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## KUMAR KARAJGI: A CHAMPION OF THE DEPRIVED



S. N. Salawade

Associate Professor , Walchand College of Arts & Science Solapur.

### ABSTRACT

Solapur is one of the cities in Maharashtra with a magnificent historical heritage. The city of Solapur, being on the borders of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, has a special religious significance. Mangalwedha, a taluka in Solapur district, is known as a place where Mahatma Basaveshwara lived for several years. Besides this, Solapur is also known to be the place where Siddheshwara did his splendid work. Long before it, Emperor Aurangzeb of the Mughal dynasty resided in Begampur of Solapur district and he used to visit the Jama Masjid in the city for Friday prayers. Solapur, among other things, has been reputed being a textile hub. A big textile industry in Asia was set up in the city in the year 1865 and later on the city witnessed the rise of revolutionaries during the period of India's freedom struggle.

**KEYWORDS** :historical heritage ,  
Kumar Karajgi , India's freedom  
struggle.

### INTRODUCTION

Solapur enjoyed four-day independence, when the entire nation was under the reign of the British Empire. The city is also known as the place where Sharad Pawar, a stalwart in Indian politics, has been quite instrumental. It has



also seen the rise of Sushilkumar Shinde up to the position of the Home Minister of India. This city, which got the identity of the textile hub, had a considerable number of textile mills. However, in the course of time, a number of textile mills got closed down. The workers therein became jobless and thus miserable. It was then that Kumar Karajgi rose as a leader of the workers. The Juni Mill, which was a glory of the Solapur city and where 22 thousand workers worked, was closed down. Thousands of workers demonstrated for compensation on the streets of Solapur under

the leadership of Kumar Karajgi. Kumar Karajgi played a key role in getting compensation to the survivors of the expelled workers by virtue of selling the premises of the Juni Mill and helped them get houses at reduced prices. However, it is quite unfortunate that neither the government nor the people have taken cognizance of the memorable contribution rendered by Kumar Karajgi.

### **FAMILY BACKGROUND & CHILDHOOD:**

Kumar was born in a farmer's family in Aherwadi, a village in South Solapur on 5th February 1949. His father, Shankar, was inculcated by the teachings of Mahatma Basaveshwara and Siddheshwara and his mother was Sonamata. Due to poverty the family of Karajgi had to migrate to Solapur and stay in Juni Mill chawl. His father became a worker in the mill. The father couldn't bear the expenses of Kumar's education, because of the cheerless financial condition. Hence, he was sent to a Municipal school. Shankar Karajgi had five children, which made the expenditure quite difficult. Kumar gave up his education after the 4th standard and started to contribute to the family's maintenance by sailing ice. Afterwards, he worked as a laborer and a cycle repairer. He made friends, since he was quite sociable and participated in religious and social activities. He would play important role in Ganesh festival, Shiv-Jayanti and Navratri festival. He would whole-heartedly participate in the Siddharameshwara festival and he also began to do social work by helping the sick people of chawl seek medical attention. It was this time when the mill where his father worked was closed down. The workers residing in the nearby colonies became jobless. Kumar began to be restless by witnessing the wretched condition of the poor workers around.

### **STRUGGLE FOR THE JUSTICE OF WORKERS OF JUNI MILL:**

Kumar realized the importance of hard work, as his father was a worker. The Juni Mill of Solapur was one of the big mills in the entire Asian continent. It was set up in 1865 and it functioned for 98 years. Around 1965, the Mill was closed down on account of a number of reasons. Twenty two thousand workers of the Mill were rendered jobless. They became desperate in search of a livelihood. Some of them left Solapur for survival. There were workers who became criminals. It is a fact that not a single leader of Solapur went to the rescue of the workers. The Juni Mill was liquidized and the workers were jobless. Nevertheless, Kumar Karajgi along with a few companions intervened and undertook a struggle for giving compensation to the former workers by means of selling the Mill land. A lobby made by the local industrialists and crafty politicians made auction of the 140 acre of Mill land at only 1 crore 70 lakh. Kumar determined that he would not allow this shameful transaction.

### **COMMITTEE FOR STRUGGLE:**

The land of the Juni Mill was thus underestimated. The little amount estimated of the Mill was not sufficient for the monetary compensation of the workers. Hence, on 9th August 1988 the Juni Mill Struggle Committee was set up under the guidance of Kumar Karajgi and there was a spontaneous support given to it by the workers. A petition was filed in the Bombay High Court for the review of the estimate of the Juni Mill land by Kumar Karajgi, with no political background. And the struggle got under way through legal manner.

### **USE OF MAHATMA GANDHI'S SATYAGRAHA:**

For the just compensation to the workers, on the one hand the Committee had filed a petition in the Bombay High Court and on the other hand, it adopted Gandhian way of resistance and fasting. At the entrance of the Juni Mill a group of the workers and their descendants began fasting under a tent.

The fasting was carried on despite unbearable heat, rain and chill. It lasted 9 years.

### **Sattyaagraha deserved to be recognized by Guinness Book of World Records:**

The Sattyaagraha undertaken under the leadership of Kumar Karajgi by the Juni Mill Struggle Committee was really historic and quite spontaneous. The participants in the Sattyaagraha were all poor workers or their survivors, who were inspired by Kumar Karajgi to undertake the struggle lasting nine long years. It is a just demand that a struggle that lasted nine years, which happens to be the longest one, must be recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records. This struggle, which followed the non-violent way, changed the mind-set of the High Court and the goddess of Justice blessed the workers. The Gandhian way of peaceful struggle succeeded and the Court gave order for a re-auction of the land of the Juni Mill. The credit of this decision goes to Kumar Karajgi.

The Bombay High Court gave the verdict of a re-auction of the land of the Juni Mill. The auction was carried out and the last price was fixed at 9 crore 36 lakh rupees. It was Kumar Karajgi who announced the final price. A man, who had no money and who was without good foot wears, made the announcement running in crores of rupees. The people of Solapur were made an appeal to collect money and an assurance was given that the land would be sold at a price of Rs. 30 per square foot. People started to deposit money in the bank. But some crooked-minded people began to spread rumours by making people withdraw their money from this noble cause. Nevertheless, Kumar Karajgi didn't give up and he renewed his attempts at seeking funds. As a result, persons like Sheth Arvindji Doshi, Ratnalal Jain and Sharad Muttha ran to the rescue of this campaign and a sum of rupees 9 crore 36 lakh was raised. The sum was deposited in the Court and the Struggle Committee took possession of the land. Thus, the assurance given to the people was fulfilled. The land that would have cost Rs. 3000/- per square meter was sold at just Rs. 30/- to those who deposited the money. The Umanagari Cooperative Housing Society erected on the Mill land adds to the glory of the Solapur city and the project of building houses is going on by the inspiration of Kumar Karajgi. If Kumar Karajgi had not struggled for the land of the Mill, the place would have been exploited by big businesspersons by building malls. We see the middle class people, the workers and the descendants of the workers residing happily in the houses on the land of the Juni Mill.

### **Other Dimensions to the Personality of Kumar Karajgi:**

Kumar Dada became a great leader of the workers. Besides this, he had other dimensions to his personality. He went for such a historic work but never had any vested interest, nor did he take any advantage of the work he did. He never desired for any political positions. He knew that politics is a tool for social transformation. In spite of good relations with politicians, right from Sushilkumar Shinde to Sharad Pawar, he concentrated on the social work only. In order to get away with the compromises that politics involves, he avoided the temptation of a political career.

### **Love of Education:**

As Kumar Dada had a realization that he couldn't seek education due to his gloomy financial conditions, he awarded a 10 acre land for setting up the Pradnya Education Society. Nagesh Karajgi Orchid College of Engineering is one of the reputed institutions in Maharashtra. Besides this there are English medium schools in Bale area and Juni Mill premises which allow education to the children of the poor and the workers.

### **Donations to Religious Cause:**

Kumar Dada has a religious bent of mind. He has donated to the religious and spiritual activities generously. To him religion is not restricted to any one community, he thinks that religion must consider all to be equal and followers of one God. He donates without any discrimination, whether it is the Christmas, the Ramzan or the Diwali occasion. It's because of his whole-hearted generosity, the followers of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar feel attached to Kumar Dada.

### **His Charity:**

Kumar himself underwent the troubles of poverty. He knows the pangs of the poor people, since he has had the first hand experience of it. Hence, he helps the poor people quite generously. He is always there whether it is distributing notebooks to the poor and needy students, helping people in festivals or funding the people getting medical treatment or getting married. Kumar Karajgi is the only large-hearted person in the city of Solapur, once upon a time this credit would be given to Baburao Chakote. Now, Kumar has taken over the baton and carrying on the work of charity.

Thus, a person who has played so many significant roles deserves to be recognized by the political leaders, the government and the non-government organizations and he must be recommended for the award of a Padma Puraskar or must be given a government position. This will certainly be a due recognition of the social commitment and philanthropic dedication shown by Kumar Dada.

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