



SRUJANI: Indian Journal of Innovative Research and Development (SIJIRD)

Volume-4 Special Issue 1, March-April 2025, Pp. 51-55
Bi-Monthly, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access, Indexed Journal

ISSN: 2583-3510

S I R D F
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www.srujani.in

Gangadhar Rao Deshpande- A Eminent Freedom Fighter

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Abstract:

Gangadhar Rao Deshpande was a prominent freedom fighter who played a significant role in India's struggle for independence. A close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, he was actively involved in the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement. His contributions to the nationalist cause were particularly evident in Karnataka, where he mobilized people against British rule and worked towards social reforms. Deshpande's leadership, dedication, and commitment to the freedom struggle made him a revered figure in India's history. This paper explores his life, political activities, and lasting impact on India's independence movement.

Keywords: Gangadhar Rao Deshpande, Indian Freedom Struggle, Non-Cooperation Movement, Karnataka Nationalism, Social Reforms.

Introduction

In the Indian freedom struggle, many notable freedom fighters emerged among the leaders of Karnataka. Gangadhar Rao Deshpande popularly known as lion of Karnataka. He was a Gandhian follower's constructive worker and founder of Khadi-Village industries in Karnataka. He is well known as Khadhi Bhagiratha of Karnataka. Most of the Bombay president leaders were influenced by Tilaks speeches and writings¹ Later they were

influenced by Mahathma Gandhi. After the death of Bala Gangadharanath Tilak Gandhi was also influenced the many leaders of Karnataka. Among this leader Gangadhar Rao Deshpande is most important personality. In the history of freedom struggle of Karnataka Belgaum was the main activity center of nationalistic activities. Gangadhar Rao Deshpande most outstanding national leader. He played very significant role in mobilizing people for various nationalistic causes during the British. His contribution to the freedom struggle and both in the political and social spheres.

¹ Narayan, R.S. (1988). *Gangadhar Rao Deshpande, Builders of Modern India series*. Ministry of Information, p.12

Please cite this article as: Shaheena Bhanu. (2025). Gangadhar Rao Deshpande- A Eminent Freedom Fighter. *SRUJANI: Indian Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, 4(1), 51-55

He was born on 31 March 1871 in a Brahmin traditional family in Jalalapura village. His father was Balakrishna Deshpande a well-known lawyer and founder member of Belgaum Vakeel's Association. Gangadhar Rao Deshpande pursued early education in Belgaum later he moves to Pune for higher studies. Here he came into contact with nationalist leaders like Tilak, Gopala Krishna Gokale, Ranade. After completion of education B.A and LLB, and also he edited the 'Lokha Matha' weekly journal.

He participated in Swadeshi Movement of 1905. Boycott of British goods are the important activity of Swadesi Movement. The Swadesi activists requested to publics to use the swadesi goods or local goods, and promotion of national education. These are additional activists of the swadesi movement. Gangadhar Rao Deshpande and Govindarao Yavegi planned to hoisted the Ganesha festival as a public event during the Swadeshi Movement. In 1906 Gangadhar Rao Deshpande organized Ganesha festival and fair in Belgaum, Balagangadharanath Tilak visited the Belgaum in this occasion.

Gangadhar Rao Deshpande was attending the Madras Congress session this was the first session attended by Deshpande. (Bhadaruddhen Tayabi president the session. Here he was introduced by Surendranatha's speeches. The patriotic session inspired Deshpande to work for the liberation of Country.²

² ibid, p.13

He attended congress sessions held at Allahabad in Bombay. Even Belgaum contributed founder in the Bombay Annual Session, he organized the students and he inspire the students with the statement 'Independence is our objective and violence is our tool' with this inspiration they given up their education and joined with Gangadhar Rao Deshpande. So, he was arrested.

After release of Tilak from Mandala Jail in 1914, Belgaum district again to hum with home Rule Movement. Govinda Rao Yalagi and Gangadhar Rao Deshpande become the harbingers of Lokamanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi.

In 1917 district political conference was held at Chikkodi Belgaum district under the presidentships of R.P Karandikar on request of Gangadhar Rao Deshpande Tilak came to Chikkodi and addressed the gathering Vishnupantha Natu was political activist in the Belgaum district and another notable personality namely Hanumanth Rao Yalagi and Govind Rao Yalagi.

When Gandhi arrived on the political seen of India, in 1920, he called for non-co-operation movement. Deshpande associated with Gandhi when he visited provinces of Karnataka.³

Gangadhar Rao Deshpande called Karnataka people to participation in non-co-operative movement especially he hurred students to quite the schools,

³ Kulkarni, R.H. (1992). Freedom Movement in Belgaum District, Venkateshwara Printers, p.39

boycott of foreign goods, Keshava Rao Gokhale, Baburao Takore Dadha Kale, Vamana bidaree, Anantha Rao Chikkodi, Balakrishna Patavanahana Sripadha Rao Kittura. Vamana Rao Chinthakara quite the college D.Y.Kulakarni Venkata Rao Jalihali Dayananda Aralikatte, Ventakanna Majali were resigned this government jobs, and participated non-co-operation movement. Gangadhar Rao Deshpande arrested and imprisoned six months by his active speeches after his release he founded Kumari Ashrama in Hudali, it become the center of constructive works and training center of freedom fighters.

When Gandhi decided to visit to Karnataka he wrote a letter to Deshpande regarding arrangements in Karnataka. Gangadhar Rao Deshpande with the help of other co-workers, he mobilized public support and funds. On 8th November 1920. Gandhi visited Nippani of Belgaum district. In 1920 Deshpande attended Nagapur Congress session in December 1920.

Due to Deshpande efforts, National schools established in Nippani, Belgaum, Dharwad, Hubli, Bijapur, Gadag, Sirisi, Kumkata and Mangalore. In 1921 Deshpande oriented the Dharwad district political conference held at Navalagunda, here he strongly criticized the British attitude.

In 1923 Indian National Congress (INC's) annual session meet in Kakinada when discussion was held for the forth

airy session. Gangadhar Rao Deshpande extended on behalf of invitation to Karnataka. Even Mohamed Ali preferred Karnataka and the congress are Belgaum Congress session and Gangadhar Rao Deshpande.

Passed revolution moved by Koujalagi Srinivasa Rao the date and place was left to Karnataka Pradesh Congress committee to decide. So Deshpande visited Bijapur and organized simple meeting at Koujalagi house first they want to set is Bijapur, finally signed the meeting at Hubli in this meeting, Gangadhar Rao Deshpande made a spacious appeal for dispassionate discussion. Kurnod Sadhashiva Rao president of south canara district congress, he proposed to south canara, koujalgi Srinivasa Rao proposed to Bijapur, some other proposed to Dharwad. Gangadhar Rao Deshpande himself suggested and finally fixed to Belgaum because Belgaum as ideal place for the congress session here political atmosphere also good.

After this meeting he contact non-Brahmin leaders and secured their support the businessman Belgaum and Solapur also assured for financial support. Fifty bungalows with new extension of Thilakwadi also available for lodging. A temporary railway station had been promised to opened at tilakwadi, Jamanlal Banjaj also promised to financial support.

Gandhi write a letter to (09-03-1924) Deshpande that he had received a final report about majili. What an unfortunate

incident it is part of the sacrifice. Where we get intentional trouble, we should not be afraid of going to goal even without going to be sent with him. Although do not invite guests, I do invite those who are sick like me, if they stay with me, I feel glad, I feel rather assumed to go to sea-resort.

On 23rd March 1924 Gandhi wrote a letter to Deshpande regarding this dispute on 5 April 1929 he wrote another letter Gandhiji assured "I want do all I can to prevent a prolongation of the dispute". Than Gandhi explained his joy about provincial congress committee's decision.

Gangadhar Rao Deshpande elected chairmen of the reception committee Belvi and Srinivasa Koujalagi agreed to vice-chairman Madhava Rao Kembavi, Bhimarao Poredar were chosen as a securities and several committees were formed.

The committee decided Tilakuvadi is suitable place for history 39th AICs annual session funds were raised and all preparation were made by local leaders on 21st December 1924 Gandhi arrived to Belgaum for chair the annual session. In this session Gandhi emphasized on promotion of Khadhi and village industries and spinning of Khadi mandatory for congress members and he called for hindu muslim unity which was essential to the broader freedom

movement.⁴ After this session Karnataka people actively participated in constructive programs and anti-british activities.

He organized a 3rd annual conference of Gandhi Seva Sangh at his native village Hudli. About 10,000 delegates from all over India except Jawaharlal Nehru have participated. He was the Chairman of the Karnataka Khadi and Village Industries Association, and a trustee of the All India Spinners Association headed by Mahatma Gandhi. He was also one of the founders of Gandhi Seva Sangh along with top freedom fighters of the country.⁵

Gangadhar Rao Deshpande was the First President of KPCC (1920) and KPCC President twice. He was a General Secretary of the Congress along with Jawaharlal Nehru and Saifuddin Kitchlew in 1923. He was the President of AICC (5th dictator) during 1931-32. He was a member of the Congress Working Committee for several years.

He fought for India's Independence for 60 years (1887 to 1947). When India got the freedom he worked for the unification of Karnataka. After 1947, Deshpande devoted himself to spiritual pursuits under the benign guidance of R.D. Ranade, a saint, and a reputed philosopher. He was convinced that real inner peace was

⁴ Hallappa, G.S. (1964). *Freedom Movement in Karnataka, Volume-2*. Government of Mysore Publication, pp.126-127

⁵ Siddavanahalli Krishnasharma. (1970). *Gandhi Mattu Karnataka*. Gandhi Samraka Trust,

available only in spiritual practices with implicit faith in them.

Gangadharrao Deshpande possessed an exceptional level of courage, eloquence, extensive knowledge, and unwavering commitment to leading a virtuous life. These remarkable qualities combined to elevate him to a position of superiority among his peers.

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