

Rebellion of Mudaragi Bheemaraya Against the British in the Freedom Movement of Karnataka

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Abstract

There were many struggles or resistances in Karnataka against the British imperialist policies and have been recorded in the pages of History of India. Among such resistances, the struggle of Mundargi region has acquired historical significance. The Mundaragi princely state was one of the few major princely states in the entire south India in general and Karnataka in particular that put up fierce resistance to the British during the revolt of 1857. Mundaragi Bheemaraya was a man of organizational power, and on that occasion he united the people of the Mundaragi region, the princes and the Desais and gained the cooperation and sympathy of all classes of people and devoted himself to fighting against the imperialists.

Keywords: Mundaragi, Bheemaraya, Karnataka, Resistance, Princely state, Rebellion Revolt, Naragunda.

Introduction:

When many royal families, princely states, and feudal lords faced the loss of their states and rights due to the British imperialist policy they opposed such a situation and fought against the British. Especially many who participated in the struggle of 1857 were caught in the trap of the problem of accepting adopted children and were unwilling to accepting this policy and fell into the cunning net of the British. But Mundaragi Bheemaraya was not personally directly involved in any such problems or exploitation. Because if we look at his status at that time, he did not belong to any royal family, was not a prince, was not a pargar, even if there was a problem like accepting adopted children. Instead, they began to oppose British rule with self motivation and a selfless spirit and above all with patriotism and freedom loving spirit to fight against the exploitation policies of the British.

Early life of Bheemaraya:

Mundaragi Bheemaraya was born in 1823. His father Rangaraya who belonged to a prominent family of the Mundaragi Nadagoudika. Rangaraya was serving as a judge in Haveri. It is believed that Bheemaraya's early education must have taken place in this area. It is known that he was educated in the British environment and acquired special knowledge along with special mastery in the English language. The high status of his father Rangaraya played an important role in shaping Bheemaraya's personality at that time. Bheemaraya was one of the few Indians who could speak English well at that time. Another special feature of Bheemaraya was that he was so talented that he could speak in the style and voice of the English people while conversing in English. This special quality of his made him close and intimate with the British Citizens and officials.

Bheemaraya's entry in to the service of British government

On the basis of special knowledge of the English language Bheemaraya made easy for him to join the service of the British Government. Bheemaraya had spent his childhood and education in contact with the British, he must have naturally attracted to the British Service. Thus Bheemaraya started his service as a magistrate. In the beginning he was completely devoted to the British and was known for his service efficiency and earned the trust of the British. After some days he was promoted to the position of Tahisldar and worked in Harapanahalli and Bellary and known as an excellent and efficient officer in this area. He earned a good name and position for himself in revenue collection, administration and adherence to British.

Resignation to the British government service:

Bheemaraya began to feel dissatisfied and fed up with the British rule and finally resigned from his service of British government in 1854. The issue that remains to be discussed is the reason for his resignation. According to some opinions, Bheemaraya himself resigned and left his job voluntarily. But another opinion, some of Bheemaraya's attitudes were not pleasing to the British. However since there is no clear and specific information according to the documents and information available so far.

Some of the administrative policies of the British, which he had observed while in service had a profound effect on his mind. He thought about his country and his people and was worried about the dangers that might arise. At the same time the British were exploiting the Indians all over the country, their economic and social conditions were very deplorable. Therefore Bheemaraya resigned from his job and settled in Bennehalli, near his hometown Mundargi.

Bheeramaraya's preparations for revolt:

Bheemaraya did not have any personal hatred or selfishness to rebel against the British, because Bheemaraya was not a king, a Desai or someone who fought for the throne or ownership. But rather he was worried that his homeland was being taken over by foreigners and all the wealth have was being looted. He wanted to free his country from the slavery of these foreigners. Therefore he left behind power, wealth and fame and came to his own village Bennehalli and started making preparations to fight against the imperialists through uniting all the surrounding kings, Desais, Deshmukhs and farmers. The most important of such leaders were Babasaheb of Naragunda, Peshwa Nanasahab, Kenchanagowda of Hammigi, Desai of Dambal etc.

The British who were closely and suspiciously observing Bheemaraya's movement at this time and realized that this suspicion was true. On 1st August 1857, the collector of Bellary wrote a letter to the collector of Dharwad informing him that Mundargi Bheemaraya and the Desai of Dambal had joined hands and on the pretext of building a lake in Dambal had conspired against the government by gathering three to four hundred people. Then collector of Dharwad summoned Bheemaraya and Desai and interrogated them. But Mundargi Bheemaraya, who had been trained in the service of the British and knew their pulse, showed special respect and obedience to the British. It showed that he was always obedient to the British rule and confirmed to the British that the information about the conspiracy was false news and released them. After this incident, Bheemaraya shifted his field of operations to the Bellary area. He organized there the farmers of Hospet, Kamalapura and surrounding villages and began collecting ammunition, Bullets and weapons for the rebellion. The chief of Koppal and the ruler of Anegondi had expressed their support to Bheemaraya against the British. Considering all the above

points, it must be understood that Bheemaraya had made systematic and adequate preparations for the rebellion against the British.

Declaration of the Rebellion:

After receiving information about the storage of weapons in Hammigi and Lakshmeshwara, the British sent sepoys under the command of the Faujdar to attack Hammigi and searched Desai's word. They sized the weapons there and posted police as guards. Bheemaraya and Kenchanagouda attacked Hammigi fort that same night and killed the guard and looted the ammunition from there. They came to Dambal looted the government treasury there and took away guns, rifles and other weapons. Many revolutionaries, who organized Bheemaraya came to Gadag and destroyed the post office and telegraph offices there and looted their property. Thus Bheemaraya openly declared rebellion step by step.

At the same time, on hearing the news of Bheemaraya's arrival in Koppal the Tahsildar of Koppal Mohammed Hanif captured the family members of Bheemaraya and detained them in Koppal fort. The British government announced a reward of five thousand rupees for anyone who captured Bheemaraya. Knowing that the family members were being held captive. Bheemaraya felt it was necessary to free his family. So he decided to move towards the Koppal fort. As soon as the British heard the news of the capture of Koppal fort by Bheemaraya, they immediately sent their troops to Koppal on May 31, 1858 and troops from all sides had surrounded Koppal fort and began the attack.

Major Hoon warned Bheemaraya that he must surrender within three hours or face serious consequences. But Bheemaraya refused to surrender and continued the attack from inside the fort. The British, who had failed to enter the fort had lured the soldiers inside the fort with money. Falling for such lure the traitors opened the door of the fort. Immediately the British army entered the fort and began the attack. Although Bheemaraya made many efforts to stop the British who had entered the fort, the revolutionaries were helpless in front of the British guns and artillery. Kenchanagouda knowing that there was no use in continuing the fight, came to Bheemaraya and said that in this situation the only way to surrender. Bheemaraya, who had not expected it and shot Kenchanagouda dead on the spot. Then he too was shot himself and martyred there, thus Bheemaraya became martyred on 1st June 1858. After the death of Bheemaraya and Kenchanagouda the helpless soldiers surrendered to the British. The Koppal fort fell into the hands of the British. Thus with the death of Bheemaraya, who fought against the imperialists, the activities of the 1857 struggle in Karnataka also came to an end.

Conclusion:

Mundaragi Bheemaraya is a legendary hero of Karnataka during the freedom movement in 1857. Earlier Bheemaraya himself served in different posts in the British government. He could not stand the exploitation policies of British rule and in protest he resigned and came back his native village Bennehalli. He contacted various neighbour leaders like Hammigi Kenchanagowda, Desai of Dambal, Nenasahab, Babasaheb of Naragunda and others including farmers. The British government was observing very closely the activities of Bheemaraya when the British attacked and took control of Koppal fort, Bheemaraya declared rebellion openly with the support of Kenchanagowda, Desai of Dambal and other revolutionary activists and took control over the Koppal fort. The traitors who lured by the British opened the door of the Koppal fort. Although Bheemaraya made many efforts to stop the British who had entered the fort. Finally Bheemaraya shot himself on 1st June 1858. It was a harsh truth that Bheemaraya who had left everything behind and fought for his country, people and independence.

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