



The Role of Women in Goa's Struggle for Freedom

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Abstract: *This paper will try to highlight the role played by the Women during the movement of Civil Liberties, during the movement of freedom struggle which will include both the violent and non-violent activities carried out by the courageous ladies of Gomantak punyabhumi. The tiny Territory of Goa on the subcontinent of India which was under the Portuguese domination for 450 years has attracted quite some attention of many in the world during the last 50 years. Goa was the smallest territory ruled by the smallest colonial power which held on to it longer than any other; yet it was the first subject 'nation' to raise its voice against political slavery and alien domination in the sixteenth century when the world had not even dreamt that it was possible for the conquered peoples to revolt against their political masters with a view to overthrowing them. This aspect of Goa's history is not known to many. Similarly there are many such Historical aspects which Goans are not aware of. One such aspect is the Contribution and the role of Women's in Goa's struggle for freedom.*

Key words: *Republican rule, National Congress, Prabhatferies, Struggle for Freedom*

1. Introduction

It is believed that woman has to play different role in her life at her home. She plays the role of a mother, a wife, she handles the home affairs like an able administrator and she works like servant. This is true with every woman in this world. Apart from this Woman can play many role in the modern times. She has come out of her house and has contributed a lot to the Society and to the humankind. Women have played multiple roles in their life and have proved by many. The contribution and the role of Woman in the freedom struggle are remarkable.

2. The role of Women during civil Liberties Movement

Women in Goa have played a very important role in the freedom struggle of Goa. If one knows the history of Goa than one will know that on 26th May 1926 Dr. Antonio Oliver de Salazar came to power

in Portugal and the Republican rule came to an end. The sword and the cross once again took hold of the administration in Goa. Salazar was destined to be the last in the lines of the cruel adventures like Vasco de Gama and Albuquerque who had came here to make Goa a part of Portugal forever. Now the struggle was between Salazar's dictatorial government trying to keep Goa under Portugal's control with all the repressive measures at his command and the Goans aspiring to be free with the tremendous backing of the whole of India. Salazar deprived all the civil liberties of public gathering, public functions holding meetings, everything was banned in Goa. The little freedom which Goans had during republican rule also came to an end. A number of curbs were imposed upon the civil liberties. For any political meetings, Governor's prior permission was necessary. All the civil liberties were curbed by passing Act Colonial in 1933.



When the total freedom of the individual was banned this was quite natural that people would revolt against the Government so slowly organizations were established and they carried out some Nationalist activities and when such things happen women's of Goa also participated and made their contribution for the liberation of Goa Daman & Diu. The first women freedom fighter who has been recognized in connection with the Civil Liberty movement was Smt. Pramila Kant Jambaulikar, who associated herself with various programs chalked out by the Goa Seva Sangh since 1945; flag hoisting, collective spinning and meetings used to be at her residence. Later on she became a prominent women member of National Congress Goa since 1946. On 21st July 1946 she led a *prabhatferi* at Madgao and was arrested and beaten. While in custody she answered the police commandant with such a rare courage which infuriated him and threatened that if she involved herself in such activities than he would not make a distinction between a girl and women but strip them. But she didn't stop, she again led processions and was rearrested and then jailed for one year.

Active Participation of women was seen on 18th June 1946 when Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia organized a meeting at Margao against the oppressive rule of Salazar and to demand Civil liberties to the Goans. Lohia inspired the *sushegad Goyankar* who had by then believed that nothing is going to change in Goa. But the entry of Dr. Lohia changed everything. People got inspirations from him and with full swing people from Pernem to Cancona and Molle to Vasco people participated in the freedom struggle movement. On 18th June when Lohia was arrested a young girl Vatsala Pandurang Kirtani was also arrested

when she came forward to deliver a speech, she was arrested and asked by the police commandant Figueiredo why she shouted Jai Hind to which she replied if Viva Salazar brought pride to the heart of the commandant, 'Jai Hind' gave her the spirit to fight for her freedom; after her arrest, a procession of about 40 women was taken out to the police station to ask for her release or else all of them should be arrested, embarrassed by this tricky situation, the police released her, but she refused to go out of the lock-up and ultimately she had to be bodily thrown out of the prison by the commandant himself.

The activity of Goa National Congress, Goa Seva Sangh, Gomantakiya Tarun Sangh and other political revolutionary organizations encouraged many young girls as well as women to actively participate in the movement for civil liberties. Various non-violent activities like *Prabhatferies*, Satyagraha, hoisting tricolor Flag, distributing pamphlets etc were carried out.

Smt. Lalita Katak – Lalita Madhav Velingkar participated in 18th June movement, she used to hold regular *prabhatferis* everyday in Margao to defy the government ban against holding meetings and curbing of the civil liberties; on 21st July 1946 with Smt. Pramila Kant Jambaulikar, Lalita Katak led a *prabhatferi* by holding tricolor a loft, police intercepted the procession and tried to snatch the tricolor from her hands, when she resisted she was slapped and tricolor was forcefully removed after physically overpowering her.

Other women freedom fighters who were actively involved in the civil liberties movement were Krishna Hegde, Vitha Hegde, Krishna Lotlikar Mukta



Karapurkar, Umabai Shirali, Indira Bhaise, Jeevan karapurkar.

Thus a number of Young girls as well as women played an active role in the movement of civil liberties against the Oppressive Portuguese rule and Dictatorial Salazar's rule.

3. The Second Phase of participation of Women is divided into two categories

Participation of Women in Non-Violent Activities: There were many goan as well as Indian Women satyagrahis who participated Non-violently in the freedom struggle especially during 1954-55. Laxmi Painguinkar, Suryakanti FalDesai, Shalini Lolyekar, Kamudini Painguinkar are some of the Goan Women who were from Cancona Taluka who participated in the Freedom Struggle.

Laxmi Painguinkar: she was the member of National Congress Goa. She circulated pamphlets and inspired youngsters in her area to participate in the freedom movement. She offered a satyagraha on 17th February 1955 at Margao, and she was arrested along with her associates and was detained at Panaji Police Station.

Suryakanti FalDesai: She was the member of Indian National Congress. Offered Satyagraha on 17th February 1955 at Margao under the leadership of Laxmi Painguinkar and was arrested and sentenced for three years imprisonment and suspension of political rights for 15 years.

Mitra Pai Bir- Kakodkar: She dedicated her life for creating political awareness among the people of Siolim, Bardez. She was in contact with Dr. Pundalik Gaitonde and other freedom fighters. She organized satyagraha

movement for girls and women. She was arrested on 28th March 1955 while she was preparing women volunteers to welcome Sudhatai Joshi who was to preside over the NCG session at Mapusa.

Sudhatai Mahadev Joshi: she was the member of National Congress Goa and later became its President in 1955. She organized the satyagrahis conference at Mapusa on 6th April 1955. Sudhatai was arrested on the same day, beaten, and sentenced for 10 years imprisonment with fine. In this satyagraha many women participated from all over Goa.

Ambikabai Dandekar: She was from Pune. She attended the National Congress Goa camp at Maneri on the Gosa border from 1st to 4th April 1955 which was held to chalk out the strategy for holding the NCG session in Mapusa. She later accompanied Sudhatai Joshi in her clandestine march towards Mapusa through border areas via Sanquelim and on 6th April 1955, she too joined Sudhatai in her attempt to hold the NCG session in Mapusa along with others.

Kamudini Kavlekar-Painguinkar: she was the member of National Congress Goa. She offered Satyagraha under the leadership of Sudhatai Joshi at Mapusa on 6th April 1955. She was arrested and imprisoned for eight years and was released on 19th August 1959. After suffering four years of imprisonment at Panaji, Quepem and Madgao jails, she participated in the Seva Dal's activities.

Shalini Lolyekar: she was the wife of Freedom Fighter Vishwanath Lolyekar. She was influenced by Shashikala Hodarkar Almieda and Komudini Kavlekar-Painguinkar. She came down to Goa from Bombay (Mumbai) to



participate in the freedom struggle movement. On 6th April 1955 she participated in a satyagraha at Mapusa under the leadership of Sudhatai Joshi. She was arrested, severely beaten and detained in police custody. She was imprisoned for eight years but was soon release.

Sindhutai Deshpande: She was from Maharashtra and was involved in the Indian freedom Movement. She also participated in the quit India Movement of 1942. She joined National Congress Goa and worked under Peter Alvares in border areas of Pernem and Cancona. Sindhutai inspired many Goan womens to join the freedom movement of goa. On 4th June 1954 she participated in the meeting of political workers at Salvador do Mundo village in Bardez Taluka. On 25th November 1954 offered Satyagraha at Panaji in front of the police station and was attested and detain till 14th January 1955 when she was pushed out of Goa border, but she returned to Neura, Goa.

Lilavati Naik:— She helped the nationalist workers, attended meetings, enrolled herself for the satyagraha of 15th April 1955 under the leadership of Sindhutai deshpande. She was arrested on the same day with Sindhutai.

Shashikala Hodarkar Almeida: Sidhutai inspired many women of Goa out of them Shashikala Mangesh Hodarkar who wanted to offer Satyagraha on 25th November 1954 with Sindhutai but could not participate in it on account of strict police vigilance on her house. Her husband Anastacio Almeida was also a freedom fighter who supported her a lot. She later offered satyagraha at Madgao on 17th February 1955 alone with Vilasini Prabhu-Mahale, by holding flag, posters and pamphlets and shouting slogans "Jai Hind" was

arrested and imprisoned and released in March 1958.

Vilasini Prabhu-Mahale: member of national Congress Goa, worked under the leadership of Peter Alvares, distributed posters, circulated messages, participated in the meetings. She offered Satyagraha at margay along with Shashikala Hodarkar. She was arrested and detained for four months.

Ashatai Phadke: Basically from Maharashtra Ashatai was a social worker and was known for her religious discourses (Pravachan). She offered Satyagraha on 28th April 1955 along with Leela sawant at Shirago during Lairai Zatra. She was arrested along with her associates and beaten severely and was detained for one month after that on medical grounds she was released. Subhada Patil, Sahodara Devi Rai, Malinibai Talpule were others who actively participated in the movement.

B] Participation of Women in Violent Activities: It is said that Goan Women directly never participated in the Goa's Struggle for freedom yet there were some women whose ideas were revolutionary like Shanta Hede, Sharada Savaikar, Prema Purav and Shobha Desai.

Shanta Hede-Desai:—She worked with Anthony De Souza and Gopal Apa Kamat; participated in underground nationalist activities like distributing pamphlets and affixing posters. In 1955 her house was searched and she was arrested, beaten severely. Her political right was suspended for 20 years.

Sharada Padmakar Savaikar: she worked under the guidance of Mohan Ranade, after Mohan Ranade's arrest she carried out hiss work of creating political awareness among the people through the



media of school. She decided to offer satyagraha all alone on 7th August 1955, but she was arrested on 6th August. Her house was searched by the police in connection with the slaying of a pro-salazarist Goan. She was released by mistake as the authorities made confusion over her name and that of one SHARAD SHIRVAIKA; later on when they realized their faux pas it was too late and by the time she had already crossed the border.

Prema Narendra Purav, nee Tendulkar, born at Khodyem -Pissurlem in Satari, was a carrier of explosives to freedom fighters. Once at Tambdi Surla she was ambushed, shot at and injured but saved by a mining truck driver. Later, when arrested, she was subjected to extreme torture in jail.

Apart from the above mentioned name; Dadi Harmalkar, Mogabai Naik were those who were the members of Azad Gomantak Dal and participated in the Non-violent activities to liberate Goa.

4. Contribution of Goan Christian Women

The freedom struggle Movement was not only led by Hindus or the Hindu women but equal contribution was made by the Christians of Goa and Catholic women too equally participated in the struggle. The following five women were the prominent Christian Freedom fighters who contributed a lot to Goa's Struggle for freedom.

Dr. Beatris de Menezes Braganza:

She was the daughter of a great Goan Nationalist Late Luis de Menezes Braganza. She took active part in anti-Portuguese bpropaganda activities, meetings and demonstrations held in Mumbai. She was one of the youth leader who led a large procession to the

Portuguese Consulate in Mumbai in 1946 to protest against the arrest of uncle Dr. T.B.Cunha. She was one of the founder members of Goa Youth League and was on its working Committee. The honour of being the first Goan woman freedom fighter goes to the outstanding anti-Portuguese female in Goa in those days, Berta de Menezes Braganza, daughter of the formidable Luis de Menezes Braganza and niece of another formidable freedom fighter, Tristao Braganza Cunha. After the 18th June stir in Margao, she and her uncle, T.B. Cunha, projected themselves as combatants on the bustling political scene, with the latter being arrested and deported. Actually, Berta and her sister, Beatriz, were Indian nationalists right from their young days, wearing saris not frocks as most Christian girls did.

Berta de Menezes Braganza: She was also the daughter of Luis de Menezes Braganza. She was the member of Goa Committee of the Indian National Congress since 1929. She was the member of Goa Youth League and secretary of its Goa branch. She propagated the use of Khadi in response to the call given by Dr. Lohia. She tried to offer satyagraha at Margao on 30th June 1946 but was prevented to do so by the Portuguese police and was beaten. She founded a fortnightly "Free Goa" in 1958. She was a member of the Indian Delegation to Afro-Asian Women's Conference in Cairo where the 'Goa Problem' evoked a special interest and importance. She toured throughout India demanding military action.

Maria Joaquina Calista Araujo: she was the member of National Congress Goa. She was arrested on 30th January 1947 for distributing nationalist pamphlets, her residence was raided and some nationalist pamphlets and other literature were seized. She was



imprisoned at Reis Magoss Jail on 15th February 1947.

Celina Olga Moniz: she was basically from Mombassa in Kenya. She travelled along with groups of nationalists to Belgaum, Banda, Vengurla, did underground nationalist activities in Goa. She was arrested on 26th January 1955 along with Dinanath Amonkar on crossing Mandovi from Malim to Panaji in a canoe with tricolours in their hand.

Dr. Laura De Souza Rodriguez: She gave up her medical practice to join Goa's freedom Movement. She worked as an active member of Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee. She was the president of Goan Women's Association, Mumbai. She strongly supported Goa's liberation movement. She edited 'Konkan life' English monthly.

Libia Lobo Sardesai: she was the member of Goa Youth League. She ran the underground radio station "voice of freedom" (Goyanchya sodvonecho Awaaz) from Castlerock and later on Belgaum. The last ultimatum to Goa Governor-General to Surrender or liberation forces would enter the territory had been repeatedly served every ten minutes from this radio station by Mrs Sardesai.

5. Conclusion:

Women participation in Goa's struggle for freedom is direct as well as indirect. There were few ladies who participated directly in the struggle for freedom while there were few who indirectly contributed to the struggle for freedom by giving food to the underground freedom fighters, by secretly supplying them the ammunitions and arms to the freedom fighters. The female ferment articulated by processions, pheries, satyagrahas and other forms of protests and opposition had its birth, I presume,

with the spontaneous, bold outburst of the teenager, Vatsala Kirtani, at the memorable meeting in Margao on June 18, 1946, rightly considered as the beginning of the end for Portuguese rule in Goa.

Given the violence of the Portuguese Police in Goa in those days, expressed by beatings and torture after arrest, the action of women in Goa in the Goan freedom struggle must be marked not only as boldness but fearlessness as well, for which they deserve admiration and respect. It seems these women freedom fighters considered foreign rule and presence as an affront not so much to Goa but to themselves individually, so emotionally vibrant was their response and action.

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