

# Gandhi in Kodagu during the Freedom Movement: A study

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## Abstract

The political consciousness in colonial India has largely been traced to the associations of upper caste, urban segments of the population and the subsequent emergence of the local associations. This understanding is based on a very narrow view of politics and is rooted in a certain ideology. The identification of the rise of political consciousness with the emergence of such associations serves the purpose of legitimizing the people's movement for social justice and also exhibits idea of patriotism. In this an attempt has been made to trace the Political Consciousness and Gandhian Ideas in Kodagu through the emergence of local associations during the freedom movement.

**Keyword:** freedom movement, ideology, Political perception etc

## Introduction

The transformation of the subcontinent through radical change social or economic – was not part of the British agenda. Whatever changes came about in the realms of society and polity were largely by products of the pursuance of the main objective of the British – exploitation of the land and its people. The net result of these changes on traditional, segmented and hierarchical Indian society was earlier seen as setting in motion parallel horizontal nobilities both at the top and bottom of the social ladder, thus widening and deepening the already existing cleavages within society. On the one hand the British rule empowered, enlarged, elevated and even nationalised the upper strata of society consisting of Brahmins and other allied *dwija* castes. The lower strata, on the other hand, consisting of Shudras, Ati-Shudras and others lost the security and complacency of the old order; they however, did gain a certain consciousness of their deprived and degraded status and the scope to change it. The structural unification brought about by the British thus contained within it deep fissures. The disjunction in the social and economic worlds naturally found its expression in and through the political awakening which was of a dichotomous nature during the colonial period. <sup>1</sup>The rise of political consciousness in colonial India has largely been traced to the associations of upper caste, urban segments of the population and the subsequent emergence of the local associations. This understanding is based on a very narrow view of politics and is rooted in a certain ideology. The identification of the rise of political consciousness with the emergence of such associations serves the purpose of legitimising the people's movement for social justice and also exhibits idea of patriotism. In this an attempt has been made to trace the Political Consciousness and Gandhian

Ideas in Kodagu through the emergence of local associations during the freedom movement. Kodagu is one of the significant district of Karnataka Geographically situated on the eastern slope of Western Ghats. It is known for its natural beauty nick named as Kashmir of South India and Switzerland of India contributed a lot to the nation in each and every field especially is a defence and sports.<sup>2</sup>

The Direct contact with European coffee Planter, the people of Kodagu were influenced by the western culture and administration and they enjoyed several privileges from the British rule. The people of Kodagu remained loyal to the British even during the revolts of 1837 and 1857. They supported the British to suppress the anti British revolts. It is noticeable that educated people of Kodagu raised voice against British even though they had opportunities to get jobs in educational departments, Coffee estates, transportation, government offices and in defence. The people who had anti British feelings, did not come forward to join newly established Coorg Regiment in 1902. This is not only due to their patriotic feeling but due to the British also. When some patriotic youths joined the Indian Congress, majority of the rich and coffee planters expressed their deep contempt. The economic policies; Lethargic attitude and the racial discriminatory policy in the field of recruitment, promotion, salary etc. had made the people of Kodagu to lose their trust in the British rule. Along with that the news paper like the Hindu, New India, Maratha etc., brought out these issues and enlightened the people of Kodagu. Besides that the ideas and views of B.G. Tilak, Annie Beasant and specially Gandhi reached to the educated people of Kadagu and they came to know about the injustice done by the British rule to the Indians. The economic depression of last decade of the 19th century and first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century further made them to go against the British imperialism. There was severe famine in many parts of the country and Kodagu was also effected. Regarding the economic depression Halar report of 1910 states that ‘During monsoon many families had meals once in a day and there was no grain in many houses during August and September. This report clearly shows that due to famine there was decline in the agricultural production which led to the decline in commerce and industrial development thus the economic depression also made them to go against the British. “Zamindars Association or Kodagu Land Holders Association” Demoralized by the lethargic attitude of the British towards their problems and economic depression made the agriculturalist and planters to form Kodagu Agriculturist Association in 1909. Rao Bahadur Kodanda Madaiaha and Biddanda Ganapathi were the eminent personalities behind the establishment of that association. The Kodagu Agriculturist Association in 1912. Maneyapanda Muthanna worked as president and Biddanda Ganapathi worked as general secretary in the beginning. The association actually sowed the seeds of freedom movement in Kodagu.<sup>3</sup>

The object of the Zamindars Association or Kodagu Land Holders Association was to bring the grievances of the people to the notice of the government and get them redressed. The association became very popular throughout the Kodagu and a number of men were enlisted as its members and that gave awareness to the people. The Kannada and English news papers highlighted the injustice done by the British, along with that literary figure Punje Mangesharaya developed the patriotic feeling and

awareness among the people of Kodagu. Thus they started to clamor for political reforms. The Act of 1909 and the Montague Chelmsford reforms of 1919 did not prove fair to Kodagu. In order to fulfil their demands the importance of the newspaper and its circulation was considered by Zamindars Associations. As a result the Zamindars Association made a resolution to setup Kodagu Company in 1920 and to publish a weekly named 'Kodagu'. Thus the first newspaper in Kodagu came into existence on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1921 and it was printed in Mysore and published at Madikeri. The Founder editor of Kodagu Weekly Pandiyanda Belliappa and Sub editor Bittianda Muthanna inspired the people and they became eminent leaders of freedom moment in Kodagu.<sup>4</sup>

The aims of the news paper Kodagu was to discuss and create awareness about political, social and economic matters of the country among the people of Kodagu, Kodendra Kuttaiah (1921-24), Kodanda Appaiah (1924-27), C.S. Venkappaiah (1927-33), Gundikutta Manjunathaiah and M.M. Siddiq (1936-38) were the eminent leaders worked as president of Kodagu Company which published news paper namely Kodagu. Articles on National Movement were published among the Rohini Devi's article on Jalian Wallabag tragedy in 1922 was significant. Even M.M. Siddiq worked for the collection of 'Tilak Swarajya Fund'. When the whole India was agitating for reforms the leading people of Kodagu also demand for reforms. The result was that in 1924 Kodagu Legislative Council was introduced by amending the act of 1919. It was just a advisory council and the chief Commission had all the powers to reject its recommendation. It was not satisfied the Kodagu people.<sup>5</sup>

The Indian National Congress had its powerful influence over every citizen of the country. In 1924 the Congress session was held at Belgaum under the presidentship of Gandhi and thirty five (35) people of Kodagu participated in it. They were inspired by the speeches and discussions of the National Leaders. After returning to Kodagu these people calling a meeting in C.S.Venkappaiah's (Advocate) office in madikeri and established Kodagu Congress Committee on 24-05-1925. Paruvanga Kushalappa was elected as the President, C.S.Venkappaiah elected as the secretary and M.M. Siddiq was elected as treasurer of this congress Committee.

The objectives and programmes of the Indian National Congress got importance in Kodagu also and weaving was encouraged. Khadi Bhandara was opened at Virajpet in 1925 for the first time in Kodagu. The Zamindar Association organised public meeting at Virajpet, Napoklu, Ammathi, Gonikoppal, Somwarpet, Kushalnagar and motivated the people. INC leaders like Gangadgar Rao Deshpande, Srinivasiyyangar, Sathymurthi, Karnad Sadashiv Roa, N.S. Hardikar, Srinivas Kaujalagi and others visited various places of Kodagu and inspired the people of Kodagu to go against the British. Thus there was political consciousness and anti-British feeling in the minds of the people in Kodagu due to Gandhi's inspiration. They boycotted the foreign goods, government schools and colleges. They cultivated the habit of using cotton clothes like Dothi and Jubba.

The intensity of anti-British movement is obvious in the words of Mallengada Chengappa who writes as follows in Swathanthrya Sangramada Smruthigalu -(p.no-361)-"About 1928-29 the leaders of

the congress had visited Hudikeri, during sandy days and addressed the people on various issues. After listening of the speeches of Pandyanda Belliappa and Kollimada Karumbaiah, I started wearing “Khadi Topi”. Around 60 students also started coming to the School wearing the Khadi Topi, despite the opposition of the Head Master”.<sup>6</sup>

### **Civil Disobedience Movement:**

The people of Kodagu responded to the appeal of Gandhi during the Civil Disobedience Movement. Number of freedom fighters took active participation that movement, 30-05-1930 under the leadership of Koravanda Ponnappa. The Congress Committee of Kodagu decided to start various programmes of Civil Disobedience movement, Public meetings, processions and picketing were organized to boycott the liquor in Kodagu. Women also took active participation in the movement. The first three ladies who courted arrest were Smt.Balyatanda Muddavva, Smt.Pandyanda Seetha Belliappa and Smt. Mukkatira Bojamma.<sup>7</sup>

In June 1930 picketing of liquor shops was started in various places of Kodagu, Ammathi,m Srimangala, Kutta, Hudikeri, Napoklu etc., As a result of this, selling of liquor was reduced from 800 gallons to 200 gallons in Virajpet. At Gonikoppal it was reduced to 300 gallons to 36 gallons and at Kutta Liquor shop was closed permanently. Despite of the opposition from the liquor shop owners, drunkers and police, the movement became very strong. On 27-08-1930 picketing was organized in front of the Govt. of at Virajpet, under the leadership of Janababdul Gafur Khan of Bilagunda. The British Govt. took drastic steps to curb down the movement and the datyagrahis like H.R.Krishnaiah, Pandyanda Belliappa (editor of Kodagu)Kollimada Karumbaiah, Janab Abdul Gafur Khan were arrested and imprisoned for 6 months. Against the arrest of these leaders Hartel was observed by shop keepers in Madikeri. The students also came out of the school and protested against the arrest and supported the movement.

When the Govt. tried to put restrictions on news paper “Kodagu” by asking to pay Rs.1000/- as deposit by a special decree was rejected by the freedom fighters under the leadership of Biddanda Subbaiah. The British Govt. (Commissioner of Coorg) repealed the special decree. As the movement was in peak stage the people of Kodagu on 28-11-1930 decided and spread the message that not to celebrate Huttari Festival. The leaders asked to wear Khadi clothes and to hoist the National Flag instead of Kolata. “Kodagu” newspaper reported that in the year 1929, the liquor around 2742 gallons were consumed but it was reduced to just 220 gallons of liquor in 1930. This clearly shows the involvement of the people in freedom movement. In support of boycott of foreign goods the people of Kodagu stopped to sale foreign goods and started to sale khadi clothes.<sup>8</sup>

**Tri Colour flag hosted on Fort:**

Inspired by the speeches of Congress leaders the youth of Kodagu like Mallengada Chengappa, B.G. Ganapathi, Mandepanda Kariappa removed the union jack and hoisted the Indian National Flag at Madikeri fort. During the same period C.M Poonacha was involved in composing, cyclostyling and circulating a publication named “Veera Bharathoi” from Gonikoppal. A hand written bulletin named: “Sarpasthra” was also secretly circulated among the people and to go against the British. The Police finally managed to track the cyclostyling machine and C.M.Poonacha was arrested and sentenced for 9 months rigorous imprisonment at Kannur Jail. The Gandhi Irvin Pact temporarily stopped the movement in Kodagu also. The movement was once again started in January 1932 as per Gandhi’s appeal. In this stage of Civil Disobedience movement public meeting speeches picketing movement once again started. On the other side British Govt. Also took drastic steps to suppress the revolt, on 10.01.1932 Ajjikutira Chinnappa was arrested along with other two, while addressing huge gathering at Gonikoppa, Mallengada Mandaiah were arrested at Hudikeri by the British Govt. On 20.06.1932 Pandyanda Belliappa at Virajpet, H.R. Krishnaiah at Gonikoappal were also arrested and on 24.01.1932 Jammada Madappa and four others were arrested at Kaikeri. In the second stage of the Civil Disobedience movement once again women played significant role. Among them Mukkatire Bojamma, Balyatanda Muddamma, Pandyanda Seethamma were the eminent women leaders arrested by British Government. The students of various schools of Kodagu participated in strikes and processions in support of movement, leading to the closure of the schools for 8 to 10 days. The students like “Bharathisutha” S.R. Narayana Rao, C.B. Monnaiah, Poojari Ramappa were arrested.<sup>9</sup>

**Visit of Gandhi:**

Mahatma Gandhi toured Kodagu along with his secretary A V Thakkar, The President of Karnataka Harijana Sanga, Veeranagowda patil, German journalist named Kurt Birton, Madeleine Slade, Miss Bajaj (Jamanlal Bajaj’s daughter) and others visited in February 1934 to propagate the eradication of Untouchability and to collect relief fund for Bihar. He visited the Harijana Colony at Kaikeri in South Coorg was very much impressed by the cleanliness they had maintained. He wished them to improve further in their social outlook also. Gandhi stayed in Ramkrishna Ashram at Ponnampet and later he visited Gonikoppa, Hudikeri, Virajpet, Ammathi, Siddapura, Kushalnagara and Madikeri. He addressed a huge public gathering at the ground near raja seat Madikeri and asked the people to change their attitude towards Harijanas in Kodagu. In the words of the commissioner of Coorg “Mr. Gandhi’s activities in Coorg were confined to the Harijana movement and the relief of the suffering of Bihar He declined to discuss Coorg.<sup>10</sup>

## Quit India Moment:

Freedom Movement in Kodagu was at its peak stage during Quit India Movement, number of people involved and actively took part. The British government took steps to control it, Pandya Belliappa, Chekkere Monnaiah, Kollimanda Karumaiah were arrested on 10.08.1942, C M Poonacha was also arrested while returning from Bombay session of the INC. Subsequently Korana Devaiah, Mandepanda Somaiah were arrested and send to Vellor Jail. Students too were in the fire front of the movement. The students named Ajjikuttira Appanna, Parvangada Uttappa, B D Subbaiah, Maneyapanda Chinnappa Singura Kuttappa, Aichettira Bopanna took part in the movement. On 03.09.1942 the office of the "Kodagu" weekly was sealed & its sub-editor B D Ganapathi was also arrested by British Government . Under the Guidance of M D Madaiah, the students of Ponnampet showed special interest took part in daily processions. Despite of Gandhi's call of Non-violence the agitation in Kodagu turned into violence. They disconnected Telegraphic line, attacked police stations, post offices with help of dynamites put fire to Munsif court at Virajpet and Gonikoppal. Thus number of patriots took part in the great struggle of Do or Die, Mallengada Chengappa, Mukkatira Belliappa G K . Chandrashekharaiyah, Nidtha Krishna Murthy, S N Thammaiah, B K Shanthaveeraiah, C.S Machaiah were the eminent freedom fighters arrested during this struggle. Poojari Ramappa was arrested for organizing Celebration of Independence day on 26.01.1943 thus around 150 people were arrested in Kodagu and 70-80 people were punished.<sup>11</sup>

The people of Kodagu who participated in Freedom Movement of the country due to the influence of Gandhian ideas suffered physical and mental torture. Many were even boycotted from their families. Eg. S R Narayana Rao. All these events which marked the political Consciousness among the people of Kodagu due to the influences of Gandhian Ideas. Thus Freedom struggle in Kodagu go to Prove that the people of Kodagu did not lag behind in nationalist fervor and sacrifice.

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