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## "UNTOLD HEROINES: WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO KARNATAKA'S STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE"

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### Abstract:

The role of women freedom fighters in Karnataka was crucial and unique, both in the pre-Gandhian and Gandhian periods. They actively participated and made significant sacrifices in the struggle for independence, leaving an indelible mark in the history of the state. This abstract explores their remarkable contributions, highlighting their role in the freedom movement. In the pre-Gandhian period, women rulers like Belawadi Mallamma, Abbakka, Keladi Rani Channamma, and Rani Veeramma fought for the independence of their territories. Their bravery and leadership set the stage for future women freedom fighters.

During the Gandhian era, which began around 1920, women in Karnataka embraced Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy and actively participated in the freedom struggle. Inspired by Gandhi's visit to Belgaum in 1924, many women became staunch followers. They engaged in individual Satyagraha, salt Satyagraha, and the No Tax Campaign, promoting democratic ideals and socio-economic values. Prominent women freedom fighters in Karnataka included Umabai Kundapur, Bellary Siddamma, T. Sunandamma, Kamaldevi Chattopadhyay, Nagamma Patil, Krishnabai Panjekar, Subbamma Jois, Yashodharamma Dasappa, Padmavati Bidari, Jayadevitai Ligade, Sitabai Ramchandra Madagaonkar, and Shakuntala Kurtakoti. The contributions of women freedom fighters in Karnataka remain an inspiration today. Their courage, resilience, and unwavering commitment to freedom serve as a reminder of the pivotal role played by women in shaping the destiny of the nation

Key Words: Freedom, Women, Sacrifice,

### Introduction:

The role of women in the freedom movement in Karnataka was significant and unique. Throughout both the pre-Gandhian and Gandhian periods, women actively participated and made sacrifices for the cause of their motherland. In the pre-Gandhian period, several queens played crucial roles in fighting for independence in their respective territories. Belawadi Mallamma, from the Swadi dynasty, is remembered for her valiant efforts in the freedom struggle. Abbakka Rani, the queen of the Ullal kingdom in South Kanara district, also fought against the British. Keladi Rani Channamma and Rani Veeramma of the Keladi dynasty were notable queens who played active roles in the struggle for independence.

The Gandhian era of the freedom struggle in Karnataka began around 1920. Mahatma Gandhi's visit to Belgaum in 1924 left a lasting impression on the freedom fighters in the region. During this period, women actively participated in various forms of resistance, including individual Satyagraha, salt Satyagraha, and the No Tax Campaign. Women freedom fighters fought alongside men to promote socio-economic values and spread democratic ideals. Queen Channamma of Kittur, in particular, initiated a

significant revolt against the British rule in India. The contributions and sacrifices made by these women were instrumental in shaping the freedom movement in Karnataka. Their active participation challenged societal norms and helped pave the way for a more inclusive and progressive society.

### **Geographical Background:**

The Kannada-speaking people of Karnataka responded positively to the political awakening and actively participated in the freedom movement, despite facing indifferent and uneven circumstances. The districts of Belgaum, Dharwad, Karwar, and Bijapur, collectively known as Bombay Karnataka, were part of the Bombay presidency under British administration. The political awakening in the Bombay presidency had a significant influence on these districts.

Mysore, on the other hand, was an enlightened princely state and responded to the national call for independence in its own way. The name of Kittur Rani Channamma, the warrior queen, became a source of inspiration for all. She was the first Indian woman warrior to fight against the British, symbolizing the courage and determination of the people.

Gulbarga, Raichur, and Bidar districts were part of the Nizam's State. During the pre-independence era, it was challenging to challenge Nizam's rule, but after independence, through a police action, these districts were incorporated into the Indian Union.

The Coastal South Kanara (Dakshina Kannada) and inland Bellary districts were part of the Madras presidency, which was separate from the rest of Karnataka. These districts did not have contiguity with other parts of Karnataka, and they followed the political developments of the Madras presidency. Coorg, although geographically contiguous with Mysore, was administratively separate and cut off from the rest of Karnataka. It was governed by the Government of India through a Chief Commissioner.

Despite these administrative divisions and challenges, the people of Karnataka, across different regions and districts, actively participated in the freedom movement, demonstrating their commitment to the cause of independence and their desire for a free and united India. Karnataka, with its rich historical background, has played a significant role in the freedom struggle of India. The region was characterized by a unique political landscape, where more than half of the area was under the rule of Indian princes, including Mysore and various small princely states.

Although these princely states enjoyed separate and independent administrations, they were geographically surrounded by British Indian provinces. The political agitation and upsurge in the British-administered territories naturally influenced the people in the princely states, leading them to share the political aspirations for freedom and democracy with their fellow citizens across the borders. Overall, Karnataka's historical background, including its rulers, poets, and brave women, has made significant contributions to the freedom struggle, shaping the spirit of nationalism and the quest for independence in the region.

### **Prominent women freedom fighters of Karnataka**

The women Satyagrahis of Karnataka deserve to be celebrated for their invaluable contributions to the history of the freedom struggle. They dedicated their lives and made tremendous sacrifices to achieve the goal of freedom for their motherland. The role of women in the freedom movement of Karnataka was unique, evident in both the pre-Gandhian and Gandhian periods.

The Gandhian era of the freedom struggle in Karnataka began around 1920. During this time, Mahatma Gandhi's leadership attracted men and women from all walks of life. His visit to Belgaum in 1924 left a lasting impression on the freedom fighters, and many women became staunch followers of Mahatma Gandhi. Women played vital roles in various activities during the freedom movement. They actively distributed pamphlets and propaganda materials, spreading the message of freedom and inspiring others to join the cause. Additionally, they enthusiastically prepared food for the freedom fighters, supporting them in their struggle.

Several prominent women emerged as leaders and participants in the freedom movement in Karnataka. Some of these notable women include Umabai Kundapur, Bellary Siddamma, T. Sunandamma, Kamaldevi Chattopadhyay, Nagamma Patil, Krishnabai Panjekar, Subbamma Jois, Yashodharamma Dasappa, Padmavati Bidari, Jayadevitai Ligade, Sitabai Ramchandra Madagaonkar, and Shakuntala Kurtakoti. These women played pivotal roles in organizing protests, spreading awareness, and advocating for the rights and freedom of the people. Their contributions were invaluable in mobilizing support and creating a united front against colonial rule. The courage, dedication, and sacrifices made by these women Satyagrahis of Karnataka deserve to be acknowledged and remembered as they played an integral part in the struggle for independence. Their unwavering commitment to the cause of freedom serves as an inspiration and a testament to the indomitable spirit of the women of Karnataka.

## 1. Yashodhara Dasappa:

Yashodhara Dasappa, a prominent freedom fighter and social reformer from Karnataka, played a significant role in the Indian freedom movement and contributed to the empowerment of women. Born on October 27, 1905, into a wealthy family in Dharwad, she grew up in a privileged background. However, she was deeply influenced by the ideas of the freedom movement and the principles of Mahatma Gandhi. Yashodhara Dasappa actively participated in various protests, processions, and rallies during the freedom struggle. She was committed to the cause of India's independence and dedicated herself to the fight against colonial rule. Her involvement in these activities demonstrated her courage and determination to bring about change in society.

In addition to her contributions to the freedom movement, Yashodhara Dasappa worked tirelessly to promote women's rights and gender equality. She recognized the importance of education and empowerment for women and advocated for their inclusion in all spheres of life. Her efforts aimed to uplift the status of women in society and break barriers that hindered their progress. In 1947, Yashodhara Dasappa laid the foundation of the Karnataka Mahila Seva Samaja. This organization focused on improving the lives of women and children in the state. It provided various services and support systems to address the specific needs and challenges faced by women, working towards their socio-economic development and empowerment.

Yashodhara Dasappa's work as a freedom fighter and social reformer has left a lasting impact on Karnataka and beyond. Her commitment to the principles of justice, equality, and social upliftment continues to inspire generations, serving as a reminder of the important role women played in the struggle for independence and the pursuit of a more inclusive society.

## 2. Umabai Kundapur:

Umabai Kundapur, also known as Umabai Dabade, was a courageous freedom fighter from Kundapur, a town in the present-day Udupi district of Karnataka. Born in 1923 into a rural farmer family, she grew up witnessing the hardships endured by the common people under British colonial rule. This experience deeply influenced her and fueled her passion for the Indian independence movement.

Inspired by the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and the principles of the Indian National Congress, Umabai Kundapur actively joined the Quit India Movement of 1942. She played a significant role in organizing meetings, processions, and rallies, aiming to mobilize more people to join the cause of freedom. Recognizing the importance of self-reliance and self-sufficiency, she also raised awareness about the significance of using Khadi clothes and supporting Swadeshi (indigenous) products, as promoted by Gandhi. Umabai Kundapur's dedication to the freedom struggle did not go unnoticed by the British authorities. In 1944, she was arrested and imprisoned in the Bellary jail. Despite facing inhuman treatment and torture, she remained steadfast and resolute. Her indomitable spirit became a source of inspiration for her fellow inmates, and she emerged as a symbol of resistance against British imperialism. Umabai Kundapur's unwavering commitment to the cause of independence and her refusal to be intimidated by the oppressive forces earned her widespread admiration. Her courage and resilience serve as a testament to the strength and determination of the freedom fighters of that era.

### 3. T.Sunandamma:

T. Sunandamma was married to N. Narasima Ayyangar, an advocate of Doddaballapur in 1932. The person who influenced her young mind and initiated her into national activities was her sister-in-law, T. Kanakalakshamma, the first lady-Graduate from Mysore University with English as her principal subject. T. Sunandamma from Doddaballapur was closely associated with leaders like T. Siddalingaih and T. Narasimha Iyengar in starting the Niggers Youth League in 1936. The League's activities were mainly social though political interest was not completely barred. Later with the merging of the Justice party with the Congress, there was a significant turn in the political affairs of Mysore State. T. Sunandamma and her husband were closely associated with its functioning in the Shivapur Congress Session. She was a leader of volunteers. God has blessed her with a loud but sweet, clear voice. Each function, in those days would open with her prayer and with her "Vande Mataram". 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. In the Quit India movement her husband was arrested and she worked underground for sometimes. Later in the "Palace Chalo Movement" she participated along with M.R. Lakshamma, courted arrest and was in jail for five months. In recognition of her services, she was twice put up as a candidate for the House of Representatives and both times got elected unopposed.

### 4. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay:

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, born in Mangalore in 1903, was a visionary feminist and a dedicated freedom fighter. Her upbringing in a liberal Saraswat Brahmin family played a crucial role in shaping her beliefs and aspirations. Her parents' association with prominent thinkers and freedom fighters, such as Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Ramabai Ranade, and Annie Besant, exposed her to progressive ideas from a young age. Inspired by her parents' circle and the Swadeshi nationalist movement, Kamaladevi became deeply committed to the cause of Indian independence. Even during her time in London, she heard Mahatma Gandhi's call for the Non-Cooperation movement and immediately returned to India to join the Seva Dal. Her dedication to the movement led to her appointment as the in-charge of the women's section of the Seva Dal.

Kamaladevi played a pivotal role in the founding of the All India Women's Conference (AIWC), a platform dedicated to advancing women's rights and empowerment. Her contribution as the first organizing secretary of the AIWC was instrumental in creating a space for women to voice their concerns and fight for equality. Throughout her life, Kamaladevi remained committed to feminism. She fearlessly challenged societal norms and fought against the infringement of women's rights by men. Her activism extended beyond the realm of freedom struggle, as she recognized the importance of gender equality and worked tirelessly to uplift women in all aspects of society.

Kamaladevi's involvement in the Salt Satyagraha showcased her unwavering commitment to the cause of Indian independence. Her resilience and determination inspired others to join the struggle for freedom. Her remarkable efforts were recognized when she became the first woman in India to run for a legislative position, a testament to her pioneering spirit and dedication to making a difference. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay's legacy as a trailblazing feminist and freedom fighter continues to inspire generations. Her lifelong commitment to feminism and her instrumental role in the independence movement paved the way for women's empowerment in India. Her tireless efforts to challenge societal norms and fight for equality serve as a guiding light for individuals striving to create a more inclusive and just society.

### 5. Bellari Siddamma:

Bellari Siddamma, born in 1903 in Dundasi Village, Haveri District, into a traditional family, emerged as a remarkable freedom fighter and advocate for women's rights. Growing up, she was influenced by her father's active involvement in the struggle for independence and her exposure to nationalist literature. Siddamma's path to engaging in the independence movement was made easier by her marriage to Murugappa, a fellow freedom fighter. Together, they dedicated themselves to the cause of liberation, working side by side in their fight against colonial rule. In 1938, Siddamma participated in the Shivapura Congress party, marking her initial entry into organized political activities. She continued her involvement



by taking part in the Aranya Sathyagraha in Chitradurga state in 1939, as well as the significant "Mysuru Chalo" or "Aranmane Sathyagraha" and the Quit India Movement.

One of Siddamma's notable contributions was in organizing the Aranya Satyagraha or Forest Satyagraha, aimed at challenging forest laws. People engaged in civil disobedience by grazing cattle in the woodlands and cutting down valuable trees, highlighting their resistance against oppressive policies. Siddamma's commitment to the cause was evident when she became the first woman in the state of Mysuru to hoist the national flag, an act that demonstrated her unwavering dedication to the freedom struggle.

Her strong convictions led to her arrest and subsequent imprisonment for cutting down wild date trees in the forests of Davangere, Mayakowda, and Anagond. Despite facing personal hardships, Siddamma's association with prominent freedom fighters such as Sardar Veeranagouda Patil, S. Nijalingappa, and T. Siddalingaiah solidified her position as a respected leader and an influential figure in the state's history. Bellari Siddamma's story serves as an inspiration for generations to come, reminding us of the bravery and resilience of women who fought against oppression. Her legacy as a trailblazer in the freedom movement and her advocacy for women's rights continue to shape the history of Karnataka, leaving a profound impact on the path to progress and equality.

### **Padmavati Bidari:**

Padmavati Bidari, born in 1915 in the village of Hulikunte in the Belagavi district of Karnataka, was a courageous freedom fighter and a passionate advocate for social reform. Growing up in a family deeply involved in the Indian freedom movement, Padmavati was inspired to join the struggle for independence from a young age. Padmavati was known for her unwavering determination and steadfast commitment to the cause of Indian independence. She actively participated in various activities and movements aimed at challenging British colonial rule. Her contributions to the freedom movement were significant, and she fearlessly faced harassment and arrest by the British authorities.

In addition to her fight for independence, Padmavati dedicated herself to promoting social reforms and advancing women's rights. She emerged as a vocal critic of the social injustices that plagued women in Indian society, particularly issues like child marriage and dowry. Her relentless efforts focused on raising awareness and advocating for the eradication of these harmful practices. Padmavati actively campaigned for the education and empowerment of women. She recognized that education was key to breaking the shackles of societal oppression and worked diligently to promote access to education for girls and women. Her belief in gender equality fueled her efforts to create a more equitable society where women had equal opportunities and rights. Padmavati's legacy as a fearless freedom fighter and advocate for women's rights highlights the importance of standing up against injustice and working towards a more inclusive and egalitarian society. Her contributions to the struggle for independence and her efforts in social reform remain a beacon of inspiration for those striving to create a better future.

### **6. Shankuntala Kurtakoti:**

Shakuntala Kurtakoti, born in 1921 in the town of Dharwad, Karnataka, was a courageous freedom fighter and a dedicated social reformer. Inspired by the Indian freedom struggle from a young age, she joined the movement as a teenager and played a vital role in the fight for independence. A firm believer in women's rights, Shakuntala actively organized and mobilized women against the British colonial rule. She fearlessly fought against social injustices faced by women and worked tirelessly to empower them. Her relentless dedication and advocacy for women's rights made her a respected figure among her peers.

Shakuntala's commitment to the cause of Indian independence did not go unnoticed by the British authorities. She was arrested multiple times and faced imprisonment for her active participation in the freedom movement. However, her spirit remained unbroken, and she continued to fight for the rights and freedom of her fellow countrymen. Shakuntala Kurtakoti's bravery, determination, and unwavering commitment to social justice continue to inspire generations. Her efforts in the freedom struggle and her work as a social reformer have left a lasting impact on the community. She is remembered as a trailblazer who fought against oppression and championed the rights of women. Shakuntala's legacy serves as a reminder of the strength and resilience of women in shaping a nation's destiny. Her contributions are a

testament to the power of individuals to make a significant difference in society and inspire positive change.

## 7. Jayalakshmibai:

Jayalakshmibai: A Dedicated Freedom Fighter and Social Worker Born in 1912 in Motebennur of Harihara Taluk, Jayalakshmibai was raised in a family that held deep patriotic values. Her parents and other family members instilled in her a love for the nation and a desire to participate in the freedom movement. In 1924, her visit to the Congress Meeting in Belgaum further fueled her inspiration to actively contribute to the cause of independence. After marrying T. B. Keshavarao, a patriotic social worker, Jayalakshmibai found complete freedom to engage in the freedom movement. In 1909, when their family adopted a Harijan (now known as Dalit) boy, they faced excommunication from their family and society. However, undeterred by the societal backlash, they remained firm in their conviction that their actions were just and right. Throughout Bellary district, Jayalakshmibai traveled extensively, actively participating in national work. In Hadagali Taluka, they faced a boycott, but she skillfully explained and convinced the local women about the righteousness of their cause, eventually receiving a warm welcome from the people.

In 1930, Jayalakshmibai organized women's "Prabhat Pheri" (morning processions) in Harapanhalli, instilling a sense of unity and dedication among women in the freedom movement. Her unwavering commitment to the cause led her to participate in the Salt Satyagraha, resulting in her arrest. During the Non-Cooperation Movement in Hospet in 1932, Jayalakshmibai faced arrest and was sentenced to six months in prison with a penalty of Rs. 150/-. In the absence of payment, she had to serve an additional six weeks behind bars. She spent a total of 7.5 months in the women's jail in Vellore, enduring hardships for the sake of freedom.

In 1942, Jayalakshmibai actively participated in the Quit India Movement, although she managed to avoid arrest while her husband faced imprisonment. During his time in jail, she shouldered the responsibility of their family and warmly welcomed guests who visited their house, displaying strength and resilience in challenging circumstances. Jayalakshmibai's unwavering dedication to the freedom movement and her willingness to face hardships and sacrifices exemplify her commitment to the cause of independence. Her participation in various movements, her role as a social worker, and her resilience in shouldering family responsibilities during her husband's imprisonment showcase her indomitable spirit and selfless service to the nation.

Jayalakshmibai's contribution as a dedicated freedom fighter and social worker serves as an inspiration to all, reminding us of the sacrifices made by individuals during the struggle for independence. Her story is a testament to the extraordinary determination and commitment displayed by women in shaping the destiny of a nation.

## 8. Jayadevi Tai Ligade:

The deep-rooted patriotism and love for Swadeshi ingrained in Jayadevi Tai Ligade can be traced back to her family tradition and cultural upbringing. Born into a family closely associated with prominent freedom fighters like Lokamanya Tilak, M. G. Ranade, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Jayadevi Tai's passion for independence and her commitment to the Swadeshi movement were deeply ingrained. During the freedom struggle, the British officers recognized the significance of the Ligade family's involvement in the extremist elements of the movement. However, they strategically ignored the participation of women in Sholapur city, fearing the repercussions of arresting them. This created an opportunity for Jayadevi Tai to actively contribute to the cause of freedom without immediate repercussions.

In an attempt to sway Jayadevi Tai's allegiance, the British officers pressured her husband, Shrimant Channamallappa, a wealthy zamindar, whose financial interests were at stake. They offered her the title of "KAISER-E-HIND" in exchange for her support of British rule. However, Jayadevi Tai, a staunch follower of Mahatma Gandhi, remained unwavering in her principles and convictions. She discarded her valuable dresses and embraced the Khadi (Khadder) and Swadeshi movement.

The British authorities, frustrated by Jayadevi Tai's resolute stance, imposed heavy fines on the Ligade family. Undeterred, Jayadevi Tai, along with her mother, actively participated in the Salt Satyagraha movement. Her area of focus in the freedom struggle was the districts of Bidar, Gulbarga, and Raichur.

One of her notable achievements was organizing the National Movement against the oppressive rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad, who was a puppet of the British Raj. In 1946, Jayadevi Tai addressed a massive crowd at Zahirabad near Basavakalyana during the Hindu Provincial Conference. Despite the ban on her public appearance, Jayadevi Tai fearlessly presented herself and delivered a powerful speech, which was broadcasted to the audience through loudspeakers. Jayadevi Tai, affectionately known as "Kalyanamma," became a symbol of unity and determination for the Hindu community, regardless of social status. Her involvement and leadership inspired the community to stand united and ready to make sacrifices for the cause. The situation was tense and explosive, and any attempt by the Nizam's government to arrest Jayadevi Tai would have sparked widespread unrest akin to the tragic "Jallianwala Bagh" massacre.

Jayadevi Tai's home became a center of activity for refugees from Hyderabad who sought shelter during their escape from the Nizam's territories. Her unwavering commitment to the freedom movement and selfless service to those in need left an indelible mark on the history of the region. Jayadevi Tai Ligade's remarkable contributions as a fearless patriot and Swadeshi advocate continue to inspire generations. Her unwavering dedication to the cause of independence and her refusal to compromise her principles serve as a shining example of bravery and resilience in the face of adversity.

### Conclusion:

The bravery and sacrifices of these remarkable women freedom fighters from Karnataka have left an indelible mark on the history of India's independence struggle. They defied societal norms, challenged colonial oppression, and fought for justice, paving the way for a brighter future. Their stories serve as a constant reminder of the resilience, determination, and strength of women in shaping a nation's destiny. It is our responsibility to honor their legacy, celebrate their contributions, and draw inspiration from their remarkable lives as we continue to strive for a more equitable and inclusive society.

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