

# Karnataka History - Freedom Movement Part 2

Special class

The Civil Disobedience Movement started by Gandhiji in 1930 kept the Congress workers in Karnataka active in some agitation or the other, and hundreds filled the jails by breaking the law. When Gandhiji launched his historic Dandi March, Salt Satyagraha was offered at Ankola in the presence of nearly 40,000 people on April 13, 1930 by M.P. Nadkarni and others. This Satyagraha was continued for 45 days at Ankola, and the K.P.C.C. had concentrated all its energies at Ankola, where every day thousands gathered to make the Satyagraha a success. Salt Satyagraha was offered in nearly 30 centres of Karnataka like Mangalore, Kundapur, Padubidre, Udupi, Puttur, Malpe, Kapu, Manjeshwar (all in Dakshina Kannada), Bisanal (in Bijapur district), Kiresur and Yavagal (Dharwad district). Salt was brought from Goa and sold at Karwar by a group of Satyagrahis on June 1, 1930. The salt markets were held at Ankola on April 25 and 27, and again on May 3, when tax-free salt was sold in hundreds of bags. The excise regulations appeared to be non-existent as a result of such an agitation. The policy of keeping reserved forests and harassment of peasants by the forest department had caused lot of unrest in Uttara Kannada.

The Salt Satyagraha was followed by Forest Satyagraha and agitation against the production and sale of liquor. People broke the regulation regarding reserved forests, and brought firewood or fodder and courted arrest. Picketing of liquor shops, cutting down of toddy trees and picketing the auction of toddy depots were also resorted to. Women also joined in large numbers in picketing liquor shops and braved humiliations heaped on them by miscreants and the police. This went on in all British districts (Uttara Kannada, Belgaum, Bijapur, Dharwad, Bellary, Kodagu and Dakshina Kannada),

More serious was the no-tax campaign, launched after the experience of Bardoli in Gujarat, Four taluks in Karnataka were selected for no-tax campaign, namely, Hirekerur in Dharwad district and Ankola, Sirsi and Siddapur in Uttara Kannada district (1931). In Hirekerur, the campaign was a complete success, thanks to the leadership of Virangauda Patil. In Sirsi it was partially successful. But, in Siddapur and Ankola, the campaign was a major success despite the repressive attitude of the government. A total of 750 people from Belgaum district, 442 in Uttara Kannada, 202 in Dharwad, 159 in Dakshina Kannada, 158 from Bijapur, 77 from Bellary and 20 from Kodagu underwent various terms of imprisonment during the Satyagraha of 1930-31 alone. They were imprisoned for various offences, like participating in meetings and processions in contravention of ban orders, cutting of toddy trees, picketing liquor shops or shops selling foreign cloth, non-payment of Hullubanni (tax on fodder from government pastures), cutting down of sandalwood trees or bringing forest products like firewood and for non-payment of taxes like land revenue.

After a short lull that followed the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931 (March to December), the no-tax campaign was resumed in 1932 in Uttara Kannada and the sacrifices of the people of Siddapur and Ankola during the time deserve to be written in golden letters. It is the irate Nadavars of Ankola and conservative brahmins of Siddapur, mostly Haviks, not only did not pay the land revenue but allowed their lands and houses to be confiscated together with their movable property which included domestic vessels and livestock. While auctioned, the goods had no bidders from the public, who fully supported the movement. When a few government servants and "loyalists" did buy such goods, women volunteers launched hunger strike in front of the houses of such loyalists. These women volunteers were subjected to all sorts of ridicule and torture while on hunger strike. Dirt was thrown on them, abuses were heaped on them and hooligans were let loose on them. But, they faced all such atrocities, and persisted in their hunger strike, which went on at times for weeks in distant secluded villages. The women broke their fast only when the buyers returned the auctioned goods to their original owners. The police also did not spare these fasting women who were flogged.

Whole families were arrested when revenue was not paid. Their houses were locked. While in search of valuables in the houses, the police ransacked many a house, and even conducted "excavations" for valuables, under suspicion that they might have been buried underground inside the house. As all grown-ups in many families had been taken to jail, two Balakashramas or shelter homes for the children of the arrested from Uttara Kannada were opened at Karwar and Shimoga, housing nearly 70 to 80 boys and girls.

When released from jail, many members found their houses in dilapidated condition either due to "police excesses" or due to heavy rains. Land was the only means of their livelihood. For four or five years, they had to undergo all sorts of ordeals, and only in 1938, they got their lost lands back. Uttara Kannada district became memorable in the history of the freedom movement in India, and has been the subject of praise at the hands of leaders like Sardar Patel and Gandhiji. The Satyagraha in other forms continued in other parts of British Karnataka. Hundreds of Seva Dal volunteers from Mysore participated in this movement outside Mysore.

Newspapers rendered yeoman service in spreading nationalistic spirit during the period. Some of the papers like Kannada Vritta (Kumta) had to suspend publications, and some others like Karnataka Kesari (Bellary) had to stop publication due to governmental action. But, cyclostyled bulletins, secretly printed and clandestinely distributed by bold volunteers, old and young (even boys in early teens) and even by women, supplemented the work of newspapers

The Congress won a majority of the seats contested by it for the Legislatures of Bombay and Madras from Karnataka in 1937. The Congress ministries came to power in those provinces. District Local Boards in these Presidency districts were also controlled by the Congress. The ministers resigned in 1939 in protest against the decision of the British Government to make India participate in World War II. Nearly 1700 men and women offered individual Satyagraha in British Karnataka in 1940-41 by shouting anti-war slogans and underwent imprisonment from three months to one year.

The Congress had decided not to hold agitations in princely areas like Mysore or Hyderabad, but only undertake constructive activities like Khadi, Harijan work, etc. Volunteers from Mysore had been going to British districts to participate in the agitations. But, the Praja Samyukta Paksha of the Old Mysore state merged with the Congress and called itself Mysore Congress in 1937. The new organisation held its first conference at Sivapur in April 1938. (The history of Mysore Congress is already discussed in an earlier chapter). K.T. Bhashyam, Talakere Subrahmanya, H.C. Dasappa, B.N. Gupta, H.K. Viranna Gowda, K. Hanumanthayya, M.N. Jois, K.C. Reddy, S. Nijalingappa, Sahukar Channayya and Tagadur were some of the prominent leaders from Mysore state. Labourers of Bangalore, Bhadravati and other industrial centres had also organised themselves under the Congress banner. Their strength was tested for the first time in the Binny Mill strike in 1941, which continued for 25 days successfully. The Mysore Government was forced to accept the workers' right to organise unions as a result. The Congress had also organised the peasants and held peasants' conferences at taluk level in 1939 and 1940 in Mysore state.

Hyderabad-Karnataka Parishat was organised in 1934 to conduct nationalistic activities in Hyderabad-Karnataka area. The Hyderabad State Congress was founded in 1938. G. Ramacharya, Ramananda Tirtha, Dr. Melkote, Krishnacharya Jeshi, Janardanrao Desai, Sharanagauda Inamdar, Virabhadrapappa Sirur and A Shivamurthy Swamy were some of the nationalist leaders of Hyderabad-Karnataka. The Congress had helped in organising peoples' movement in other minor princely states of Karnataka too like Jamkhandi, Mudhol, Sangli, etc.

#### QUIT INDIA

Karnataka witnessed unprecedented mass awakening during the Quit India movement of 1942. The movement was strongest in Belgaum and Dharwad districts and in Bangalore and Mysore cities This movement was spontaneous and all princely areas too joined in it.

Soon after the declaration of the launching of the Quit India movement by Gandhiji at the Bombay A.I.C.C on August 8, 1942, all important leaders of the Congress were arrested. The movement became leaderless. Kalelkar and Mashruvala, two trusted lieutenants of Gandhiji, wrote in Harijan weekly giving a call to carry on the agitation with a view to undermine the government machinery. They suggested the undertaking of subversive activities so that the British government would cease to function. Physical violence was to be totally abhorred. British war efforts were to be thwarted.

The K.P.C.C. appointed an action committee with C.J. Ambli of Bijapur as the president, R.R. Diwakar as secretary and U. Srinivasa Mallya, D.P. Karmarkar and R.S. Hukkerikar as members. The committee had Bombay as its headquarters. Annu Guruji, Chennappa Wali, Chinmayaswami Onkarmath, Sriranga Kamath, Vamana Bidari, Dr. Jayadeva Kulkarni, Wadavi and others in Belgaum district, Kariyappa Sangur, Mailara Mahadevappa, Timmanagouda Menasihal, Shankar Kurtkoti, Venkatesh Magadi, N.T. Dabade and Bindumadhava Burli in Dharwad district, C.J. Ambli and R.G. Dube in Bijapur district, Ramachandra Prabhu and K.G. Joshi in North Kanara were in the forefront of underground activities. Dozens of Gramachavadis (village offices) were burnt in Belgaum and Dharwad districts, and revenue records from village accountants were confiscated and set on fire. Arms with hereditary village watchmen (Toni and Talar) were confiscated. Telegraph wires were cut, railway lines removed, and railway stations and government offices were also damaged. European military had to be deployed in Belgaum and Dharwad districts to suppress the movement. The well organised underground movement in North Karnataka districts was so successful that it became famous as "Karnataka Pattern". Even Jayaprakash Narayan recommended the pattern to Bihar workers.

In Old Mysore, labourers at Bangalore, Bhadravati, K.G.F., Davanagere and other places went on strike in protest against the arrest of Gandhiji and other leaders, and the strike continued for a number of days. Students too joined the agitation in thousands by boycotting schools and colleges. The Bangalore- Guntakal train traffic was suspended for two weeks due to subversive activities. Sardar K.A. Venkataramayya, A.G. Ramachandra Rao, N.D. Shankar, M.V. Krishnappa, Maganlal Shah, Kotre Nanjappa, H.S. Doreswamy and others directed underground activities in Mysore as all senior leaders had been arrested in the initial stage in this movement.

The agitation continued severely for at least one year in full swing. Twenty-five railway stations in Karnataka were burnt or damaged. Post offices in Bangalore and Nippani were among the many that were destroyed. At Nippani a punitive fine of over two lakhs was levied for having burnt many government offices including the sub-registrar's office. Government timber depots at Gangavali, Hattikeri and Sirsi in Uttara Kannada were set on fire, and a punitive fine of Rs. 30,000 was levied on Gokarna town for the Gangavali burning. More than 50 persons in Kodagu and over 100 from Hyderabad-Karnataka came to be arrested in 1942-43.

Eleven people were killed in Bangalore, especially in August (1942) soon after the news of Mahadevbhai Desai's death in jail (August 15) reached the city. The Mysore Bank Square was the scene of massacre. Five persons were killed at Davanagere and seven at Kailahongal as a result of police firing. Seven persons from Nippani taluk died at Gargoti, Kolhapur state, while trying to loot the state treasury. A school boy was killed in Nippani town and another youngster at Kadavi Shivapur, Belgaum district, when police opened fire on processions. Similarly, a young student died at Hubli on August 15, 1942 when a procession was fired on. In Hassan district, picketing of shandys (weekly fairs) was organised strongly, advising people not to pay shandy toll. There was police firing at Shravanabelagola on a shandy day, 6th October 1942. The police being unable to control the large peasant assembly, resorted to firing, killing seven.

More serious was the incident at Isur, Shikaripur taluk, Shimoga district which declared itself a "free village". It put a ban on entry of government servants into the village by putting up a placard at the village gate. When a tahshildar and police party came into the village, the Police officer behaved in a high-handed way provoking the people. He fired a shot at boys for requesting him to put on khadi cap. Panic-stricken villagers, hearing the gun shot, attacked the police party killing the tahshildar and the inspector. Hell was let loose on the village by the police and military, and five young patriots came to be hanged on murder charge in March 1943. Timmanagouda Menasihal, a worker, died of injuries sustained by explosion of a grenade in his custody, in Dharwad district. More shocking was the news of the death of Mailar Mahadevappa, a staunch Gandhian and a dedicated worker, at Hosaritti in Dharwad district, while trying to loot a government treasury on 1st April, 1943. Two other colleagues of his also fell victims to police bullets. The riots at Isur created panic in the minds of the leaders, and movement almost came to a standstill in Mysore state.

At least 15,000 people were jailed in Karnataka in 1942-43. Of these 10,000 were from princely Mysore only. Jails were full everywhere, and barracks were erected to house political prisoners. Many died in jails due to bad food and epidemics. People of Karnataka proved themselves to be in no way lagging behind the people in other parts of the country in their patriotism, determination and sacrifice. The movement came to an end when underground workers like Dr. Diwakar and others surrendered to the police in August 1944 on Gandhiji's instruction.