



Original Article

Common People, Workers and Unsung Heroes in Solapur's Freedom Movement: An Alternative Historiographical Study

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Abstract

The current research paper examines the freedom movement of Solapur through the prism of ordinary people, laborers and unsung heroes. Traditional historical accounts of Solapur have tended to concentrate on the independence of 1930, which lasted three days, on Martial Law and the four martyrs. Although these events and figures are the focus of the public memory in Solapur, the rest of the social involvement in the movement has not been given equal focus. Textile workers, peasants, traders, women, youth, students, journalists, volunteers, rural members and ordinary citizens kept the freedom movement alive in Solapur. The paper follows a different historiographical bottom-up approach to study the involvement of common people in meetings, processions, hartals, flag activities, swadeshi, khadi, shelter networks and local resistance. It states that the freedom movement of Solapur was not just a leader-based but society-based. Workers of textile factories provided the movement with a mass and working-class character, women helped in direct and indirect ways, young people and students gave it bravery and communication channels and rural population helped to spread nationalism nationwide. The article also addresses the necessity to acknowledge those unrecognised figures like Shankar Shivdare and the anonymous fighters whose contributions were not remembered by mainstream. It concludes that the reconstruction of the freedom movement in Solapur needs the archival records, oral history, the family records, the local newspapers, photographs and the personal collections. This approach contributes to the democratization of history, its inclusiveness and loyalty to the field experience of the local society.

Keywords: common people, workers, unsung heroes, Solapur, social history, oral history, alternative historiography, freedom movement.

Introduction

The history of the Indian freedom movement is often written through national leaders, Congress movements, major events and formal political organisations. However, the real strength of the movement came from common people who participated in different ways. They attended meetings, joined processions, wore khadi, boycotted foreign goods, closed shops, stopped work, carried flags, sheltered activists and suffered repression. Without such participation, the freedom movement could not have become a mass movement.

Solapur provides an important case for such a people-centred study. The city is remembered for the historic events of 1930, Martial Law and the four martyrs. These events are important, but they do not represent the complete history of the movement. The wider social base of Solapur's freedom movement included workers, peasants, traders, women, youth, students, journalists, rural activists and ordinary citizens.

This paper argues that Solapur's freedom movement should be interpreted as a society-centred struggle. It was not only the achievement of leaders or martyrs. It was made possible by the peoples. The uploaded thesis draft also emphasises that the study gives special attention to common people, workers, women, youth, students, peasants, traders, local leaders, journalists, volunteers and neglected participants.

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Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this paper are:

1. To examine the role of common people in Solapur's freedom movement.
2. To study the contribution of textile workers and labour consciousness.
3. To analyse the role of women, youth, students, peasants and traders.
4. To identify the need for recognition of unknown and neglected heroes.
5. To discuss the importance of oral history, family records and local memory.
6. To present an alternative historiographical interpretation of Solapur's freedom movement.

Methodology

This paper uses a socio-historical and alternative historiographical approach. It is based on secondary historical sources, local writings, research theses, memorial literature and conceptual works on social history and subaltern history. The paper also suggests the use of primary data, including oral history, interviews, family records, rare photographs, newspaper clippings and field observations.

The approach is bottom-up as it examines history through the perspective of the ordinary people. It does not banish leaders and martyrs, but puts them into the broader community that bore them. The paper has critically read colonial records since in most cases protesters were described in the records as rioters or law-breakers. Such participation is viewed in a people-centred approach as nationalist action that is influenced by local conditions.

Need for People-Centric History

History about people is needed since traditional history tends to place more emphasis on leaders, historical events and written documents. In Solapur, historical memory is highly focused on the four martyrs and Martial Law. These are noteworthy, but the movement was far broader.

The movement was made possible by common people. They attended mass meetings, they watched hartals, they shut down stores, they put down their tools in factories, they hoisted flags, they sheltered activists and they kept the memory of sacrifice. A good number of them were not formally employed. They might not be mentioned by their names in the official documents. But their involvement was the social basis of the movement.

People-centred history can remedy this lapse. It involves workers, women, peasants, traders, youth, students and rural people as historical actors. It also assists in recognizing those heroes who were not known to be heroes as they did not make it into the mainstream memory.

Solapur as a Working-Class City

The freedom movement in Solapur is mainly based on Solapur being Girangaon and Kamgarnagari. The textile industry produced a mass of working population. Workers resided in common settlements, labored in equal terms and they came to feel unity. Their sense of economic deprivation

and industrial discipline brought about labour consciousness.

This labour consciousness was to be later linked to nationalist consciousness. Employees started to realize their fight against rights and dignity as the global fight against colonialism. The Civil Disobedience Movement during which workers participated in hartals made the movement very powerful.

Nationalism in Solapur was not just a notion that was talked about in conferences. It penetrated into factory life, labour settlements and everyday experience of workers. The working and lower classes turned the nationalist movement into a strong popular movement when the mills were shut down during protests.

Workers and Labour Consciousness

Textile workers in Solapur had not been involved in the freedom movement in vain. Workers already possessed experience of collective action in labour struggles. The awareness of unity and organisation was developed through strikes and union activities. When the nationalist thoughts penetrated Solapur, the workers acted in response as they realised in collective mobilisation.

The involvement of workers made the movement to have a mass nature. It also provided the movement with a socio-economic aspect. Freedom was not just perceived as political freedom as being independent of British rule. Dignity, justice, wages and rights were also aspects that were associated with freedom among the workers.

This is one of the most peculiarities of the freedom movement in Solapur and the connection of labour consciousness with the nationalism of the region. It demonstrates that anti-colonial struggle was not an isolated phenomenon that was not connected with daily economic life.

Peasants and Rural Society

Though the centre of dramatic events was the Solapur city, the rural society was also significant. The nationalist ideas were propagated to the district with the help of Taluka and rural centres like Barshi, Pandharpur, Kurduwadi, Karmala, Sangola, Mohol, Madha, Mangalwedha, Akkalkot and Walsang.

Revenue pressure, drought, poverty and agrarian problems were experienced by peasants. These circumstances led to discontentment with the colonial rule. Gandhian concepts of swadeshi, khadi, self-reliance and moral resistance were popular in the rural society. Rural population engaged in resistance in form of meetings, processions, flag activities, boycott and shelter networks.

The rural aspect is significant as it demonstrates that the freedom movement in Solapur was not only urban. It was district-wide. The involvement of the rural population linked the political activities in the city to the social environment of the entire Solapur district.

Traders and Business Class

Business groups and traders were also significant in terms of support. They took part in hartals, promoted swadeshi, boycotting of foreign products and assisted

nationalist networks. The fact that traders were ready to employ economic action as a political response was evidenced by market closures during major protests.

Economic action in the Gandhian politics was both moral and political in nature. Economic power of colonies was questioned by boycotting of foreign goods. Swadeshi encouraged national self reliance. In Solapur, the traders served to address nationalistic ideas to the market life.

Their involvement also assisted in holding various classes together. Workers, traders and educated groups collaborated in instances of social protest. This solidarity empowered the movement.

Middle Class, Educated Groups and Press

The middle class which was educated largely contributed to the formation of public opinion. National ideas were interpreted by teachers, lawyers, doctors, journalists, writers and municipal leaders to the local people. They arranged meetings, made speeches, wrote articles and utilised civic platforms.

The press played a crucial role in particular. Political awareness was created through the newspapers like the Kalpataru, Solapur Samachar, Gaznfar, Karmayogi and Kesari. They covered national news, local gatherings, police violence and misery of people. Newspaper reports helped to maintain the memory of colonial repression during the time of Martial Law.

Journalism was thus turned into an ideological weapon. It linked Solapur to the national movement and also left local experience to be used by the future generations.

Women's Participation

The contribution of women in the freedom movement of Solapur has been under-documented. This is due to the fact that a lot of the contribution of women occurred in the home and informal areas. Public arrests or legal cases are generally documented in official records, but household-level support is seldom documented.

Khadi, swadeshi, food, shelter, secrecy, emotional support and care of families was also provided by women. They supported the activists by offering them safe havens and keeping family life going despite repression. There are women who even participated in processions and activities in the streets.

Oral history and family records are needed to study the involvement of women. The contributions of many women only remain in family memory. Thus, a people-based history should not consider women as mere historical actors who are auxiliary followers of history.

Youth and Students

The freedom movement in Solapur was infused with vitality and boldness by the youth and students. They were involved in processions, mass meetings, flag actions, volunteering actions and communication systems. The youths would be messengers, organised mobs and took risks.

Particular attention should be paid to the role of Shankar Shivdare. He was shot off with the tricolour in his

hand, and his martyrdom is a symbol of the bravery of young actors. Nevertheless, he has not gotten the same appreciation as the four martyrs. This demonstrates the necessity to expand the historical story.

The participation of youth demonstrates how an entry of the nationalistic ideas into the mind of a new generation occurred. Young people interpreted freedom as sacrifice and duty, action in the public.

Unknown and Neglected Heroes

Many contributors to Solapur's freedom movement remained unknown or neglected. Public memory rightly honours the four martyrs, but several other participants also deserve recognition. These include Shankar Shivdare, anonymous firing victims, women supporters, rural activists, student volunteers, workers and families that helped the movement.

The reasons for neglect are many. Some participants did not leave written records. Some were poor or socially marginalized. Some contributed indirectly from homes or villages. Some were remembered only in oral memory. Colonial records often described people as accused or law-breakers, not as patriots.

Therefore, unknown heroes must be identified through a combination of sources. Archival records, court documents, newspapers, oral interviews, family histories, photographs, letters and local memorials should be used together.

Oral History and Family Records

Oral history plays a crucial role in the reconstruction of people-centered history. There are a lot of unofficial participants who are not listed. Their narratives live within families and communities. Interviewees such as descendants of freedom fighters, senior citizens, families of workers and local historians may provide valuable information. Family records can consist of ancient photographs, letters, jail certificates, newspaper clippings, medals, flags, diaries and handwritten notes. These sources are useful as they relate the common history with personal recollection. Oral history should however be used with care. Memories can be partial or can be subject to emotion. So, oral narratives are to be juxtaposed with newspapers, archives and local histories. Oral history can be a very strong instrument of reclaiming forgotten voices when applied critically.

Alternative History of the Freedom Movement of Solapur

There is an alternative historiography of the freedom movement of Solapur that would need a change of focus. To begin with, it is necessary to shift the emphasis on leaders to society. Second, it should shift to social processes as opposed to political events. Third, it has to shift to local experience as opposed to national narrative. Fourth, it needs to shift towards known heroes to ordinary and unidentified actors. This does not underestimate the significance of the four martyrs or key leaders. Rather, it puts them in the context of the general people movement which made their sacrifice meaningful. The four martyrs were not a group of

four individuals; they were a symbol of a society in revolt. Alternative historiography is more democratic history. It enables workers, women, youth, peasants and ordinary citizens to emerge as creators of history. This strategy is needed in Solapur as the movement was entrenched within the local society.

Historical Memory

The memory of the freedom movement in Solapur should be maintained in systematic manner. Family and local institutions are littered with many documents, photographs and oral memories. Otherwise, they will be lost. The freedom movement of Solapur should be made into a local archive. Known and unknown participants should be put into a digital database. The sites like Tilak Chowk, Gandhi Chowk, Solapur Municipality, Faujdar Chawdi, old mill areas and martyr memorials need to be mapped and conserved. A memorial gallery or museum should also be set up. It must also have sections about workers, women, youth, rural participation, newspapers, Martial Law, four martyrs and unknown heroes. Freedom movement of Solapur should be taught in schools and colleges. Young generations can be linked to local history by heritage walks, exhibitions and oral-history projects.

Conclusion

The freedom movement in Solapur involved not just the history of leaders, Martial Law and four martyrs. It was a wide-spread social movement maintained by ordinary citizens. It was made strong by workers, spread by peasants, supported by traders, led by educated groups, sustained by women, garrisoned by youth, and made mass by the common people. An anthropocentric analysis indicates that common citizens were the active creators of history. They were involved in meetings, processions, hartals, flag activities, swadeshi, khadi, shelter networks and local resistance. We should recognise their contribution via alternative historiography.

The history of unsung heroes should be studied to make the history of Solapur more comprehensive. The historical record should include Shankar Shivdare, anonymous protestors, women activists, rural activists, workers and student volunteers. The memory of these contributors can be preserved through oral history, family records, archival work and preservation work. Thus, the freedom movement of Solapur may be perceived as society-based struggle based on the local experience. It was a local declaration of the national freedom movement in India, and it should take a significant role in regional and national history.

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Conflicts of interest

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