

# The Freedom Movement in Bombay Karnataka: Role of Women's Contributions

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## Abstract

Since civilization time, women's contribution in one or the other fields is immense in the Indian history. That too particularly in the freedom Movement, liberating the mother India from the foreign rule and also in the freedom Movement of Bombay Karnataka, women's contribution is really appreciative. Not only men but also women who participated in the freedom struggle with complete Mind heart and work. They also stood bravely as a backbone for this cause.

There were only few women in the beginning stage of the freedom struggle, they did not participate completely because in the beginning Most of the anti-British Movements were revolutionary and violent in their nature. Therefore, women stood apart from the struggle. But Gandhi entered to the freedom struggle in 1917 and called for the use of Ahimsa or non violence as a weapon. From then, every section of the Indian society started to participate in this movement. women in particular actively participated in this struggle and started to oppose the British policies in their own ways. A group of women participated in the violent arm movement, some participated in non-violent and same women indirectly supported or assisted the revolutionaries. Here. I'm going to discuss about those brave women participated in our freedom struggle that is particularly from Bombay Karnataka region

**Keywords:** Swadeshi Movement, Rashtreeya Shala, Anti Partition, Swadi Dynasty, Coorg and Civil Disobedience

## INTRODUCTION

The Freedom Movement in North Karnataka was more intensified widespread and radical than in the other areas of Karnataka. The sudden emergence of the associations and organizations is one of the achievements of anti-partition movement, which was turned as Swadeshi movement in India general and in Bengal particular. Most of such the Samitis or national volunteer movements were quite open bodies engaged in a variety of activities. Physical and moral training of members, social work during famines, epidemics, religious festivals, preaching the Swadeshi message through multifarious forms, organizing crafts, school arbitration courts and village societies, implementing the techniques of passive resistance to the foreign rule

Indian Nationalist Movement the role of women's participation is special nature in Karnataka. Women were participated very actively and sacrificed their lives for the cause of their motherland. Queen Chennamma of Kittur started an era of revolt against the British in India. 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. It must be highlighted that, Queen Chennamma once defeated a British force and killed Thackeray. In the second encounter with the British army, she was defeated. Thus, Queen Chennamma of Kittur started an era of revolt successfully in Karnataka. Belawadi Mallamma of the Swadi dynasty, Abbakka, Queen of Ullal kingdom of South Kanara district, Keladi Queen Chennamma and Rani Veeramma of Keladi dynasty are the names of few women rulers who demonstrated their heroism as queens and fought for independence of their territories.

Mahatma Gandhiji's visits to Belgaum in 1924 left everlasting impression upon the freedom fighters. Millions of women participated in individual Satyagraha, salt Satyagraha and No Tax Campaign and thereby Gandhian era of independence started in the state. Women freedom fighters along with men fought for socioeconomic values and to popularize democratic ideas. 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.

Bombay Karnataka 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. The sacrifice made by women is a special feature and culture of Karnataka. One can remember Attimabbe of 10th century, Akka Mahadevi of 12th century, Gangambika of Vijayanager, Onake Obavva have set examples many centuries before the actual fire of freedom struggle could start in the country. People of the state, have responded positively to the political awakening and participated actively in the freedom movement. Belgaum, Dharwad, Uttara Kannada 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. 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. Half of Karnataka area was under the rule of Indian princes. Besides Mysore and the Kannada Districts in the Nizam's state, there were nearly a dozen small princely states like Sondur, Savanuru, Ramadurg, Jamakhandi, Mudhola, 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 up heal 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. In this article separately studied selected women's freedom fighters like Nagamma Veernagouda Patil, Sitabai Ramachandra Madagaonkar, Ramabai Jeevanrao Yalagi and Mahadevitai

Doddanne Hegde. These women's freedom fighters were given most prominent and intellectual role in Nationalistic Movement in Karnataka. Women freedom fighters' contributions and all activities impact on contemporary India.

### **Prominent Women's Freedom Fighters and Contributions:**

#### **Smt. Ramabai Jeevanarao Yalgi**

It is difficult to avoid a mention of the famous Yalgi family of Belgaum, while talking of the history of the movement for Indian Independence. Shri Govindrao Yalgi lit the first spark of patriotic spirit in his family under the benign influence of Deshbhakta late Gangadharrao Deshpande three scores of years ago and the spark continues to shed its light until today unabated. In fact, it has been the nursery of several patriots for decades now. It was to this family that Smt. Ramabai belonged. She was recognized both in Maharashtra and Karnataka as a brave woman ever engaged in mitigating the sufferings of others and an indomitable fighter in the social and political fields.

Born in 1900 A. D. at Bellary, Ramabai was married to Shri. Jeevanrao Yalgi, of Belgaum, when she was just stepping into the teens (1913). It was Govindrao the eldest of the trio, a patriot of Tilak tradition and zeal, who initiated young Jeevanrao Yalgi and his elder brother Krishnarao Yalgi into the spirit of national service. Practically every member of the family was more or less closely associated with a number of revolutionary episodes figuring on the political scene then, while pursuing openly the Four-point programme enunciated by the late B. G. Tilak. Police raids, searches, arrests were a daily feature. The Sword of Damocles was all the time hanging on the heads of the members of this household in those glorious twenties. She showed complete self-abnegation in responding to the wish of her husband, Shri Jeevanrao Yalgi. What with the nationalist schools (Rashtriya Shala), the gymnasiums, the Melos and the Cotton spinning, the couple shared all activities, with full devotion.

During the direct-action politics of the B. G. Tilak days all the adults in the family were engrossed fully. Naturally a great responsibility devolved on the active women members at home. From facing the police raids to hosting the VIPS of the political cadre in hundreds they were required to go through it all as a compulsive ordeal, with a bright joyful face, without a complaint. Ramabai was the main figure to keep up this spirit in the family. Soon followed the Gandhi epoch, with all its throes in full as the resistance to the British grew grimmer and grimmer. The Yalgi women now came out into the open. The Prabhat Pheris, the sessions at Charkha, Women's Club Organizations, wielding the brooms to clean the Harijan settlements and to have common feasts with them truly secular in letter and spirit-the whole panorama opened up before them. The task of educating young and old women was conducted with great tenacity. The husbands were in jails but the women neither faltered, nor would they get demoralized.

The year 1941 witnessed the commencement of Individual Satyagraha. Gandhiji personally attended to the selection of Satyagrahis. The selection of Shri Jeevanrao was a foregone conclusion. But the selection of Ramabai for the Satyagraha, by Gandhiji himself was a 'striking' event. Ramabai was sentenced to nine months imprisonment, her jail mates then being none other than Mridulaben Sarabhai and Maniben Patel. They were all clubbed under the category of women criminals! During her stay in jail Ramabai developed special relationship with other common women criminals. She carried social service to the jails-a point worthy of note for the authors of jail manuals. Smt, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya has made a glorious reference to this fact in one of her public lectures.

In 1942, Ramabai was arrested once again, but this time her companion was her own niece Malutai. All the menfolk in the family were already behind the bars by then. She was released on parole on account of her poor health. But the very next day she defied the ban by joining the session at the 'Magic wheel' in Maruti Temple. The D.S.P' Corngham, 'the tiger' of Ahmednagar, called on Dr. Yalgi in jail only to say "Tell Ramabai, your auntie, to stop all this". Dr. Yalgi reacted sharply. "She is quite capable of looking after herself! But I fail to understand why the government should worry if one went on quietly spinning at the Charakha"; The D.S.P. waved his hands frantically and thundered "No! No! That's the germ of the whole discontent. It must stop.

Eventually the agitation slowed down but the whole family bore its scars and got plunged into a financial crisis from which there was no easy way out. But Ramabai once again showed her mettle in helping her husband. Jeevanrao Yalgi. Now it was starting all over again, from scratch! Like any Hindu wife, one of her greatest wishes was to die before her husband. She did achieve it when she breathed her last on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1966.

### **Smt. Sitabai Ramachandra Madagaonkar**

Sitabai Ramachandra Madagaonkar hails from a family of well known patriots. Haimappa Chandraghatgi of Siddapur, the noted freedom fighter, was her uncle. Her father-in-law, Hari Ramakrishna Madagaonkar and his brother Vaman Madagaonkar were also known for their contribution to the Indian freedom movement. Sitabai's uncle, Hariyappa, joined the National School Siddapur in 1921, and she studied, in addition to formal education; she learnt cycling and swimming, yoga and special works in National activities and self-reliance.

For a while after her marriage, she led a domestic life but it was not long before she took the inevitable plunge. With the encouragement of the elders, she began to take part in the hoisting of national flag and mochas. The police would round them up, snatch away flags and books containing national songs and frighten them by keeping them in the open till 10 p.m. on many occasions. Pressure used to be brought on them to make them disclose the whereabouts of their active workers.<sup>136</sup> Sitabai's in-laws' home was often the center of national activity. The workers would collect there to discuss plans and methods of action. Her brother-in-law and father-in-law were both in jail. She took part in freedom mochas even when she had gone to her mother's place for confinement.

Along with other women workers, she offered to fast in front of the houses of those who had purchased in auction confiscated domestic animals. Being delicate in her condition, as her baby was just a couple of days old; she could not stand the strain. But after some attention to her health in Hanajibail under the care of Shri Ramachandra Bhat, she began to take part in the fasting Satyagraha once again. She was frequently arrested and was confined to the police lockup for short intervals. Later she decided to work in the background without getting caught. She would help the Satyagrahis, give them refuge in her place and visit them when they were in jail. She and the other members of the family were harassed by the police continuously. When one of her aunts died all her relatives were in jail. Her house was often subjected to police search and whatever was available used to be confiscated. The government even decided to take under its custody all the houses of the Satyagrahis' they could not even celebrate festivals like the Ganesha festival properly as only womenfolk were left at home. Even her brothers were behind the bars. When Sitabai Madagaonkar attended the Taluka Political Conference at Bonagiri, she was arrested along with the President and Vice-President of the conference and several others. After some twenty days of being pushed about from place to place, she was sentenced to 9 months'

imprisonment. As there was no other woman-Satyagrahi in the Karwar jail she had to remain along with her four-month-old child in a separate cell.

When a couple of others joined her, they were all taken to Hindalaga; they were in 'C' class. In the 'B' class were Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Leelavati Munshi, Maniben Patel and others. Smt. Madgaonkar was sent to Yervada where she was ultimately released. One of the inmates here was one Shantamma from Ankola who had been put in prison without any court order that effect. They had to work from 9 a.m. till 4 p.m. Smt. Madgaonkar did, in addition to the work allotted to her, even other people's work, if they were weak or were not trained in that kind of work. Smt. Sarojini Naidu, who was in the 'A' class? Often came to talk to the others and help look after the small children. When Smt. Madgaonkar was released, she felt bad for the older women who were left behind, for they were being treated by the authorities with no sympathy.

### **Smt. Mahadevitai Doddamane Hegde**

The late Mahadevi Tai was an Indian freedom activist. She was born in 1906, and was the cousin sister of former Chief Minister late Ramakrishna Hegde. A child widow, she was the daughter of Doddamane Krishnaiah Subbaiah Hegde of Siddapur taluk in North Kanara district, whose family is well known for its sacrifices during the Indian freedom struggle in Bombay Karnataka. Plunging into the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 and later she joined Mahatma Gandhiji's ashram at Wardah. She was a close associate of Acharya Vinobha Bhave and Jamnal Bajaj.

Doddamane Mahadevi Hegde was an Indian freedom activist. She was born in 1906, and she was the cousin of the former Chief Minister of Karnataka late Ramakrishna Hegde. A child widow, she was the daughter of Doddamane Krishnaiah Subbaiah Hegde of Siddapura taluk in Uttara Kannada district, whose family is well known for its sacrifices during the Indian Freedom Movement in Bombay Karnataka. Plunging into the Freedom Movement in 1930, she joined Mahatma Gandhi's ashram at Wardah. She was a close associate of Acharya Vinobha Bhave and Jamnalal Bajaj. Mahadevi Tai, as she was called, joined the Indian National Congress and later the Sarvodaya Movement run by Acharya Vinobha Bhave. Mahadevi Tai went to jail three times during the freedom struggle. She is the founder of the Vishwaneedam Trust and the Vallabh Niketan in Bangalore, one of the Six Ashrams of Acharya Vinoba Bhave.

In 1942 Mahadevi Tai Hegde plunged into the Quit India movement and gave her role freedom of a nation. She went to jail three times during the freedom movement. She is the founder of the Vishwaneedam Trust and Vallabh Niketan in Bangalore.

### **Conclusion and Findings**

Karnataka has been known for many years as a land of bravemen. When British power slowly spread all over India, the people of Karnataka could not tolerate the Imposition of an alien rule and alien culture. So many decisive battles were waged by bravemen and women of Karnataka like Hyder All, Tippu Sultan of Mysore, Rani Channamma of Kittur, Sangolli Rayanna of Bailhongal, Bheema Rao of Mundaragi and many others.

So, Karnataka as a whole has played a vital role during the freedom struggle in India. The Bedas and Kodagas have been the foremost fighting races of Karnataka, and have continuously maintained their high reputation. The Bedas of Halagali fought under the leadership of Balaji Nimbalkar against Britishers. They had the great encouragement from Diwakar Dixit son of Chidambara. Dixit of Murgod,



but Nimbalkar died in the struggle. During the struggle Jadiyappa, 3alappa and 19 other people were hanged. The feelings of the Bedas of Halagali, who faced with an order from East India Company to surrender their arms, are recorded in a popular Kannada folksong, which highlights the brave deeds of the Bedas.

Women of Bombay 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 scarified there all to achieve their goal. The role of women in the freedom movement is unique in Karnataka.

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 like, Nagamma Veernagouda patil, Ramabai Jeevanarao Yalagi, Sitabai Madagaonkar and Mahadevitai Doddamane Hegade who were contributed out standing in freedom struggle of Karnataka. These people were greater initiative to conducting struggle activities in Karanataka. The Karnataka State has contributed a lot for the freedom struggle. Kannadigas are very well-known for bravery and courage. They 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, Hoyasals, Chalukyas of Badami, Vijayanagar kings for their love and dedication for freedom.

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