



Role of women in the non-cooperation movement in west Godavari district

Dr. B. Naga Padmavathy.

Principal, S.K.S.D. Mahila Kalasala Degree & PG (Autonomous), Tanuku

Introduction

By the close of the second decade of the 20th century the position of women in the West Godavari District was very backward in the matter of education, social equality and economic freedom, steeped in the mire of superstition she was confined to the four walls of the kitchen. The credit for bringing women into the mainstream of Indian politics goes to Mahatma Gandhi. The advent of Gandhi brought a new political force on the Indian horizon. He gave a new outlook to the movement in the West Godavari District.

Maganti Annapoorna Devi was the first woman who participated in the freedom movement in West Godavari District. She was the daughter of Kalagara Rama Swami and Pitchamma, wife of Maganti Bapineedu. She had her education at Brahma Balika Vidyalaya, Calcutta. When Gandhi visited Vijayawada in 1921, she presented all her gold ornaments to Gandhi. In the words of Gandhi, 'so far as I remember, she is the first lady who gave away all her ornaments to me. He also observed that she was the only lady wearing khaddar by the women in the Vijayawada meeting and one who had organised the meeting actively, sincerely, and peacefully. She took active part in making bonfire of the foreign clothes and picketing toddy shops in the non-cooperation movement.

When Gandhi visited Elm on April 3, 1921, he spoke in a meeting organised by women in the Town Hall, Eluru, which was attended by about 10,000 women delegates. On that very day Gandhi laid the foundation stone for 'Sattiraju Venkataratnamma Stree Samaja Bhavanam'. In his speech Gandhi expressed his deep sense of grief and hatred at the maintenance of the institution of Bhogam Women at Kakinada. He remarked that every woman was a sister and a mother to everyone and ignoring that, to gratify men's lust some women were compelled to adopt the shameful profession of sex workers, they were degraded and their prospect of living a honourable and decent life ruined. He appealed to those unfortunate women to give up their shameful profession, and asked the Andhra leaders to work for the upliftment of women. He wished that no single Bhogam woman exist in future. He explained the importance of charka in improving the economic status of women. The speech of Gandhi had great effect on the women of West Godavari District. Kalagara Ravamma, a native of Chataparru, offered Gandhi a golden bar weighing 10 sovereigns towards Tilak Swaraj Fund.

Gandhi's tour in the district attracted many women. These women not only became the followers of Gandhi but also propagated and implemented the Gandhi constructive programme. Prominent among them were Maganti



Annapoorna Devi, Sattiraju Mangamma, Chebiyyam Sodamma, Devulapalli Satyavathi, Tallapragada Viswasundaramma, Juluri Tulasamma, Kalagara Ravamma, Mulpuri Chukkamma and others.

During the period of non-cooperation movement Maganti Annapoorna Devi toured the villages of Bhimavaram, Peda Amiram, Kopalle, China Amiram, Pentapadu, etc. She was the first woman who dared to speak in the public requesting the people to extend their support to the non-cooperation movement, at a time their motherland needed their services most. She asked the women to participate in the freedom movement as it would encourage men to enthusiastically participate in the freedom movement in right earnest. Her speeches, delivered in a sweet tone and chaste diction, cheered and impressed all.

Devulapalli Satyavathi, Juluri Tulasamma and Sattiraju Mangamma, natives of Tanuku, played a prominent role in establishing and organising a national school in Tanuku and propagating the utility of khaddar. Juluri Tulasamma exhorted women to work on charka and spin yarn, in obedience to the command of Gandhi. Chebiyyam Sodamma taught tribal students and inaugurated spinning yarn on charka in line with the ideals of Gandhi in Swaraj Ashram at Polavaram founded by Pusuluri Kodandaramayya in 1920. Tallapragada Viswa Sundaramma, a native of Ungutur, Kalagara Pitchamma and her sister Kalagara Ravamma, natives of Chataparru, and Mulpuri Chukkamma of Eluru propagated the use of khaddar and even donated on a large scale to Tilak Swaraj Fund. It is

interesting to note that women in large numbers in Eluru Taluk participated in the freedom movement.

Many prominent women leaders from other districts like Unnava Lakshmi Bayama, Yamini Pooma Tilakam, Duvvuri Subbamma and Vippagunta Vengamamba toured the West Godavari District and worked in non-cooperation movement. Unnava Lakshmi Bayamma, wife of Lakshminarayana of Guntur District, inspired the people of West Godavari District with her thundering and vehement speeches at Eluru, Penugonda, Palacole and Narsapur, captivated the minds of the people and succeeded in attracting many of them into the freedom movement. Pointing to men at Eluru she said, "Sir, are you not ashamed to lose your vitality and sense of understanding under the impact of western action and culture? It is an irony of fate that a housewife like me expected to work in a kitchen has to come on the dais to exhort you to awake from your slumber of impotency and participate in the freedom movement with a bold heart".

She addressed a women's meeting at Narsapur in which she said, "I understand bangles, rings and other jewellery were forthcoming earnestly from the fair hands. I have a mind that lady agitators will bring Swarajyam quickly and more surely than the best of male orators". Then she appealed for Tilak Swaraj Fund. One Kasturi Mahalakshmi donated four sovereigns of gold to the fund. On the same evening she addressed the men's meeting at Narsapur and appealed to the audience "to come out of the government service civil or military and work for Swaraj".



Her speeches cheered and enthused the people to join the freedom movement.

Another fiery Speaker Yamini Poorna Tilakam toured Eluru, Pulla and Kaikaram and gave vehement speeches in support of the boycott of foreign cloth and anti-drink as a result foreign cloth gathered and put to fire in Eluru Abkari bidders at Pulla and Kaikaram cancelled their abkari contracts. Another learned Speaker Duvvuri Subbamma gave enlightened speeches sprinkled with references from epics at Eluru and Kovvur. She called the non-cooperation movement a Dharma Yudda or a war between the forces of injustice and justice in which justice would ultimately triumph. Another splendid Speaker of great attraction was Vippagunta Vengamamba who spoke at Eluru and Undi supporting non-cooperation movement.

The advent of Gandhi on the Indian political scene drew women into the national movement. Breaking their age-old shackles of tradition, purdah and superstition women jumped into the mainstream of the freedom movement and holding the tri-coloured flag on the shoulder boldly they walked along with men in all the processions, agitations and picketings in the course of the freedom movement.

References:

1. Young India, 27 October 1927.
2. Anahra Patrika, April 7, 1921, P.6
3. Ibid., August 29, 1921, p.11 and September 13, 1921, pp.9-10.
4. Ibid., December 23, 1920, p.9.
5. Dr. Gopala Swami:- Freedom Movement in West Godavari District 1919-1943, 2017

6. Andhra Patrika, September 3, 1921, p.4.
7. The Hindu, October 26, 1921.
8. Ibid., August 12, 1921, and Andhra Patrika, August 12, 1921, p.7.
9. Dr. G. Gopala Swami,