was an important milestone in the struggle for national freedom. 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. The news spread throughout the State. The reaction of the public was, "A brave lady, a truly brave lady, an ideal Satyagrahi, indeed. Anybody else in her place would have run to the Maharaja". After her release, she travelled widely all over Karnataka and Mysore State. She mainly concentrated her activities in the rural areas. She was truly a mass leader. She advised the women to take to spinning and weaving. She popularized Khadi. She tried to dissuade the young and the old from the drinking habit. Her second major political activity was her participation in the programme of cutting of toddy trees in Turuvanur in Chitradurga district under the leadership of S. Nijalingappa. The Quit India Movement of 1942 found her again politically active. She did not court arrest, but was all the time helping the underground workers. The police kept an eye on her but she managed to fool them on a number of occasions.¹¹ 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.

Conclusion

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. In the pre-Gandhian freedom struggle women in their role as queens fought for independence of the territories. They were Belawadi Mallamma of the Swadi dynasty, Abbakka, queen of Ullal kingdom of South Kanara district, Keladi Rani Channamma, and Rani Veeramma of Keladi dynasty. The Gandhian era of freedom struggle in Karnataka began roughly from 1920. Gandhiji's visit to Belgaum in 1924 left everlasting impression upon the freedom fighters. They also participated in individual Satyagraha, salt Satyagraha and No Tax Campaign. Women freedom fighters along with men fought for socio-economic values and to popularize democratic ideas. Queen Channamma of Kittur started an era of revolt against the British in India.

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