

Commemorating unsung National Heroes on Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav



Rani Kittur Chennamma



Grand Portrait



Kittur Chennamma, the Queen of Kittur, was one of the first Indian rulers to lead an armed rebellion against the British East India Company in 1824, against the implementation of the Doctrine of Lapse. She became a celebrated freedom fighter in the state of Karnataka and a symbol of the independence movement in India. Since 1824, 'Kittur Utsava' has been organized every year in the month of October to celebrate the heroic rebellion of Rani Kittur Chennamma.

Rani Kittur Chennamma



Early Life

Kittur Chennamma was born on October 23, 1778, in Kakati, a small village in the present Belagavi District of Karnataka, India. She belonged to the Lingayat community and received training in horse riding, sword fighting and archery from a young age. She was well known throughout her village for her bravery. She was married to Mallasarja Desai, the king of Kittur, at the age of 15 and became the queen of Kittur. She had one son from the marriage, who after the death of her husband in 1816, also died in 1824. As the queen of Kittur, Kittur Chennamma adopted Shivalingappa after the death of her only son with the aim of making him the heir to the throne of Kittur.

Rani Kittur Chennamma



Opposing the British Rule

The British East India Company denied the adoption of Shivalingappa as heir of Kittur and ordered his exile from the kingdom under the pretext of Doctrine of Lapse. Kittur Chennamma, however, defied the British order to expel Shivalingappa from the throne. She sent a letter to the Governor of Bombay to plead the cause of Kittur but Lord Elphinstone turned down Chennamma's request. The state of Kittur came under the administration of Dharwad collectorate in charge of Mr. Thackeray, and Mr. Chaplin was the commissioner. Both men did not recognise Chennamma as the regent and Shivalingappa as the ruler and apprised Rani Chennamma to surrender her kingdom, but she again defied the British order. This led to the breakout of a war.

Rani Kittur Chennamma



War against British Rule

The British attempted to pillage Kittur's treasures and jewels, which valued around 15 lakh rupees, but were unsuccessful. They had attacked Kittur with a force of 20,000 men and 400 guns, which came mainly from the third troop of the Madras Native Horse Artillery. In the first battle between the British and Kittur, on October of 1824, British forces faced heavy losses. St. John Thackeray, the British collector and political agent, was also killed during this first battle by the Kittur forces. Rani Chennamma's lieutenant, Amatur Balappa, was mainly responsible for Thackeray's death and the losses faced by the British forces. Two British officers, Sir Walter Elliot and Mr. Stevenson, were also taken hostages by Rani Chennamma's forces

Rani Kittur Chennamma



Second War with British Rule

To avoid further destruction as accounted due to first war, Rani Chennamma negotiated with the British Commissioner Mr. Chaplin and the Governor of Bombay, under whose regime Kittur fell. She released the hostages owing to the British promise that the war would no longer be continued. However, the promise turned out to be only an act of deception. Humiliated by their first defeat at the hands of a small Indian ruler, Mr. Chaplin treacherously returned with much larger forces from Mysore and Sholapur to attack Kittur once again. Kittur Chennamma and her forces were outnumbered by the large strength of the British forces in the second war against the British Rule. Rani Chennamma was defeated in her last battle and captured by the British, who imprisoned her at the Bailhongal Fort for life.

Rani Kittur Chennamma



Imprisonment and Death



After being captured, Rani Chennamma spent the last five years of her life in imprisonment at Bailhongal Fort. She took her last breath at the Bailhongal Fort on 21/02/1829. Rani Chennamma's samadhi (burial place) is in Bailhongal taluk, under the care of Government agencies. The only time the place is looked after is during the 'Kittur Utsava' and 'Kannada Rajyotsava'.



Rani Kittur Chennamma

Kittur Rani Chennamma is still remembered for her valour. During the freedom movement, her brave resistance against the British forces became the theme of several inspirational plays, folk songs (Lavani) and stories. Rani Chennamma's first victory against the British forces is still honoured annually in October during the 'Kittur Utsava', held in Kittur. A historical-drama film called Kitturu Chennamma was produced and directed by B. R. Panthulu about the life and times of Kittur Rani Chennamma. A popular daily Indian Railways train that connects Bangalore and Kolhapur was also named after her as Rani Chennamma Express.

Rani Kittur Chennamma



On September 11, 2007, Rani Chennamma's statue was unveiled at the Indian Parliament complex in New Delhi by the first woman President of India, Smt. Pratibha Patil. The statue was donated by the Kittur Rani Chennamma Memorial Committee and was sculpted by Vijay Gaur. Two other statues of Rani Chennamma were also installed at Bangalore and Kittur.

Sources: Rani Kittur Chennamma: India's Valiant Freedom Fighter/#IndianWomenInHistory

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