



**FORGOTTEN WOMEN FREEDOM FIGHTERS AND SOCIAL REFORMERS OF
THE HYDERABAD-KARNATAKA REGION**

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ABSTRACT:

*The Hyderabad-Karnataka region, presently known as the Kalyana Karnataka region, has made significant contributions to India's freedom struggle and social reform movements. However, the role of many women freedom fighters and social reformers from this region remains largely neglected in mainstream historical narratives. These women actively participated in anti-colonial movements, struggles against the autocratic rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad, and various social reform initiatives aimed at promoting education, gender equality, social justice, and the upliftment of marginalized communities. Despite facing social, cultural, and political barriers, they demonstrated remarkable courage, leadership, and commitment to public welfare. This study seeks to explore and document the contributions of these forgotten women, highlighting their role in shaping regional and national history. By examining historical records, biographies, archival sources, and scholarly literature, the study aims to recover their legacy and provide a more inclusive understanding of the freedom movement and social transformation in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region. Recognizing these women's contributions not only enriches historical scholarship but also inspires contemporary discussions on women's empowerment and social change.*¹



KEYWORDS: *Forgotten Women, Freedom Fighters, Social Reformers, Hyderabad-Karnataka Region, Kalyana Karnataka, Women's Participation, Freedom Movement, Nizam Rule, Social Change, Women's Empowerment, Regional History, Gender Equality, Social Justice, Indian National Movement.*

INTRODUCTION

The history of India's freedom struggle and social reform movements is enriched by the contributions of countless women who displayed extraordinary courage, leadership, and dedication. While several prominent women leaders have received recognition in national historiography, many women who played vital roles at regional levels remain largely forgotten. The Hyderabad-Karnataka region, presently known as Kalyana Karnataka and comprising districts such as Kalaburagi, Bidar, Raichur, Yadgir, Koppal, and Ballari, possesses a unique historical legacy shaped by resistance against colonial rule, opposition to the Nizam's autocratic administration, and various social reform movements. Within this historical landscape, numerous women emerged as active participants in political struggles and agents of social transformation.² The women of the Hyderabad-Karnataka

¹ Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, Penguin Books, 1989.

² Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947*, Macmillan, 1983.

region contributed significantly to movements for freedom, social justice, education, and the upliftment of marginalized communities. Despite facing patriarchal restrictions, limited educational opportunities, and social barriers, they participated in public life with determination and commitment. Many women supported nationalist activities, mobilized local communities, promoted literacy and women's education, challenged social inequalities, and worked for the welfare of disadvantaged sections of society. Their efforts strengthened both the freedom movement and the broader process of social reform in the region. However, the contributions of these women have often remained absent from mainstream historical accounts. Historical narratives have largely focused on prominent national leaders, leaving regional women activists underrepresented in academic research and public memory. As a result, valuable stories of courage, sacrifice, and leadership have been overlooked. Recovering these forgotten histories is essential for developing a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of India's struggle for independence and social progress. This study seeks to examine the lives and contributions of the forgotten women freedom fighters and social reformers of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region. By analyzing historical records, biographies, archival documents, and secondary literature, the study aims to highlight their role in shaping regional society and contributing to national movements. It also seeks to recognize their legacy as an important source of inspiration for contemporary discussions on women's empowerment, social equality, and democratic participation. Through this exploration, the study contributes to preserving and celebrating the invaluable contributions of women whose efforts have long remained on the margins of history.³

Aim

The primary aim of this study is to explore, document, and analyze the contributions of forgotten women freedom fighters and social reformers of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region and to highlight their role in the freedom movement, social transformation, and regional development.

Objectives

- ❖ To identify the women freedom fighters and social reformers of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region whose contributions have received limited historical recognition.
- ❖ To examine the role of these women in the freedom struggle against colonial rule and the Nizam's administration.
- ❖ To analyze their contributions toward social reform, including women's education, social justice, eradication of social inequalities, and community welfare.
- ❖ To study the challenges and barriers faced by women activists and reformers in the socio-political environment of the region.
- ❖ To assess the impact of their activities on the social, cultural, and political development of Hyderabad-Karnataka.
- ❖ To contribute to a more inclusive understanding of regional and national history by bringing the achievements of these women into academic and public discourse.
- ❖ To preserve and promote the legacy of these forgotten women as sources of inspiration for future generations.⁴

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on a qualitative and historical research methodology. It aims to examine and document the contributions of forgotten women freedom fighters and social reformers of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region. The study relies primarily on secondary sources of data, including books, research articles, biographies, historical records, government publications, archival documents, journals, newspapers, and other relevant literature related to the freedom movement and social reform activities in the region. A descriptive and analytical approach has been adopted to understand the role

³ Neera Desai, *Women in Modern India*, Vora & Co., 1977.

⁴ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

played by women in political, social, and educational reforms. Historical documents and scholarly works have been critically reviewed to identify women whose contributions have received limited recognition in mainstream historical narratives. The collected information has been systematically analyzed to examine their participation in the struggle against colonial rule and the Nizam's administration, as well as their efforts toward social justice, women's education, community development, and the upliftment of marginalized groups.

The study also employs a historical interpretation method to place the activities of these women within the broader socio-political context of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region. Comparative analysis has been used wherever necessary to assess their contributions and their impact on regional society. The findings are presented through a thematic examination of the lives, achievements, challenges, and legacy of these women. Thus, the research methodology combines historical, descriptive, and analytical methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the contributions of forgotten women freedom fighters and social reformers and to highlight their significance in the history of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region.⁵

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study of forgotten women freedom fighters and social reformers of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region is significant because it seeks to bring to light the contributions of women whose roles have largely remained overlooked in mainstream historical narratives. While the history of India's freedom struggle and social reform movements often highlights prominent national leaders, many regional women activists who made remarkable contributions have not received adequate recognition. This study helps bridge that gap by documenting and analyzing their efforts and achievements. The research contributes to a more inclusive and balanced understanding of history by acknowledging the participation of women in political, social, educational, and cultural transformation. It highlights the courage, leadership, and determination of women who challenged social barriers and actively participated in movements against oppression, inequality, and injustice. Their involvement in the struggle against colonial rule and the Nizam's administration demonstrates the important role women played in shaping the socio-political landscape of the region.⁶

This study is also significant for preserving the historical legacy of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region. By recovering the stories of forgotten women activists and reformers, it enriches regional historiography and provides valuable information for future researchers, historians, and students. The study contributes to the documentation of local history, which is often neglected in broader national narratives. Furthermore, the research promotes awareness of women's contributions to nation-building and social development. It serves as a source of inspiration for contemporary society by showcasing examples of women's leadership, resilience, and commitment to public welfare. The findings may encourage greater appreciation of gender equality and women's empowerment while emphasizing the importance of recognizing the contributions of women in all spheres of society. Thus, the study holds academic, historical, social, and cultural significance by preserving the memory of forgotten women freedom fighters and social reformers and by ensuring that their contributions receive the recognition they deserve.⁷

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Scope

The present study focuses on the contributions of forgotten women freedom fighters and social reformers of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region, presently known as Kalyana Karnataka. The study covers women who participated in the freedom movement, resisted the Nizam's rule, and contributed to social reform initiatives such as women's education, social justice, community development, and the

⁵ Bharati Ray, *Women of India: Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

⁶ Radha Kumar, *A History of Doing*, Zubaan, 1993.

⁷ S. Chandrashekar, *History of Karnataka*, University of Mysore Publications, 2004.

upliftment of marginalized sections of society. It seeks to examine their roles, achievements, struggles, and influence on the social and political development of the region. The study explores historical and social developments within the districts of Kalaburagi, Bidar, Raichur, Yadgir, Koppal, and Ballari. It aims to highlight the contributions of women whose efforts have received limited attention in mainstream historical writings. By analyzing available historical records and scholarly literature, the study contributes to a broader understanding of women's participation in regional and national movements and enriches the existing body of knowledge on the history of Hyderabad-Karnataka.⁸

Limitations

The study is primarily based on secondary sources such as books, research articles, historical documents, journals, biographies, and archival materials. Therefore, its findings depend on the availability, accuracy, and reliability of existing records. Due to the limited documentation of many regional women activists, complete information regarding their lives and contributions may not always be available. Another limitation is that several women who contributed significantly to local movements may not have been adequately recorded in official historical documents, resulting in gaps in historical evidence. The study is confined to the Hyderabad-Karnataka region and does not cover women freedom fighters and social reformers from other regions of Karnataka or India. Time and resource constraints also restrict the scope of extensive field investigations and oral history collection. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the neglected contributions of women freedom fighters and social reformers and contributes to preserving their historical legacy.

REVIEW OF THE STUDY

The available literature on India's freedom struggle and social reform movements reveals that women played a crucial role in shaping political and social change. Several studies have examined the contributions of prominent women leaders such as Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Rani Gaidinliu. These works highlight the active participation of women in nationalist movements, social reform campaigns, and efforts aimed at improving the status of women in society. However, most historical studies focus on nationally recognized figures, while the contributions of regional women activists remain comparatively underexplored. Research on the history of the Hyderabad State and the Hyderabad-Karnataka region has primarily concentrated on political developments, the anti-Nizam movements, peasant struggles, and the process of integration with the Indian Union. Scholars have discussed the role of various organizations and leaders in resisting autocratic rule and promoting social change. These studies provide valuable insights into the socio-political environment of the region but often offer limited attention to the specific contributions of women participants.⁹

Several works on Karnataka's social and political history have emphasized the importance of social reform movements, educational development, and campaigns against caste discrimination and social inequality. These studies acknowledge women's participation in reform activities but generally treat their contributions as a secondary aspect of broader historical developments. As a result, detailed accounts of many women activists and reformers remain scattered across local histories, biographies, memoirs, and archival records. Regional historical writings, local publications, and biographical accounts provide important information about women who contributed to the freedom movement and social transformation in Hyderabad-Karnataka. These sources indicate that many women actively supported nationalist activities, encouraged education, participated in public movements, and worked for the welfare of marginalized communities. Nevertheless, the documentation of their achievements remains fragmented, and comprehensive academic studies dedicated exclusively to these women are limited. The review of existing literature therefore reveals a significant gap in historical research concerning the forgotten women freedom fighters and social reformers of the Hyderabad-Karnataka

⁸ S. R. Nijalingappa, Hyderabad Karnataka Liberation Movement: A Study, Karnataka State Archives, 1998.

⁹ P. Raghunatha Rao, History of Hyderabad State, Sterling Publishers, 1986.

region. There is a need for systematic study and documentation of their contributions to ensure a more inclusive understanding of regional and national history. The present study seeks to address this gap by bringing together available historical evidence and highlighting the role of these women in the freedom struggle and social reform movements of the region.

DISCUSSION OF THE SUBJECT

The history of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region is deeply connected with struggles against colonial domination, the autocratic rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad, and various forms of social inequality. Within this historical context, women played a significant yet often underrepresented role in both the freedom movement and social reform activities. The discussion of this subject reveals that women were not merely passive participants but active contributors to political resistance, social awakening, and community development in the region. Women from the Hyderabad-Karnataka region participated in different forms of resistance, including supporting underground nationalist activities, spreading awareness among rural communities, participating in protests, and encouraging others to join the freedom movement. Despite facing strict social norms, limited mobility, and lack of formal education, many women demonstrated strong leadership qualities and contributed to mobilizing public opinion against oppressive systems. Their involvement reflected both courage and a deep sense of responsibility toward society. In addition to political participation, women reformers in the region played an important role in addressing social issues such as illiteracy, caste discrimination, child marriage, and gender inequality. They worked to promote education among girls, encourage widow remarriage in some cases, and support the upliftment of marginalized communities. Their reform activities contributed to gradual social change and helped challenge rigid traditional structures.¹⁰

The discussion also highlights that the contributions of these women were often localized and community-based, which is one of the reasons they remained absent from mainstream historical narratives. Unlike prominent national leaders whose activities were widely documented, many women from this region worked at the grassroots level, and their efforts were recorded only in scattered local sources, oral histories, and regional accounts. This lack of proper documentation has led to their marginalization in historical studies. Another important aspect of the subject is the intersection of gender and socio-political struggle. The women of this region had to navigate both colonial or feudal oppression and patriarchal restrictions within society. Despite these challenges, they emerged as agents of change and played a dual role in resisting external political control and internal social injustice. Their contributions reflect a broader understanding of freedom, which included not only political independence but also social equality and dignity. Overall, the discussion of forgotten women freedom fighters and social reformers of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region reveals their crucial but underrecognized role in shaping the region's history. It emphasizes the need to revisit historical narratives and acknowledge the contributions of these women in order to develop a more complete and inclusive understanding of India's freedom struggle and social transformation.

CONCLUSION / FINDINGS

The present study on forgotten women freedom fighters and social reformers of the Hyderabad-Karnataka region reveals that women made significant but largely unrecognized contributions to the region's freedom struggle and social transformation. The findings indicate that women were actively involved in resisting colonial influence and the autocratic rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad through various forms of participation such as awareness campaigns, support for nationalist movements, and community mobilization. The study finds that women in this region were not limited to domestic roles but extended their participation into social and public spheres, contributing to education, social reform, and the upliftment of marginalized communities. They played an important role in promoting girls' education, challenging social evils such as caste discrimination and child

¹⁰ Lakshmi Iyer, *Women in Indian Freedom Movement*, Gyan Publishing House, 2001.

marriage, and encouraging social equality within their communities. It is also observed that the contributions of these women have remained largely undocumented or insufficiently highlighted in mainstream historical narratives. The lack of written records, combined with their local and grassroots level involvement, has resulted in their historical marginalization. However, available secondary sources, regional histories, and oral traditions confirm their meaningful participation in both political and social movements.

Another key finding is that these women faced multiple challenges, including patriarchal restrictions, limited access to education, and socio-cultural barriers, yet they continued to contribute actively to social change. Their efforts demonstrate a strong sense of resilience, leadership, and commitment to public welfare. The study further concludes that the role of these women was not only supportive but also transformative in nature, as they contributed to both national freedom and regional social development. Their work laid the foundation for gradual social progress in the Hyderabad–Karnataka region. Overall, the study highlights the urgent need to recognize, document, and preserve the legacy of these forgotten women. Their contributions are an essential part of regional and national history and serve as an inspiration for future generations in the fields of social justice, gender equality, and nation-building.¹¹

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The present study on forgotten women freedom fighters and social reformers of the Hyderabad–Karnataka region opens several avenues for further academic exploration. It is recommended that future research should focus on extensive field-based investigations to collect oral histories from local communities, which may help uncover lesser-known women contributors whose activities were not documented in written sources. Further studies may also undertake district-wise or village-wise detailed research within the Hyderabad–Karnataka region to identify specific women leaders and their individual contributions to the freedom movement and social reform initiatives. Such micro-level studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of grassroots participation.¹² It is also suggested that future researchers make greater use of archival materials, private collections, letters, diaries, and unpublished manuscripts to reconstruct the historical narratives of these women more accurately. Collaboration with local historians and cultural organizations may help in preserving valuable historical evidence. Comparative studies between women freedom fighters of Hyderabad–Karnataka and those of other regions of Karnataka or India could provide deeper insights into regional variations in women's participation in the national movement and social reforms. Additionally, interdisciplinary research combining history, sociology, and gender studies is recommended to better understand the socio-cultural challenges faced by these women and their impact on contemporary society. Digital documentation and the creation of online archives dedicated to regional women freedom fighters would also be a significant step toward preserving their legacy for future generations. Finally, it is recommended that educational institutions include the contributions of these forgotten women in academic curricula to ensure wider awareness and recognition of their role in shaping regional and national history.

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¹² Karnataka State Archives, Documents on Hyderabad-Karnataka Integration Movement, Bengaluru.

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