

## Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay: A Fair Testimony Of Women Empowerment

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### Abstract

Kamaladevi was a born rebel. She would have preferred a warrior's life. Her infant 'Kicks' were more vigorous and violent, more powerful and persistent. Kamaladevi was an Indian social reformer, freedom fighter and most remembered for her contribution to Indian independence movement, for being the driving force behind the renaissance of Indian handicrafts, handlooms and theatre in post independence India, and for upliftment of the socio-economic standard of Indian women by pioneering the cooperative movement in India.

**KEYWORDS:** Women Empowerment, political participation, women Legislation, Freedom Movement.

### Introduction:

The role of the women was in fact most crucial, without whose support and active participation there could have been no success. This was in fact acknowledging by no less a person than Gandhiji himself, who said that their contribution should really be written in letter of gold. One has to only closely look back and see how, as the usual political male leaders and workers were being filled quickly and effectively by a large number of women, who showed initiative, enterprise, courage and leadership. Kamaladevi, one of the most precious among such glittering gems in the country in boggler aspects and in Karnataka in particular.

### Objectives:

1. Kamaladevi's multifaceted contributions are to be traced thoroughly.
2. Her widowhood, remarriage and seeking higher education are highlighted even her utmost possibility from the orthodox Hindu family
3. Kamaladevi's participation in Gandhian movements are searched.
4. Her contributions are traced in the post independent India in several respects.
5. Finally Kamaladevi's personality how she consequenced as fair testimony of women empowerment in Karnataka

### Methodology:

Very simple historical method of profile analytical study has been followed.

### 1. Early Life:

Kamaladevi was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1903. She was the fourth and youngest daughter of a Saraswat Brahmin couple, Anantaiah Dhareshwar and Girijabai in Mangalore of Karnataka State. Anantaiah the then district collector of Mangalore.

Kamaladevi got a firm grounding and provided bench marks to respect for her intellect as well as her voice. Something, that she came to know for in the coming years, when she stood as the voice of the downtrodden as well as the unheard. Her parents befriended many prominent freedom fighters and intellectuals and this made Kamaladevi an early enthusiast of the Swadeshi nationalist movement.

She studied about ancient Sanskrit drama tradition from its greatest Guru Natyacharya, Padma Shri Mani Madhava Chakyar by staying at Guru's home in Kerala. In her age of seven years, she lost her elder sister Suguna and his father also. Girijabai with her small kids decided to raise on her dowry property. The young Kamaladevi questioned the aristocratic division of her mother's household and preferred to mingle her servants and their children wanting to understand their life as them.

## **2. Marriage – Widowhood – Remriage:**

In 1917, when was only fourteen years of age, married to Krishna Rao and within two years she was widowed, while she was still at school. According to orthodox Hindu rules of the times being a widow she was not allowed to continue her education, yet she defiantly moved to Chennai and continued her education from St. Mary's School and finally completed her high school in 1918.

## **3. Marriage to Harin**

Meanwhile studying at Queen Mary's College in Chennai, she came to know with Suhasini, a fellow student and younger sister of Sarojini Naidu, who later introduced her talented brother, Harin to Kamaladevi, by then a well known poet – play right – actor. It was their mutual interest in the arts, which brought them together. Finally when she was twenty, married Harindranath Chattopadhyay much to the opposition of the orthodox society of the times, which was still heavily against widow marriage.

## **4. Move to London:**

Shortly after the marriage Chattopadhyay couple left for London, where Kamaladevi joined Bedford College, University of London, and she received a diploma in Sociology, while still in London, Kamaladevi came to know of Mahatma Gandhi's non-cooperation movement in 1920 – 23 and she promptly returned to India.

## **5. Sevalal Leader:**

Soon after returned to India from London, she joined sevadal a Ghadhian organization set up to promote upliftment. Soon she was placed in charge of the women's section of Dal where she got involved in recreating, training and organizing girls and women of all ages across India, to become voluntary workers, called as 'Sevikas'. In 1816, she met Margaret Cousins, the founder of All India Women's Conference (AIWC) and was inspired her to run for the Madras provincial legislative assembly. Thus, she became the first women to run for a legislative seat in India.

## **6. The All – India Women's Conference:**

Kamaladevi, herself founded the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) and became its first organizing secretary. In the following years AIWC, grew upto become a national organization of repute with branches and voluntary programs run through out the

nation, and work steady for legislative reforms. During her tenure, she traveled extensively to many European nations and was inspired to initiate several social reform and community welfare programmes, and set up educational institutions run for the women, and by women. Another shining example in this series was the formation of Lady Irwin College for Home Sciences a one of its kind college for women of its times in New Delhi.

#### **7. First Indian Women to be arrested:**

Kamaladevi was a part of the seven member lead team, announced by Mahatma Gandhi in the famous Salt Satyagraha of 1930. In the same year she was arrested for entering the Bombay Stock Exchange to sell packets of contraband Salt and spent almost a year in prison. In 1936, she became President of the Congress Socialist Party. Working along side Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia and Minor Masani for her feminism was inseparable from socialism, and where necessary she opposed her own colleagues when they ignored or infringed women's right.

#### **8. The doyen of arts and crafts in post independence era:**

Independence of India, brought partition in its wake, and she plunged into rehabilitation of the refugees. Her first task was to set up the Indian cooperative union to help with rehabilitation, and through the union she made plans for a township on cooperative lines. At length Mahatma Gandhi reluctantly gave her permission on the condition that she did not ask for state assistance, and so after much struggle, the township of Fairdabad was set up, on the outskirts of Delhi, rehabilitating over 50,000 refugees from the Northwest Frontier. She worked tirelessly helped the refugees to establish new homes, and new professions, for this they were trained in new skills, she also helped setting up health facilities in the new town.

Thus, began the second phase of life's work in rehabilitation of people as well their lost crafts, she is considered single handedly responsible for the great revival of Indian handicrafts and handloom, in the post independence era, and is considered her greatest legacy to modern India.

#### **9. Kamala Devi as an Actress:**

She also acted in a few films. In an era when acting was considered unsuitable for women from respectable families. In her first stint, she acted in two silent films, including the first silent film of Kannada film industry. Mricchakatika (Vasantasena, 1931), based on the famous play by Sadraka also starring Yenakshi Rama Rao and directed by pioneering Kannada director, Mohan Dayaram Bhavanin. In her second stint in films she acted in a 1943, in Hindi film, Tansen, also starring K. C. Saigal and Khursheed, followed by Shankar Parvati (1943) and Dhanna Bhagat (1945).

#### **10. Works of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay**

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### **11. Awards and Recognition:**

The Government of India conferred on her the Padma Bhushan (1955) and later the second highest civilian award, the Padma Vibhushan in 1987, which are among the highest civilian awards of the Republic of India. She also received the Ramon Magsayasy Award (1966) for Community Leadership. She was awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship, Ratna Sadsya, the highest award of Sangeet Natak Akademi, India's National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama, given for lifetime achievement in 1974.

UNESCO honoured her with an award in 1977 for her contribution towards the promotion of handicrafts. Shantiniketan honoured her with the Desikottama, its highest award. UNIMA (Union International de la Marlonette), International Puppetry organization, also made her their member of honour.

### **12. Kamala Devi a Legacy:**

In 2007, the outlook magazine chose Kamaladevi amongst its list of 60 Great Indians and she was India Today's, 100 Millennium people.

Today, the world crafts council gives two awards in her memory, the Kamaladevi Awards and the Kamala Sammaan, for exceptional craft persons or to individual for their outstanding contribution to the field of crafts.

Apart from the crafts council of Karnataka, also gives the Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Vishwakarma Awards, each year to not worthy crafts persons.

For over three decades now, Bhartiya Natya Sangha has been awarding the 'Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya Award' for the best play of the year.

### **Conclusion:**

As a young lady from a saraswat Brahmin family, Kamaladevi got child marriage in earlier age. She lost her husband and become widow. Here she crossed many hurdles of

hindu rites and get remarriage in the then days and gain her higher education in London. She was a role model by participating in the non-cooperation to India got freedom actively. She also served in several organizations like Sevadal, cooperative movement, women empowerment programmes, Indian film land, literary fields and others in respectable consideration are thoroughly analysed.

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