

## TELUGU WOMEN IN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

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**1. Introduction:** The sacrifice made by the women of India will always occupy the foremost place. They fought with true spirit and undaunted courage and faced various tortures, exploitations and hardships to earn us freedom. When most of the men freedom fighters were in prison the women came forward and took charge of the struggle. But, the mythological saying says that as follows:

*“Anaayakaa vinashyanthi – bahunaayakaa nashyanthi  
Shishunaayakaa nashyanthi – Stree naayakaa Vinashyanthi “*

Any group with no leader has no prospects. Group with many leaders has no prospects. A group with an young leader (with no experience) has also no future. The group with a female leader has quite no prospects. It means that a woman also not eligible to be a leader for any group. Earlier it was the feeling of many people. Now, the days have been changed. There are many examples and precedents that many women achieved many things that could not be possible by the men. According to mythological perception, we give more importance to Goddess than God in calling as “Lakshmi Venkateshwara, Parvathi Parameshwara etc. Woman’s participation in India’s freedom struggle began as early as in 1817 when Bhima Bai Ho kar fought bravely against the British colonel Malcolm and defeated him in guerilla warfare.

As India has celebrated this year AZADI Ka Amrit Mahaotsav commemorating the 75<sup>th</sup> year of Independence, the history of the Indian Freedom Struggle would not be completed without mentioning the contribution of many unsung women Freedom Fighters of India. Many women came to the streets, led processions and held lectures and demonstrations. And they possessed a lot of courage and intense patriotism.

*“Woman is always fierce, she is fearless & she is brave like a lioness.”*

**2. Women in freedom movement from Andhra:** Duvvuri Subamma, Sangam Lakshmi Bai, Durga Bhai Deshmukh, Mallu Swarajyam, Arutla Kamala Devi and Yallapragada Seethakumari took active part in the freedom struggle from Andhra. Women of Nellore region could maintain a nominal role in the freedom struggle. Many of them contributed in their own way, some donating their lands, most parting with their jewellery and few turning radical; unmindful of British police taking action against them. Speeches of Mahatma Gandhi during his visits to Nellore in 1920s inspired men and women alike in the region. Many women joined the freedom struggle. They raised funds for Handloom and Harijan funds. They are :

- **Ponaka Kanakamma.** Born in 1896, Kanakamma was a poetess and first woman president of Nellore Congress Committee She donated 13 acres of land for Pinakini Satyagraha Gandhi Ashram at Pallipadu. Kanakamma is remembered by both old and new generations. She contributed to starting of Sri Kasthuri Devi Vidyalayam, a popular girl’s school of Nellore City.. She took part in Vande Mataram and Salt Satyagraha movements. She wrote the auto-biography of Sri Rama Yogi, both in Telugu and English. Kankamma was an accomplished write and her writings appeared in Bharati, Krishnapatrika, Grihalakshmi, Anasuya, Hindu sundari Jaminryot and in many other journals. She lost

her property due to the tyranny and repression of Venkatagiri Zameendar. She established in 1952 an industrial training centre for poor, orphan and under-privileged women. During her life, she hosted many eminent freedom fighters and poets at her residence in Potalpudi and in Nellore. National leaders like Babu Rajendraprasad, Desabandhu Chittaranjan Dass, artists Udayasanker, Atreya, Sthanam, Tiruvankur sisters and many others were her guests. She is the recipient of the Gruhlakshmi Swarnakankanam Sanmanam (award felicitation). On Gandhi Jayanti in 2017, Kanakamma's bronze statue was erected on the premises of Pinakini Satyagrahasramam, Pallipadu by the Ashram Committee.

- **Paturu Balasaraswattamma** was born in 1900. She was Inspired by the radical stance of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, she handed over all her gold ornaments to a group of people for purchasing materials to make bombs. She ran "Simhapuri" newspaper to highlight the news of independence struggle. She was jailed twice between 1930 and 1932.
- **Tikkavarapu Sudarshanamma** is an another prominent Nellore women who participated in the freedom movement and she was the wife of famous freedom fighter Tikkavarapu Rami Reddy. She went house to house collecting foreign clothes and held their bonfires in streets of Nellore.
- **Lakshmikanthamma** was the daughter of Rami Reddy and Sudarshanamma. A student of Shanthiniketan, Lakshmikanthamma was sentenced for three months and fined ₹ 500 in 1941 for individual satyagraha. She was the wife of late Bezawada Gopal Reddy, who went on to become a Governor of Uttar Pradesh in Independent India.
- **Rani sundaramma** is also a freedom fighter born in 1891. She hailed from a very rich landlord community. She married her maternal uncle Subbarama Reddy, a rich landlord from Potlapudi Village, near Nellore. She was eight years old at the time of her marriage. As her husband was traditional, she was not allowed to attend school. Though she had no formal schooling, she acquired proficiency in three languages Sanskrit, Hindi and Telugu by her own efforts. In 1907, when Bipin Chandra Pal and his wife visited Nellore in connection with 'Vande Mataram Movement', she hosted the couple. With the help of her youngest brother-in-law Pattabhiramareddy, who was involved in Library movement, she established "Sujana Ranjani samajam" and "Vivekananda Granthalayam" in Potlapudi village, near Nellore to serve the society. Her friends started libraries in nearby villages Pogadadoruvu kandrika and Kotturu. She worked for the uplift of Harijan (outcaste) and poor. From 1916 to 1919 for a brief period, she was under the spell of revolutionary politics and later became the ardent disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. She purchased 13 acres of land in Pallipadu village about 8 miles from Nellore on the banks of river Penna and handed over the land to her revolutionary friends for concealing fire arms and for firing practice. When she became the follower of Mahatma, she donated the land to establish the "Pinakini Satyagrahasramam". Gandhiji inaugurated the "Pinakini Satyagraha Ashram" on 7 April 1921.
- **Rajyalakshammamma** is a strenuous female leader for freedom struggle participated in non-cooperation movement and in Salt Satyagraha. She underwent six months rigorous imprisonment in 1930 in Rayavellore prison and in 1932 imprisoned in Rayavellore for 13 months. Rajajee, Durgabai,

Bejawada Gopala Reddy and many other important freedom fighters were her co prisoners. Under Gandhiji's constructive programme, she also founded a School for girls on Vijayadasami Day in 1923. It was inaugurated by Sri Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu. Gandhiji laid the foundation stone for the permanent building of the school on 12 May 1929. In 1944 Rajyalakshammamma exchanged 1-5 acres of the school site, in Pogatota Nellore for a sprawling 20 acre of land in the outskirts of Nellore and a school building was built in this site with the donation made by Sri tikkvarapu Ramireddy in around 1947 or so.

- Duvvuru Subbanma, Durgabhai Deshmukh, Sangam Lakshmi Bai and others are well known. Stalwarts like Yellapragada Sitkumari, Ammanna Raja and Arutla Kamala Devi have been recognized.
  - **Yellapragada Sita Kumari** was born on 9 October 1914 at Bapatla, Guntur District. She was an expert in Telugu, Sanskrit, and English. She worked as a Teacher at Key's Girls High School, Secunderabad from 1946 to 1956. She was a pioneer of Nizam Andhra Mahila Sabha. She founded the khadi production center for training women in Hyderabad. Sita Kumari was also a member of the All India Women's Movement Association. She led satyagraha against the ban on Hyderabad State Congress by the Nizam government. She also took on an active part in the Quit India Movement.
  - **Durgabai Deshmukh** was an Indian freedom fighter, lawyer, social worker and politician. She was a member of the Constituent Assembly of India and of the Planning Commission of India. From her early years, Durgabai had been associated with Indian politics. She was a prominent social reformer who participated in Gandhi-led Salt Satyagraha activities during the Civil Disobedience Movement. She was instrumental in organising women satyagrahis in the movement. This led to British Raj authorities imprisoning her three times between 1930 and 1933. She failed to get elected to Parliament in 1952, and was later nominated to be a member of the Planning Commission. She was also the first to emphasise the need to set up separate Family Courts after studying the same during her visit to Chira in 1953. Durgabai was awarded a Padma Vibhushan.
- Many women including Rani Channama of Kittur, and Rani Begam Hazrat Mahal of Avadh fought against the British East India Company in the 19th century, 30 years before the "First War of Independence 1857".

**3. Conclusion:** Albert Einstein, one of the Nobel laureates said about Mahatma Gandhi as "*Generations to come will scarce that such a one as this walked the earth with flesh and blood*". Some people may have a dissent, however, it is true to believe that each and every freedom fighter is a person that he or she himself or herself has walked the earth with flesh blood for sacrifice to the Nation.

