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Uprisings against Colonial Rule- 1857, in Karnataka with Special Reference to Halagali Incident

Suryakanth P. Kokatnur

Research Scholar and Assistant Professor,
Department of History, Govt. First Grade College, Mudhol, Karnataka, India

Abstract:

During Nineteenth Century India witnessed great Revolts and agitations against the British rule .The Great Revolt or Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 took place during this period and impused many Indians, against the Colonial Policies. A large number of uprisings took place throughout India. At Meerat, Luknow, Oudh, Delhi and other places important incidents took place. In Karnataka also there are few Agitations and Uprisings took place before, during 1857.Even before 1857 at many places like Kiiitur, Badami, Kodagu, Nargund, Mundargi uprisings have been organized in Karnataka.The Incidents those took place at Halagali are very important, because it was fought without any external help. The people of this village fought bravely in order to mark their protest against the British Arms Act, which was brutally suppressed by the British, which was not a necessary.

Keywords: *Revolt, agitation, arms, swords, horse, political agent, magistrate, regiment*

1. Introduction

In India at the end of Eighteenth and beginning of Nineteenth century, we have witnessed various revolts and agitations in India. There is no doubt that there was overall resentment against the foreign rulers and attempts were made at different levels to overthrow it. Indians states and other individuals started agitations and revolts and agitations against the British colonial Rule even before 1857. Individual and state interests were at stake. The doctrine of lapse, high taxes, the "Divide and Rule" policy, Arms Act of 1857, led to resentment at all levels of the ruled population. The people were fed up of the British policy throughout Nation. In Karnataka also we have such examples. Hyder and Tippu fought for the nation to drive away the English from India. Dhondia Wagh encountered Wellesly in 1800, Koppal revolt in 1819, Stir in Bidar in 1820. In the year 1824 Kittur State under Rani Channamma fought against the Doctrine of Lapse Policy of the British. She was the First India woman to resist the British. Kodagu uprising in 1835, Flare in Badami, 1840, In the same year a similar revolt took place at Sindagi. In the year 1857 there were nationwide agitations took place against the Colonial rule. It is called by various names. Various Scholars called it as a rebellion, a revolt, the "Sepoy Mutiny" and "War of Independence".

In Karnataka State, especially in Northern Parts of Karnataka, during the Great Rebellion period 1857, at many places fought against the British. J.F. Fleet had collected various Ballads (*Lavanis* –folk songs in Kannada Language) regarding these uprisings in his "A SELECTION OF KANARESE BALLADS" which were published later on in Indian Antiquary, Volume XV and XVI which gives valuable information. Among them Naragund, Halagali, Surpur, Mundargi are famous uprisings. In this present essay I am briefing only about the uprising of Bedas of Halagali, where whole people choosed self-immolation¹. Halagali presently a village in Mudhol taluk (Dist. Bagalkot, Karnataka). During the year 1857 it was under the Princely State of Mudhol, as a part of the Southern Maratha Country.²

2. Road to Uprising

As a consequence of the mutiny of 1857, the British passed Disarming Act all over the British Districts and Native States under Political Superintendence. The Same Act was passed on 11th September 1857. ³ This Disarming Act, No.XXVII, relating to the importation, manufacture, and sale of Arms and Ammunition and for regulating the right to keep or use the same.⁴ The government issued an order for the confiscation of all weapons of every description, possessed by the people populace at large. This was, of course, was a great blow to the people, who were not even yet fully accustomed to the security of the British rule. The same Orders were issued by the Southern Maratha Irregular Horses Officer of 24th Bombay Native Infantry.⁵ Lieutenant William Alexander Kerr, Political Agent –Magistrate of Belgaum in Mudhol, the 9 gun Salute Princely State of the Southern Maratha Country. Because Prince of Mudhol had accepted British Over lordship and loyal to the English. Implementation of the Act was assigned to the Krishna Rao, of Kunderagi, the Karbari or the Chief Administrator of Mudhol.⁶ Because, the Raja was not ruling at that time and British appointed

Karbari to look after the affairs of the State.⁷ He enforced the Act in the Mudhol State. In some of the villages the people had already surrendered their weapons and obtained license for those which they returned, arms.⁸ The Karbari thought that all the villagers will follow the same. But the Bedas of Halagali, a village in the State protested against this Act, refused to surrender their arms and raised there a small rebellion. These Bedas are known for their courage, Valour and loyalty and living peacefully. Most of them, living on hunting wild animals and selling forest wood and other products. For this purpose Bedas kept some equipment and tools. Rarely, they involved in dacoity. Their main weapons were bow and arrow, swords, daggers, hand –knives, crooked swords, lances, spears, axes and rarely gun powder and the musket. These weapons were used for their daily livelihood and worshipped at certain festivals.⁹ and they never disturbed others. Kerr, the political Agent of the Northern Karnataka and Magistrate of Belgaum, had informed the people of Halagali, that they must obey the orders of Government. The people of Halagali thought that it is below their dignity to submit tier arms to government.¹⁰ They replied strongly to Karbari “ We have not become women, wearing bangles on wrists ,that we should give up weapons; who are you that have come?; even at the cost of life, we will not give up; go quietly now away.¹¹ But the Karbari Krishna Rao was still hoping that the People of Halagali would obey the orders after some time and register their arms. By this time the people of Bhanturnur, nearby village to Halagali, had already surrendered their arms at behest of their leader Veera Hanuma Nayak.¹² On the 11th November, 1857, Karbari Krishna sent for the Jamadar of Halagali, a leader of Bedas to submit his arms at Mudhol and Jamadar did so. The Karbari placed a license in his hands and returned the arms to him and asked him to convince others to follow him. When he returned to Halagali people were angry with his attitude and boycotted. The Karbari was still hopeful and sent this time Karkun Ram Rao Bhujang to Halagali to induce the people to obey. This effort also failed. Veerappa Naik one of the village elderly man told the Karbari that the people of Halagali are in no mood to obey the orders and they are ready for any sacrifice. In the mean time, Balaji Nimbaalkar, Killedar of Hosakoti village¹³ have organized the Bedas into Strong and asked the people to fight British if necessary. Then Karbari sent Bheema Rao Anant Ghorpade, a Mankari of the Raja of Mudhol, and Naro Ramachandra Potnis and two others, on 22nd November to Halagali to influence upon Nibalkar. When they entered the village, the gathered people protested. These leaders escaped from their with great horror. Even with these efforts Karbari did not give up his effort and on 23rd of November he sent Veer Hanuma Naik of Bantanur to convince the Halagali people finally. But this was also failed and he returned without any hope and told the Karbari that no one could make these determined people obey the orders of the Government.

Then it was inevitable to Karbari to report British authorities regarding the Halagali situation. In the meantime, a message came on 27th November from Lt.Colonel Malcom, Commander of the Southern Maratha force, which he had heard from Mr. W.H.Havlock, asking about Halagali happenings. Immediately Karbari reported the same. Government got the information, that more than 500 Bedas neighboring villages like Mantur, Budni and Alagundi have gathered under the leadership of Jidaga nad Bala at Halagali to support. The British understood, the situation is worse and prepared to fight, on the basis of Karbari’s report. Lt.Col Malcom issued orders on 29th November, to Lt.Kerr to proceed to with the Bijapur Cavalry Halagali and implement the Government orders. Immediately Kerr reached the Village in the evening with his Cavalry. He asked the village people to accept the orders and submit their arms. The Bedas refused and fired at the British. Then the Kerr tried to enter the village, but they could not enter the center of the Village. Bedas fought gallantly and the English has to wonder whole night. Next Day, on 30th morning Lieut. and Adj. La Touch came with additional force. The British reassumed the offensive against the Bedas and driven them into the town. In the meantime, Lt.Molcom arrived in company with Mr.W.H.Havlock, First Asst.Magistrate, along with main force. Then the situation came under his control. Then Malcom went into neighboring hills in search the Bedas, leaving Kerr in the town. Though the number is less, the Beds fought ferociously and it became very tough to Kerr and his men to face them. Every house of villagers became Bastion they attacked in group by group which became problem to face. Then Kerr ordered that the houses of the village should be set on fire, so that those fighting from inside would come out. But brave Bedas fought from their only. Number of them died while fighting. Mr. W.H. Havlock, First Asst. Magistrate was shot dead by the Bedas. As per the Political Agent’s report more than 500 men in arms fought the British. The main leaders of Halagali uprising were Jidaga, Balappa, Hanumappa, Balaji and Nimbalkar Bhimappa. Whole Village was devastated by setting fire after death of Havlock. Bullets fell in showers, like the falling of rain. One lady, Ramavva (Rami), sister of Jadagappa, fought with great courage Killed English soldiers and their horses.¹⁴ But finally no one was left, the whole village was plundered. All the grain and cattle destroyed. They did not even spare the children, they set fire, the village was burnt. Halagali was reduced to ashes. All the Bedas, then submitted. Later on the English captured more than 300. as prisoners, including Jidaga and Balappa. Out of them 19 have been tried by Court Martial. They were all found guilty and sentenced to death. 13 of them have been executed on 11th Friday of December, 1857 in Mudhol on Market (*Weekly Bajar*) day and another 6 were hanged in Halagali itself on 14th of December, 1857. Babji son of Shivaji Nimbalkar, who had played a vital role in Halagali uprising, escaped and got protection in Surpur.¹⁵

3. Conclusion

Like this the people of Halagali fought with the British without any help from outside in order to protect their self –respect. These innocent people were suppressed brutally, which was not necessary. Because they never disturb any one including the British. They are peacefully living people. Though, this uprising was not directly connected to the 1857 Revolt, one should have respect for their self respect , self sacrifice, self determination and bravery of these people. Violating the British rule at that time was not an easy task and fighting with the British force during 1857 was much more difficult and have already suppressed the Great Revolt of 1857. These people fought with their crude weapons, while the British with the fully sophisticated armed weapons. The Uprisings of Karnataka have some financial and political support, but the People of Halagali didn’t have this type of support. We should also take into consideration the fact, that local Ghorpade rulers were loyal to the British. The British should have left this matter to Princely state

only. But even today the Bedas of Halagali have kept their swords and equipment which they used against the British. A memorial stone has been erected in the Mudhol town in the name of these brave Halagali fighters..

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