



## The Role of Women in Freedom Movement of India Special Reference to Karnataka

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**Abstract:** *The role played by women in the war of independence of 1857 was creditable and invited and admiration even leaders of the Revolt. Rani of Ramgarh, Rani Jindan Kaur, Rani Tace Bai, Chauhan Rani, and Tapasvini Maharani daringly led their troops into the battlefield. Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi whose heroism and superb leadership laid in an outstanding example of real patriotism. Indian women who joined the national movement belonged to educated and communities. Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Vijayalakshmi Pundit and Annie Besant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are the names which are remembered even today for their singular contribution both in battlefield in political field.*

*The history of Indian freedom struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the contribution of women. The sacrifice made by the women of India new line will occupy the foremost place. The history of freedom struggle is replete with the saga of sacrifice, selflessness, bravery of women. Many of us don't know that there were hundreds of women who fought side by side with their male counterparts. They fought with true spirit and undismayed courage. The Indian women broke away from various restrictions and got out of their traditional home-oriented roles and responsibilities. So, the participation of women in the freedom struggle and National awakening is simply incredible and praiseworthy. However, it is not easy for women to fight as warrior's in the male dominating society. Even though females tried to change the perception of such orthodox people who thought women are meant to do only household chores. Moreover, females not only sacrifice their lives but also combat such issues. Rani Laxmi Bai was one of such women who fought against British rule by mitigating all odds; hence this paper entitles to highlight the legacy that women showed in the history by showing their fierce nature.*

**Keywords:** *Role of women, Freedom movement in India, Freedom Movement in Karnataka, Rani Abbakka, Rani Chennamma, Umabhai Kundapura, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya.*

**INTRODUCTION:** In the pre-independence period, the status of women within the country was in a deprived state. The major cause of this was, there was a prevalence of male dominance. The major responsibilities of the women were dedicated towards the implementation of household responsibilities and they were not allowed to participate in the implementation of other tasks and activities, no where they allowed to express their ideas and viewpoints. During this period, number of systems, were put into operation, which imposed unfavourable effects upon women. These



include child marriages, restraints were imposed upon widow remarriage, female foeticide, female infanticide, purdah system, sati and polygamy. During the period of the East India Company, many social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Ishwar Chander Vidya Sagar and Jyotiba Phule had undergone numerous challenges that were associated with bringing about changes in the status of women within the Indian society. During this period there were many ladies, who mastered the art of martial arts. Rani Laxmi Bhai fought for the Independence of the country. Women participation in India's freedom struggle began as early 1817 when Bhima Bai Holkar fought against Britishers. Madam Bhikaji Cama, the first Indian women socialist who fought for her motherland's freedom after the 1857 uprising. There is no doubt that women participation in Indian anti-imperialist struggle in large number.

Let us elucidate the role of Indian women who participated in the freedom struggle against British East India Company and British Empire and made great and rich contributions in various ways. No single factor can be delineated which can explain the mass participation of middle-class women in the nationalist movement. It was a complex matrix of political expectations and responses to the nationalist movement. Conservative norms affected both elite women and ordinary middle-class women with either no education or very little education. However, the elite women had the support of male leaders from their own households, which made their public entry easier than those of the ordinary middle-class women. The political charisma of nationalist leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru further facilitated this process. However, since elite women shared the same social norms as middle-

class they needed stronger political platform through which they could motivate themselves as well as other middle-class women. This was provided through two channels: first, the incorporation of domestic articles such as salt and cloth into the political discourse. Ordinary middle-class women could relate to these items of daily use. Second, nationalist symbolism associated with women as nurturers and defenders of civilization elevated women's existing roles in both public and domestic domains, facilitated by the wider favorable nationalist atmosphere of segregation and respectability. The latter was important for both elite and ordinary middle-class women. Once women negotiated the diffused public-private boundaries, they had the choice of adopting the different political ideologies of either non-violent Gandhism or revolutionary strategies, which often used violence as a means of achieving political aims. This study would not be complete without looking at ways in which women's participation shaped their lives after Independence.

#### **MILESTONES OF FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN INDIA:**

1. The first war of Independence (1857-58)
2. Partition of Bengal, Swadeshi Movement (1905)
3. Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (1919)
4. Non-cooperation movement (1920)
5. Poorna Swaraj declaration by the congress; Meerut conspiracy case (1929)
6. Civil disobedience: The Dandi March (1930)
7. The Quit India Movement (1942)

#### **WOMEN LEADERS OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT:**

There is no doubt that women participated in the Indian anti-imperialist struggle in large numbers. If we were to



recall the names of women leaders in our national movement, we will find that the list is a very long one. Starting with Sarojini Naidu, Rani Laxmi Bai, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Mridula Sarabhai at the national level, we may go on to provincial level leaders like Annie Mascarene and A.V. Kuttimalamma in Kerala, Durgabai Deshmukh in Madras Presidency, Rameshwari Nehru and Bi Amman in U.P., Satyawati Devi and Subhadra Joshi in Delhi, Hansa Mehta and Usha Mehta in Bombay and several others. In fact, such is the nature of our nationalist movement that it is very difficult to distinguish between regional level and all-India level leaders. Many women began at the local level and went on to become players in the nationalist centre stage.

**RANI ABBAKKA** : Abbakka Rant in one of the earliest freedom fighters of India who resisted the Portuguese. The regions where Abbakka was queen is known as Tulunadu, Rani Abbakka, though a Queen of a little known small princely state, Ullal, was magnetic woman of indomitable courage and patriotism. While Rani Jhansi has become a symbol of courage, Abbakka, nearly 300 years her predecessor has been largely forgotten by history. Her furious wars with Portuguese are not well recorded. Ullal Fort, the capital of Abbakka's Kingdom is located just few kilometers away from the city of Mangalore (Mangalore is in Dakshina Kannada Dist. Of Karnataka State), on the shores of the Arabian Sea. It is a historical as well as a pilgrim spot because of the beautiful Shiva Temple built by the Queen and a unique natural rock, called the Rudra Rock. Abbakka Mahadevi fought the Portuguese in the latter half of the 16th

century. She belonged to the Chowta dynasty who ruled over the area from the temple town of Moodabidri. The port town of Ullal served as their subsidiary capital. The Portuguese made several attempts to capture Ullal as it was strategically placed. But Abbakka repulsed each of their attacks of over four decades. She was also one of the earliest Indians to fight the colonial powers and is sometimes regarded as the first woman freedom fighter of India. Rani Abbakka Devi 2 had been crowned as the Queen of Ullal by her uncle Thirumala Raya. They belonged to the Jain royal dynasty of the Chowtas, ruling their tiny kingdom but the family deity was from the Hindu temple at Somanatheshwara. Chowta rulers were one of the many small feudatory states in Tulu Nadu that paid their allegiance to the rulers of Vijayanagara.

**RANI CHENNAMMA**: Earliest ruler of fight British rule Rani Chennamma was the first woman Independence activist of Bharat. She stood all alone with vibrant fiery eye against the British Empire. Rani Chennamma did not succeed in driving them away, but she did provoke many women to rise against the British rule. She was Chennamma Queen of the princely state Kittur in Today she is well known as Kittur Rani Chennamma. Let us take a few steps back in history to know more about her.

Rani Chennamma was born in Kakati (a small village in north Belgaum in Karnataka), in 1778 that is almost 56 years earlier than Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi. From a very young age she received training in horse riding, sword fighting and archery. She was well known for her brave acts across her town. Rani Chennamma was married to Mallasarja Desal, ruler of Kittur at the age of 15. Her married life seemed to be a sad tale



after her husband died in 1816. With this marriage she had only one son, but fate seemed to play a tragic game in her life. Her son breathed his last in 1824, leaving the lonely soul to fight against the British rule.

The Doctrine of Lapse was imposed on native states by the British. Under this declaration, native rulers were not allowed to adopt a child if they had no children of their own. Their territory formed part of the British Empire automatically. The state of Kittur came under the administration of Dharwad collectorate in charge of Mr. Thackeray. Mr. Chaplin was the commissioner of the region. Both did not recognize the new ruler and the regent and informed that Kittur had to accept the British regime.

**UMABAI KUNDAPUR** : Born in Mangalore, she got married to Sanjiv Rao at 13 years. Her father-in-law, Ananda Rao Kundapur was a reformist and staunch believer in upliftment of women. His encouragement helped her in completing matriculation and later helped her father-in-law in education women through Gunadevi Mahila Samaj, Mumbai. During the funeral procession of Tilak, she was attracted towards the freedom struggle and became a volunteer of Congress and advocated the Khadi Movement. She wrote and enacted a play on Swadeshi and recruited women volunteers by going door to door. Later she became the leader of women's wing of Hindustan Seva Dal. In spite of all odds and death of her husband, her determination to participate in the freedom struggle did not deter.

The responsibility of recruiting volunteers to the Belagam Congress Session was given to Umabal by Dr. Hardikar. She travelled to Bangalore, Mangalore, Udupi and recruiting more than 100 volunteers. In order to impart education to women,

she started a school in Hubli. Later in the year 1927-28, she was elected as Vice President of Karnataka Regional Congress. She also actively involved herself in the 1942 Quit India Movement. For the selfless service, sacrifice, dedication and her devotion towards the nation has been an inspiration to all.

**KAMALADEVI CHATTOPADHYAYA**

: Kamaladevi's life reflected a remarkable era in India's history; she lived the problems faced by Indian women and triumphed in the Indian renaissance. She was born in an intellectual family to Ananthalah and Girijabat Dhareshwar in Mangalore. Even though well off, the sudden death of her father caused turmoil in the family and Mrs. Dhareshwar lost her rightful inheritances. To reduce the responsibilities of the widow, Kamaladevi was married even when she was a child and she herself became a widow, before understanding the meaning a marriage!

The young girl had to face the scorn of an orthodox society, as the status of a widow was miserable then, Yet, Kamaladevi pursued education and her hobbies. She was a beautiful girl and took interest in arts and theater. A young poet Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, brother of Sarojini Naidu, fell in love with her and despite their differences in caste and languages, they were married. The marriage did not last long, however. It was the time in India when Mahatma Gandhi gave a call for freedom not only from colonialism but also India's own problems of untouchability and poverty. He called upon women to fight side by side with men. Kamaladevi became an active organizer of the women and young wing of the Indian National Congress. She was instrumental in the emergence of the changing face of the Indian women during twentieth century Kamaladevi



became a prominent leader during India's freedom struggle organizing satyagrahas, mobilizing volunteers and fighting deeply rooted social evils. She travelled all over the world publicizing India's cause.

Along with freedom in 1947 the nation on India inherited so many problems of the partition. Kamaladevi worked relentlessly to heal the wounds of refugees by establishing co-operative societies and self-employment schemes. She went on to rejuvenate the traditional Indian home industries like weaving and handicrafts. As chief of the Board of Handicrafts, she started the pension system for the craftsmen.

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya's contribution in preserving and promoting India's art, culture and heritage is quite unequalled. She served this cause till she was marginalized by Indira Gandhi's coterie. She continued to be great patron of Indian art and theater. Ibrahim Alkazi, the first director of National School of Drama (NSD) once narrated her love of the stage - "She would climb up four storied theater galleries even in her old age, would enjoy the show, and then meet the artists personally and offer congratulations and tips for improvement". She didn't care for personal recognition or wealth. What a selfless volunteers she was! She was a trade-unionist, a revolutionary, a reformer, a great patron of arts, an accomplished writer (She has authored twelve books), an orator and a freedom fighter. A truly amazing woman from India. This week (April 5, 2003) we recognize her on the occasion of her birth centennial. Excerpted from "The woman who knew so much" (Bahuballide Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya in Kannada) from the book Nenapinalli Nintavaru by Jyotsna Kamat, Mahila Sahityika, Hubli, 2000.

#### THIRUMALA

Kannadiga who had the honor of winning Gandhiji's love and affection Kamala Hampana was born in our own land Tumkur, In 1900 to a school master. As child she had a flair for music. Along with her husband Thirumala Tatacharya movement and was immensely influenced by Gandhi's dedication. She composed many songs and sang which was an inspiration to many dedicated themselves to the cause of freedom struggle.

#### NAGAMMA VEERANNA GOWDA

**PATIL:** Popularly known as 'Harijana Priye' for the selfless service rendered in the upliftment of Harijans, she dedicated herself for the cause of Harijans. Her husband Veerannagowda Patil was also influenced by Gandhi's movement. The couple was inspired by Gandhi's message that "untouchability is also a struggle in the freedom movement", Patil, gave this entire responsibility to his wife Nagamma. When Nagamma hesitated and told she being an uneducated what she can do? Gandhi asked her to adopt few Harijan Children and treat them as their daughters, she immediately nung into action and from then onwards never looked back. Because of the painstaking efforts of the couple, Hubli has many educational institutions especially for women. Later her daughter Leelavathi and son-in-law Venkatesha Magadi also join the struggle and entire family dedicates to the cause of freedom.

Some other women were also fought against British in Karnataka they are Yashodaramma

Dasappa, Manangidevakka Ramananda, G.C Bhagirathamma, Ballery Siddamma, Subbamma Jois, M.R Lakshamma, Sushila Bheemkumar, Shantha Bai Dattatreya Karamakara, Rama Bai Jeevan Rao Yalagi, Seethamma Subramanya Shastri etc.,





**CONCLUSION:** The story of women's participation in India freedom struggle is the story of making bold choices, finding themselves on streets, inside jail and in legislature. After so many efforts India achieved Independence on August 15, 1947. Thousands of Indian women dedicated their lives for obtaining freedom of their motherland. The nonviolent movement that gained India her freedom not only took women along but was dependent for its success on the active participation of women. Perhaps for the first and the only time in world history, the power of a mighty global empire on which the sun never set had been challenged and overcome by the moral might of a people armed only with peace, ideas and courage. In the end we can say that in the last fifty-year, women movement has matured and has progressively deepened its relationship with other movement like trader unions, environmental movements and other progressive movements which fight against all forms of oppression, injustice and degradation.

Feminism and Nationalism were never mutually exclusive for women in women's organizations like women's Indian Association, All India Women's Conference and National Council of Women in India. There may have been conflict with the nationalist over priorities and tactics but not over ultimate goals. Feminism and Nationalism were closely inter linked. The selfless service, dedication and sacrifice of these women were a great inspiration to everyone and there were many such unheard voices and unseen faces in the freedom struggle of India and Karnataka.

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