

The Relationship between National Leaders and Karnataka during the Indian National Movement Padmavathi V.

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ABSTRACT:

This paper critically examines the reciprocal relationship between national leaders and the region of Karnataka during the Indian National Movement (1885–1947), emphasizing the interplay between national political ideologies and regional socio-political dynamics. Karnataka then territorially fragmented under various British presidencies and princely states most notably Mysore, emerged as an active participant in the broader anti-colonial struggle. National figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel catalyzed mass mobilization through visits, speeches, and ideological influence. Their engagement was not unidirectional; Karnataka contributed significantly through grassroots activism, regional leaders like Karnad Sadashiva Rao and Hardekar Manjappa, and strategic adaptation of national programs including Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India.

The study further interrogates how Gandhian ideals were localized in Karnataka, particularly through khadi promotion, Harijan welfare, and village-based self-reliance. It also explores the unique political context of princely Mysore, culminating in the “Mysore Chalo” movement demanding responsible governance. The eventual unification of Kannada-speaking regions in 1956 is analyzed as a postcolonial extension of nationalist aspirations. Ultimately, the essay argues that Karnataka’s engagement with national leaders was both collaborative and transformative, contributing to the shaping of modern Indian nationalism and regional identity formation within the federal structure of post-independence India.

KEYWORDS:

Indian National Movement, Karnataka National Leaders, Mahatma Gandhi, Belgaum Congress Session, Mysore Chalo Movement.

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Introduction:

The Indian National Movement was a multifaceted struggle that engaged a wide spectrum of political ideologies, social reform movements, and regional awakenings. While national leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and Subhas Chandra Bose spearheaded the larger fight for independence, regional participation was equally crucial in sustaining and enriching the movement. Karnataka, then divided among British-administered regions (Bombay Presidency, Madras Presidency), the princely state of Mysore, and parts of Hyderabad, made a significant yet often underemphasized contribution to India's freedom struggle.

The relationship between national leaders and Karnataka was marked by interaction, inspiration, and mutual transformation. National leaders catalyzed local political awakenings, while Karnataka provided the movement with committed leaders, mass participation, and unique regional strategies. This essay explores that relationship, tracing the evolution from early resistances to the Quit India Movement and the unification of Karnataka post-independence.

1. Early Resistance and Political Awakening in Karnataka**1.1 Pre-Congress Resistance**

The spirit of resistance in Karnataka predated the Indian National Congress. The 19th century saw armed revolts and uprisings in different regions:

Kittur Rani Chennamma (1824): She led a valiant rebellion against the British East India Company's Doctrine of Lapse after they refused to recognize her adopted son as the heir to the throne.

Sangolli Rayanna (1830): A military chief of the Kittur kingdom who organized guerrilla warfare against the British.

Surapura and Coorg Rebellions: Local rulers and tribal leaders resisted annexation and imposition of British authority.

Though isolated, these revolts became symbolic of Karnataka's inherent resistance to foreign domination and were later glorified by nationalist leaders as precursors to the freedom struggle.

1.2 Impact of Social Reform and Education

The 19th-century social reform movement, influenced by thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, also reached Karnataka. Missionary and secular institutions played a role in spreading modern education and political consciousness.

The Mysore Government under Krishnaraja Wodeyar III and IV, with the support of Dewan Rangacharlu and Dewan Sheshadri Iyer, implemented progressive administrative reforms, fostering an environment that was conducive to nationalist ideas.

2. The Entry of Indian National Congress and Karnataka's Participation

2.1 Early Involvement (1885–1915)

The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885. From the beginning, Karnataka had representation at Congress sessions. Nationalist newspapers, pamphlets, and vernacular journals helped spread political awareness.

Karnad Sadashiva Rao was one of the early Congress leaders from Karnataka who took part in various sessions of the Congress. He also promoted education among the marginalized and worked for women's upliftment.

Alur Venkata Rao, a historian and nationalist, contributed through his writings and became a strong advocate of Karnataka unification.

2.2 Home Rule Movement and Tilak's Influence:

The Home Rule Movement led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak had a major influence in North Karnataka. Tilak's visits to Belgaum and Hubli attracted large crowds. His slogans of "Swaraj is my birthright" were widely adopted. Leaders like Gangadhar Rao Deshpande in Belgaum and Govindrao Yalgi in Dharwad actively participated in Home Rule League activities.

3. Gandhian Era and Mass Movements (1915–1942)

3.1 Gandhi's Visits to Karnataka

Mahatma Gandhi visited Karnataka multiple times between 1915 and 1942. His philosophy of non-violence, satyagraha, and constructive work found deep resonance. In 1924, Gandhi presided over the Belgaum Congress Session—the only session he ever presided over. This was a landmark moment in Karnataka's political history. During his 1934 visit to Davanagere, he laid the foundation for a Harijan hostel, encouraged khadi production, and emphasized the need to remove untouchability.

3.2 Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements:

Karnataka actively participated in both the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22) and Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–34):

Boycott of British goods, schools, and law courts was seen in cit-

ies like Bangalore, Hubli, Dharwad, and Mangalore. Khadi centers were set up in places like Badanavalu (Mysore district), a village Gandhi visited and praised. Leaders like Hardekar Manjappa spread Gandhi's message through Bhajan Mandalis and public lectures.

3.3 Role of Women and Youth

Women leaders like Yashodhara Dasappa, Kamala Bai, and Indiramma took active part in satyagraha's and picketing. Youth organizations, particularly Seva Dal (founded by Karnataka-born N.S. Hardikar), played a crucial role in mobilizing people.

4. Quit India Movement and Underground Activities (1942–1947)

The Quit India Movement, launched by Gandhi in 1942, marked a more aggressive turn in the freedom struggle. Despite severe repression, the movement spread across Karnataka:

In Chikmagalur, Shimoga, Tumkur, and Dharwad, there were protests, strikes, and sabotage of communication lines. Khadi Shankarappa and other underground activists used khadi centers as hubs for secret communication. Students and workers in Bangalore organized strikes and protests. Police opened fire on gatherings in Hubli and Mysore. The movement marked the rise of a new generation of leaders ready to lead post-independence India.

5. Role of Other National Leaders in Karnataka

5.1 Jawaharlal Nehru

Nehru visited Karnataka several times during his political campaigns. He addressed meetings in Bangalore, Mysore, and Belgaum. His speeches focused on democracy, secularism, and modern industrial development. His views influenced young freedom fighters and intellectuals in Karnataka who later led the state post-1947. Nehru also supported the idea of linguistic states, which laid the groundwork for Karnataka's unification.

5.2 Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

Patel's contribution was more prominent during the integration of princely states. He worked to integrate the Kingdom of Mysore into the Indian Union, using diplomacy and pressure, though the Mysore rulers had largely cooperated with the national movement.

5.3 Subhas Chandra Bose

Though Bose had limited direct interaction with Karnataka, his ideology found supporters in urban areas. INA recruitment and support activities were conducted secretly in coastal Karnataka, especially among

the Muslim and Christian communities.

6. Unique Role of Mysore State

Mysore, a princely state, had its own political dynamics:

Mysore Maharajas, especially Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, were progressive rulers who invested in education, public works, and women's welfare. Yet, political power remained with the royal court.

The Mysore Congress was formed in 1920 but faced resistance from the monarchy. The "Mysore Chalo" Movement (1947) demanded responsible government. Massive protests were held in Bangalore, Mysore, and Mandya. Leaders like K.C. Reddy, T. Subramanya, and T. Sidalingaiah led the final push toward democratic governance.

7. Unification of Karnataka and the Legacy of the Freedom Movement

7.1 Karnataka Ekikarana Movements

Inspired by the nationalist goal of uniting India, Kannada leaders launched the Ekikarana (Unification) Movement:

Areas speaking Kannada were split between Madras Presidency, Bombay Presidency, Hyderabad, and Mysore. Leaders like Alur Venkata Rao, Kuvempu, and B.D. Jatti advocated unification as a cultural and political necessity. After independence, due to the efforts of Karnataka leaders and the States Reorganization Commission (1956), the modern state of Karnataka was formed.

7.2 Cultural and Political Legacy

Nationalist values of secularism, democracy, and social justice became part of Karnataka's political culture. Post-independence leaders like Devaraj Urs, Kengal Hanumanthaiah, and Kadidal Manjappa carried forward the vision of inclusive governance. Literary figures like Kuvempu (Jnanpith awardee) integrated nationalist ideals into Kannada literature, promoting a regional identity within the national framework.

Conclusion

The relationship between national leaders and Karnataka during the Indian National Movement was dynamic, reciprocal, and transformative. National leaders provided the ideological framework and moral leadership that inspired thousands in Karnataka. In return, the state offered a rich tradition of resistance, robust local leadership, and wholehearted mass participation. From early revolts to Gandhian satyagrahas, from student activism to the Mysore Chalo movement, Karnataka not only participated

in the national struggle but helped shape its diverse, federal character.

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