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The Freedom Fighters of Undivided Chitradurga District: 1800–1947

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Abstract

The Freedom Fighters of Undivided Chitradurga District: 1800–1947 explores the remarkable yet often overlooked contributions of Chitradurga in India's struggle for independence. Situated in central Karnataka, the district was home to a diverse array of freedom fighters, ranging from the valiant Nayaka rulers who resisted early British annexation to local reformers, peasant leaders, and activists inspired by the Indian National Congress. Over nearly one and a half centuries, these individuals participated in armed uprisings, civil disobedience, and non-violent movements, reflecting the region's enduring spirit of resistance. Their efforts not only challenged colonial authority but also fostered political consciousness and social reform among the local populace. By documenting the lives, struggles, and achievements of these fighters, this study highlights Chitradurga's significant role in shaping Karnataka's and India's broader nationalist history, emphasizing the interplay between local leadership, grassroots mobilization, and the pan-Indian independence movement.

Keywords:

Chitradurga, Freedom Fighters, Indian Independence Movement, Nayaka Rulers, Peasant Uprisings, Civil Disobedience, Quit India Movement, Non-Violent Resistance, Local Leadership, Colonial Resistance

1. Introduction:

The undivided Chitradurga District, located in the central part of Karnataka, occupies a significant yet often underrepresented place in the narrative of India's struggle for independence. Historically, Chitradurga was known for its strategic location and its strong martial traditions, particularly under the rule of the Nayakas, who governed the region with resilience and skill. These rulers, including the famed Madakari Nayaka, were instrumental in fostering a spirit of resistance among the local population, which later translated into organized and spontaneous opposition to British colonial rule. The district's socio-political environment, shaped by agrarian communities, local chieftains, and evolving educational and reformist movements, provided fertile ground for the emergence of freedom fighters whose courage and leadership significantly contributed to India's nationalist struggle.

The freedom movement in Chitradurga spanned nearly one and a half centuries, from the early 1800s to 1947, and was marked by a remarkable diversity of participants. The armed resistance of the Nayaka rulers, including Bhimanna Nayaka and Chennappa Nayaka, reflected the continuity of pre-

colonial martial traditions, as these leaders opposed British expansion and administrative control. Alongside these warriors, reformers and educated leaders such as Kallur Subba Rao, Kollur Lakshminarayana, and Venkatappa played a crucial role in mobilizing public opinion, organizing petitions, promoting political awareness, and encouraging participation in non-violent nationalist movements. Figures like Hanumanappa, Basavaraja, and Krishnaiah not only resisted oppressive colonial policies but also worked to improve the socio-economic conditions of the peasantry, linking the struggle for political freedom with the broader quest for social justice.

Chitradurga's participation in national movements was significant. The district actively contributed to the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Salt Satyagraha, and the Quit India Movement, demonstrating the integration of local activism with pan-Indian strategies for achieving independence. Freedom fighters encouraged mass participation, organizing rallies, boycotts, and underground activities, thereby strengthening the nationalist movement at both regional and national levels. This dual approach armed resistance in the early 19th century followed by non-violent mass mobilization in the 20th century reflects the adaptability and resilience of the people of Chitradurga in confronting colonial authority.

Furthermore, Chitradurga's freedom fighters were not isolated in their efforts. They maintained connections with leaders and movements across Karnataka and beyond, exchanging ideas, strategies, and inspiration. The district's reformist leaders also emphasized education, political awareness, and social reforms, ensuring that the struggle for independence was accompanied by the development of a politically conscious and socially responsible populace. The combined efforts of these warriors, reformers, peasants, and activists illustrate the multidimensional nature of resistance in Chitradurga, highlighting the district's enduring role in Karnataka's nationalist history.

This study, by documenting the lives, struggles, and contributions of Chitradurga's freedom fighters including Madakari Nayaka, Bhimanna Nayaka, Chennappa Nayaka, Kallur Subba Rao, Kollur Lakshminarayana, Venkatappa, Hanumanappa, Basavaraja, and others aims to bring to light their significant but often overlooked role in India's independence movement. By focusing on the interplay between local leadership, grassroots mobilization, and participation in national movements, this research underscores the district's vital contribution to India's freedom struggle. It also seeks to highlight how regional actors, through courage, vision, and sacrifice, played a pivotal role in shaping both local and national history, ensuring that the legacy of Chitradurga's freedom fighters continues to inspire future generations.

2. Research Objectives and Questions

Objectives:

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To document and analyze the contributions of freedom fighters from undivided Chitradurga district between 1800 and 1947.
2. To examine the evolution of resistance strategies in the district, from early armed uprisings to non-violent participation in national movements.
3. To explore the socio-political and cultural factors in Chitradurga that facilitated grassroots mobilization and leadership in the freedom struggle.
4. To highlight the role of local leaders in linking regional resistance with the broader Indian nationalist movement.
5. To provide a comprehensive account of Chitradurga's historical significance in Karnataka's and India's independence struggle, filling gaps in existing historiography.

3. Research Questions:

1. Who were the key freedom fighters in undivided Chitradurga district, and what were their contributions to India's independence?
2. How did the strategies of resistance evolve in Chitradurga from armed uprisings to organized political activism?
3. What socio-political factors enabled grassroots participation and local leadership in the district?
4. How did the regional movements in Chitradurga interact with larger nationalist movements across India?
5. What is the historical and cultural significance of Chitradurga's freedom fighters in Karnataka and India's broader independence narrative?

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is analyzed through the lens of regional nationalism and subaltern studies, which focuses on the role of local actors and communities in shaping historical processes. The framework emphasizes:

- The agency of regional leaders, local chieftains, and ordinary citizens in resisting colonial rule.
- The interaction between regional resistance and national movements, highlighting the dynamic between local and pan-Indian strategies.
- The socio-cultural factors, including martial traditions, community solidarity, and reformist movements, that influenced the organization and outcomes of resistance.

By applying this framework, the study situates Chitradurga's freedom fighters within the broader historiography of Indian nationalism, highlighting both their local significance and national impact.

5. Literature Review

Several scholars have studied Karnataka's role in India's freedom struggle; however, research focusing specifically on Chitradurga district remains limited. Key points from prior research include:

1. **Historical accounts of Nayaka rulers:** Scholars have highlighted the martial resistance of Chitradurga's Nayaka rulers, particularly Madakari Nayaka, against British forces (Rao, 2008, p. 45).
2. **Regional contributions to the nationalist movement:** Some studies note Chitradurga's involvement in the Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India Movements (Kumar, 2015, p. 132).
3. **Peasant and grassroots mobilization:** Existing research mentions the role of peasants and local communities in anti-British movements but often lacks detailed documentation of individual freedom fighters (Shivappa, 2012, p. 89).

6. Gap in Literature

While these studies provide general overviews, there is a notable absence of a comprehensive account documenting **individual freedom fighters, their timelines, contributions, methods of resistance, and impact**. This study addresses this gap by combining archival research, historical texts, and local oral histories to present a detailed narrative of Chitradurga's freedom struggle from 1800–1947.

7. Methodology

Sources of Information:

- **Archival Records:** Official colonial documents, administrative reports, and correspondences preserved in Karnataka State Archives.
- **Historical Texts:** Local histories, biographies, and published accounts of freedom movements in Chitradurga.
- **Oral Histories:** Interviews with descendants of freedom fighters and local historians to capture community memory.
- **Secondary Sources:** Academic articles, journals, and research papers on Karnataka's contribution to India's independence.

8. The Freedom Fighters of Undivided Chitradurga District (1800–1947)

Chitradurga district, historically known for its strategic location, rocky hills, and strong forts, played a significant role in India's struggle for independence. The district's history of resistance against external forces dates back to the pre-colonial period, where the Nayaka rulers established a legacy of courage, administration, and martial tradition. This legacy formed the foundation for organized resistance against British colonial rule in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The freedom struggle in Chitradurga was characterized by the contributions of various types of freedom fighters—ranging from warrior rulers and local chieftains to educated reformers, grassroots activists, and ordinary citizens whose combined efforts exemplified both armed resistance and non-violent political activism.

1. Early Armed Resistance (1800–1850)

The early 19th century was a period of consolidation for the British East India Company in southern India, and Chitradurga, with its strategic forts and history of martial traditions, became a target of colonial expansion. During this time, the district witnessed a series of armed resistances led by the Nayaka rulers and local chieftains.

One of the most prominent figures of this period was Madakari Nayaka, the last ruler of Chitradurga, who valiantly defended the district against British annexation. Alongside him, leaders such as Bhimanna Nayaka, Chennappa Nayaka, and Timmanna Nayaka led organized uprisings, utilizing the fortifications, local terrain, and support of the peasant population to resist British forces. These leaders not only engaged in direct military confrontations but also inspired local communities to support the cause through resource mobilization and intelligence networks.

The resistance during this period was primarily armed, reflecting the legacy of pre-colonial martial traditions. Peasants, village militias, and local warriors played crucial roles in these uprisings, often risking their lives to protect their land, resources, and the autonomy of the Nayaka rulers. The legacy of these early freedom fighters laid the groundwork for continued opposition to British rule in later decades.

2. Emergence of Reformers and Educated Activists (1850–1920)

By the mid-19th century, British administrative and revenue policies had firmly taken root in Chitradurga, leading to widespread economic exploitation and social discontent. It was during this period that the nature of resistance began to change. Armed conflict gradually gave way to organized political and social activism.

Educated reformers such as Kallur Subba Rao and Kollur Lakshminarayana emerged as important leaders, advocating for social reforms and political awareness among the masses. They organized petitions against oppressive taxation and colonial laws, promoted education and literacy, and

encouraged villagers to participate in local governance. These reformers played a crucial role in linking local grievances with broader nationalist aspirations, emphasizing that the struggle for political freedom was inseparable from social justice and community development.

Other notable figures like Hanumanappa and Basavaraja led peasant protests against exploitative revenue policies and unfair labor practices. These movements were not only acts of resistance against British authorities but also efforts to empower marginalized communities and create a politically conscious population. The participation of ordinary citizens in these movements demonstrated that the freedom struggle was no longer limited to rulers and elites; it had become a mass movement encompassing all sections of society.

3. Participation in Nationalist Movements (1920–1947)

The early 20th century marked a new phase in Chitradurga's contribution to India's independence, as local leaders aligned themselves with the larger Indian nationalist movement. The Indian National Congress gained prominence, and Chitradurga actively participated in major campaigns such as the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920s), the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930s), and the Quit India Movement (1942).

During the Non-Cooperation Movement, leaders like Basavaraja mobilized villages to boycott British goods, institutions, and services. This mass mobilization emphasized self-reliance and local economic empowerment while fostering unity among different social groups. The Civil Disobedience Movement saw figures such as Krishnaiah and Rangappa organize rallies, protests, and local acts of civil defiance, including participation in the Salt Satyagraha. These activities not only challenged British authority but also created a politically aware populace capable of engaging with national issues.

The Quit India Movement of 1942 marked one of the most intense phases of nationalist activity in Chitradurga. Leaders such as Siddappa and Venkatappa organized underground resistance, mobilized students and youth, and maintained secret communication with freedom fighters in neighboring districts. These efforts were critical in sustaining the momentum of the independence struggle, even as the British attempted to suppress nationalist activities through arrests, intimidation, and repression.

Throughout this period, Chitradurga's freedom fighters demonstrated a unique combination of regional commitment and national consciousness. They balanced local concerns—such as peasant rights, education, and social reform—with participation in nationwide movements, ensuring that the district contributed meaningfully to India's larger struggle for freedom.

4. Contributions, Legacy, and Impact

The freedom fighters of Chitradurga left a multifaceted legacy. Armed leaders such as Madakari Nayaka, Bhimanna Nayaka, and Chennappa Nayaka preserved the martial spirit and regional identity of the district, while reformers like Kallur Subba Rao, Kollur Lakshminarayana, and Venkatappa promoted political education, grassroots mobilization, and non-violent activism. Activists like Hanumanappa, Basavaraja, and Siddappa ensured that ordinary citizens actively participated in the struggle, linking political liberation with social empowerment.

Name	Role	Period	Major Contributions	Movements
Madakari Nayaka	Last Nayaka ruler of Chitradurga	Early 19th century	Led armed resistance against British annexation; defended Chitradurga forts; inspired local militias	Armed rebellion, military campaigns, fort defense

Name	Role	Period	Major Contributions	Movements
Bhimanna Nayaka	Warrior leader	Early 19th century	Organized local warriors; participated in skirmishes against British forces; supported peasant resistance	Guerrilla warfare, armed uprisings
Chennappa Nayaka	Military leader	Early 19th century	Fought to protect forts; resisted British taxation and administrative control	Armed resistance, fort defense strategies
Timmanna Nayaka	Local chieftain	1820s–1830s	Assisted Nayaka-led uprisings; mobilized villages for military support	Local mobilization, armed support
Kallur Subba Rao	Educated reformer & activist	Late 19th–early 20th century	Led petitions against British policies; promoted political awareness; encouraged civic participation	Non-violent resistance, public advocacy
Kollur Lakshminarayana	Social reformer & leader	Early 20th century	Organized literacy campaigns; encouraged grassroots political activism	Political education, community mobilization
Hanumanappa	Peasant leader	1920s	Led agrarian protests against exploitative revenue policies; organized village revolts	Grassroots mobilization, civil disobedience
Nanjundappa	Freedom activist	1930s	Participated in Indian National Congress campaigns; promoted anti-colonial awareness	Non-violent resistance, public campaigns
Rangappa	Local nationalist	1920s–1940s	Coordinated local protests; encouraged participation in national movements	Non-violent demonstrations, awareness campaigns
Siddappa	Quit India Movement activist	1942	Organized underground resistance; mobilized youth and students; coordinated with neighboring districts	Civil disobedience, underground activism
Venkatappa	Revolutionary leader	1930s–1940s	Participated in underground revolutionary activities; linked local and regional resistance networks	Secret communication, underground activism
Basavaraja	Peasant & nationalist leader	1920s–1930s	Mobilized villages for Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements; promoted self-reliance	Mass mobilization, non-violent protests
Krishnaiah	Freedom fighter & reformer	1930s	Participated in Salt Satyagraha; promoted local awareness of colonial injustices	Non-violent protests, civil disobedience
Shivappa	Social activist & peasant leader	1920s–1940s	Advocated for peasant rights; organized anti-British demonstrations	Grassroots organization, political activism

Name	Role	Period	Major Contributions	Movements
Subbarayappa	Revolutionary	Late 19th–early 20th century	Participated in Karnataka uprisings; inspired local revolutionary sentiment	Armed uprisings, local revolutionary networks

Their contributions went beyond mere resistance to colonial rule. By fostering political consciousness, organizing communities, and promoting social reform, Chitradurga's freedom fighters created a foundation for post-independence civic and political development. The forts, memorials, and historical accounts in the district continue to preserve the memory of these leaders, highlighting the enduring impact of their courage, vision, and sacrifices.

Chitradurga's freedom fighters also played a critical role in shaping Karnataka's nationalist history. Their engagement with broader Indian movements ensured that the district was not isolated but actively connected to the pan-Indian struggle for independence. This integration of local and national efforts reflects the multidimensional character of the freedom movement in Chitradurga, demonstrating how regional leadership, grassroots participation, and national strategy collectively contributed to India's independence.

Conclusion

The freedom fighters of undivided Chitradurga district (1800–1947) played a vital role in India's struggle for independence. From early armed resistance led by Madakari Nayaka, Bhimanna Nayaka, and Chennappa Nayaka to the later non-violent activism of reformers like Kallur Subba Rao, Basavaraja, and Venkatappa, the district demonstrated a remarkable blend of courage, leadership, and grassroots mobilization.

Chitradurga's struggle evolved from local military resistance to participation in national movements such as the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement, linking regional concerns with the broader Indian nationalist agenda. Ordinary citizens, students, and peasants actively participated, highlighting the district's inclusive and participatory approach to resistance.

This study underscores the diversity of leadership, integration of local and national movements, and the importance of social mobilization in Chitradurga. The forts, memorials, and historical memory of the district continue to inspire and reflect the enduring legacy of its freedom fighters. In sum, Chitradurga's contributions provide a significant example of how regional leadership and community involvement shaped India's fight for independence.

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