

PROMINENT WOMEN PERSONALITIES OF TAMILNADU

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Abstract

The women of Tamilnadu not only shine in politics but also in the other fields like education, music, dance, sports, literature, military, police, cinema, freedom struggle, fight against illegal practices and superstitious beliefs etc. Asalambikai Ammaiyar was a great reformer. She followed the way of Gandhiji's Ahimsa and singing 'Gandhi puranam' songs and composed it. Moovaloor Ramamirtham was an important person who fought for the defeat of Devadasi system. She started 'Uvathi Saranalayam' a welfare organization for devadasis and gave a new life to devadasis, subalakshmi was the first women to finish the B.A. degree in the caste of Anthanar. She struggled for the life of widows, so the central government awarded her 'padma shree' award. Thillaiaadi valliammai had struggled for women's freedom and human rights. Ambujammal was a great freedom fighter. She opposed the British people for India's Independence and she blocked the shops which were selling the foreign goods. She started a women's education centre "Sreenivasa Gandhi" in the name of her father and Gandhiji. V.M.Kothainayaki Ammal was an eminent patriot. She wrote many stories and dramas. In 1925, she purchased the magazine 'Jeganmohini' to publish her stories. She gave out world news and news about freedom struggle to the house wires through her magazine. K.B.Sundarambal was a popular actor in Tamil cinema. When Gandhiji conducted salt sathyagraha, she also joined with him and sang many freedom motivating songs. T.P.Rajalashmi was a popular Dramatist. And, she was very popular in film industry but she was interested in congress party and Gandhian principles. She struggled for the development of Tamil society. Nagammiar wife of E.V.R.Periyar struggled for the Indian Independence and women's freedom. M.S.Subbulakshmi was a great singer of Tamilnadu.

Keywords: *dance, sports, literature, military, police, cinema, freedom struggle*

The women of Tamil Nadu shine not only in politics but also in the other fields like education, music, dance, sports, literature, military, police, cinema, freedom struggle, fight against illegal practices and superstitious beliefs etc. Some of the important Tamil women in the above said fields are given below.

Asalambikai Ammaiyar

She was born in south Arcod District, Thindivanam Taluk, Rendana Village in the year 1875. In her youth stage itself she was interested in Indian National Movement and started to speak in political meetings. She had more respect and love for Gandhiji. In 1921, September 17, Gandhiji came to Kadaloor. She praised Gandhiji on behalf of south Arcod District Women's Fellowship. She followed the way of Gandhiji's 'Ahimsa' and singing 'Gandhi Puranam' songs and composed it. Her 'Gandhi Puranam' has 2034 songs. She was spending 30 years for completing Gandhi Puranam at the age of 73. She died on 1955.

She also wrote "Ramalinka Swamigal Varalatra paadalagal, Kulanthai Swamigal pathigam, Atthisoodi Venba, Tilahar puranam". So she was called as 'Present Day Ovvaiyar'.

V.Kalayana sundaranar mentioned about the work of Asalambikai Ammaiyar in his autobiography.

Moovaloor Ramamirtham

Ramamirtham was born at Thiruvarur in 1883. She was the important person who fought for the defeat of the Devadasi system. She started 'Uvathi Saranalayam' a welfare organization for devadasis and gave a new life to Devadasis. She had written two novels 'Thasigalin Mosavalai' and 'Mathi Petta Minor'. In the novels she insists the need for the abolition of the Devadasi system. In 1938 she participated in anti-Hindi agitation. In this agitation she walked continuously for 42 days and 577 miles. She was the only woman who walked the anti-Hindi agitation. She died on 1962.

Subalakshmi

Subalakshmi was born as a daughter of subramaniya Iyer and Visalatchi Ammaiyar in Mylapore, Chennai on 30 July 1886. She was very much interested in education and finished her primary education at the age of nine. She got married at the age of eleven and her husband died within three months after her marriage. So her relatives were against her education. But again she started her education in 1899. In 1905 she came in third place in the state matriculation examination. In 1908, she started to learn B.A. degree and finished it at the age of 23. She was the first woman to finish the B.A. degree in the caste of 'Anthanar'. She got the job as a teacher in 1911 and later she was promoted as a head mistress.

In 1912, there were more than 22000 widows in Chennai in between the age of 5 to 15. In her own home at Elumpoor, Chennai, she started a service Centre for the widows. She named it as "Shree Saratha Iyikkia Sangam". Also she started a school and because of insufficient area she shifted it to Thiruvallikaeni, Chennai. The Government of Tamil Nadu had given Rs.170000 for constructing new buildings to this school. From 19 December 1922 in the new building her school was started as the name of "Lady Willington" school. This school got the great place in the growth of women education in Tamil Nadu. She struggled for the life of widows so the central government awarded her 'Padma Shree' award. She was affectionately called as 'Sister Subalakshmi'. She died in the year 1969 at the age of 82.

Thillaiyadi Valliammai

Thillaiyadi Valliammai was born at Johannesburg in South Africa in 22 February 1898. Her father was Munusamy and mother was Mangalathammal. They were the citizens of the village Thillaiyadi near Tanjavur Sembanar Temple. But they lived in South Africa. After completing Law, Gandhi worked in South Africa as a lawyer. He saw the sadness and cruel condition of South African people and started to protest for them. At that time, Valliammai, who was great in courage and strength joined with him and started to protest for the people.

In 1913, March 14 a new Law was passed that any marriage that was not according to the church or according to the Marriage Law of south Africa would be held null and void, which disproportionately affected the Indian Community in that country. So Gandhiji showed his protest in the way of 'Ahimsa'. Valliammai, who was 16 years old, joined in this struggle with Gandhiji. Because of her struggle she was arrested and sent to Marit's burg jail for three month. There she was affected by fatal fever. When she was released, she was nothing more skin and bones held together by her sheer determination and grit. Then she died in the same sixteenth age on February 22, 1914. Thus she had struggled for women's freedom and human rights and died in her teen age. Gandhiji had opened a memorial statue of Valliammai in South Africa on July 15, 1914.

When Gandhiji came in to Tamil Nadu in 1934, he gave a speech about the courage of Valliammai. Also he liked to see the birth place of Valliammai. Even though there was no road facility in that village, He went there and worshipped it. When the Government celebrated Gandhiji silver jubilee in 1969, Tamil Nadu Government inaugurated a memorial statue of Valliyammai in Thillaiyadi. Thillaiyadi Valliammai Memorial Hall, including a public library was instituted in 1971 on 2452 square meters of land by the Indian Government in the village of Thillaiyadi, now in Tharangambadi Taluk, Nagapattinam. A Commemorative stamp on her was released on 31 December 2008.

Ambujammal

Ambujammal was born in 1899, on January 8, at Chennai. She was born in a rich and influenced family. Her father was Srinivasa Iyengar and mother was Renganayagai Ammal. Because of her father's status, she learned Tamil, English, Hindi and Sanskrit in her home. From the childhood itself, she was very much interested in the Gandhian principles. When Gandhiji and Kasthuri Bai came to Chennai in 1915 to collect money for South African Satyagraha, she went to see Gandhiji with her father. She was surprised to see Kasthuri Bai, because she was in 'Kather' Saree. On seeing the simpleness of Kasthuri Bai she had given her large priced silk sarees and jewels for the fund of backward class people.

She opposed the British people for India's Independence and she blocked the shops which were selling the foreign goods. Then she was arrested and locked in Vellore jail. There she was teaching Hindi, Tailoring and flower making for the women prisoners. In 1943 she became the member of Chennai Corporation. She started a women's education Centre "Sreenivasa Gandhi" in the name of her father and Gandhiji. By this, women got training in education, medical treatment and business training.

In 1945, when the Congress conference held in Avadi, Chennai, she was selected as the leader of reception committee. In 1946 she started co-operative societies separately for women in Madras. In 1957 she was a member of social Welfare Board of Chennai and continued it for seven years. She became popular among the people by writing a book "Naan Kanda Bharatham". She got the 'Padma Shree' Award in 1964 for her social work. She fought for

women's education, women's business development and abolition of Devadasi system. She was called as the "Adopted Daughter of Gandhiji". She died in 6 October 1983.

V.M.Kothainayaki Ammal

She was born as the second daughter of Venkatacharyar and Pattammal in December 1, 1901 at Thiruvallikeni, Chennai. At the age of 5 she got married. So she did not get a chance for education. But in the childhood itself she had a good knowledge in storytelling. Up to the age of 20, she did not know to read or write. But she published the drama 'Indira Mohana' with the help of her friends.

Then she started learning Tamil and wrote many stories and dramas. In 1925, she purchased the magazine 'Jeganmohini' to publish her stories. Because of her writings it came in the first place. More than 10,000 prints had been published by this magazine and it created a great record. She had continuously published this magazine up to 5 October 1959.

She gave out world news and news about freedom struggle to the house wives through her magazine. She created more than 150 women writers by her magazine. She was very fond of the principles of Gandhiji and she wrote more about that of Gandhian principles in her magazine and wore 'Kadhar' dress. Her Novel 'Vaitheki' was about the life of prostitutes. She fought against the sale of foreign dresses and liquor. Then she was arrested and put in to the Vellore jail. In Vellore jail she looked the pathetic life of women prisoners and she wrote a novel 'Sothanaiyin Kodumai'. The government was against to publish her other novels like 'Thiyaha Kodi' and 'Nalina Sekaran'. But she was not afraid of anything and published the novels. After Independence she started 'Mahatma Gandhi Seva Sangam' and she fought for the development of women, prohibition of liquor and eradication of untouchability. She was in the literary field for 35 years so she was called 'Naval Rani' and 'Katha Mohini'. She died on February 20, 1960.

K.B.Sundarambal

She was born in Kodumudi village near karur in 1908, October 11. The first letter of her village's name and her mother Balambigai's name became the initial for her name. From the childhood itself she started to act in stage dramas. Then she was introduced as a child artist in the Velu Nayakar Drama Company. Her songs also got popular. In 1917 she went to Sri Lanka and participated in a drama troupe. At that time she got 40 rupees as monthly salary. She became popular when she acted in the film 'Ovvaiyyar'. She got Rs.1 lakh salary for the film 'Nandanar' (Nandanar, in which she played the hero). In India she was the first actress who got 1 lakh rupees salary for a film.

When Gandhiji conducted salt Satyagraha, she also joined him with and sang many freedom motivating songs. Her songs increased the thought of freedom to the Tamil people. In 1958 when Kamaraj was the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu she became the member of Rajya Sabha. She was the first screen star to become a member of the state Legislature. She got the

'Padma Bhushan' from the central Government, 'Yaelisai Vallabi Award' from Tharuma puram Diocese and the 'Isai Paerarinjar Award, from Tamil Isai Sangam. She died on 19 September, 1980. In that time, the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu M.G.Ramachandran ordered to bury her mortal remains with Government honor.

T.P.Rajalakshmi

T.P.Rajalakshmi was born in Thiruvaiyaru at Thanjavur District in the year 1911. She was the daughter of Punjabakesa Iyer and Meenakshi. She was married at the age of 11, but was abandoned by her husband when she could not pay her dowry. So Rajalakshmi's father committed suicide. Then Rajalakshmi left her village along with her mother. In order to support her family, Rajalakshmi joined a drama troupe and acted in atage plays. She learnt dance and music from Sankaradas Swamigal, a popular dramatist. Rajalakshmi got a grip in life in 1931, when she acted as the heroine in the first Tamil talkie, 'Kalidas'. So she got the proud of being a first Tamil actress and also got the special name 'Cinema Rani'. By acting, she became rich and started her own film company named 'Rajam Theatres'. She produced a film 'Miss Kamala'. The story was written by her and she had directed it. So she became the first woman director of South India.

She was very popular in film industry but she was interested in Congress Party and Gandhian Principles. So she had taken a film 'Indiya Thai' regarding our independence. Because of sensor board it got failed. She struggled for the development of Tamil society and died in 1950.

Captain Laxmi Seghal

She was born as the daughter of Ammu and Swaminathan at Chennai on October 24, 1914. Since childhood, Laxmi's aim was to become a doctor and serve the poor countrymen. At the age of 16 in 1930, she learned secondary education in Rani Mary College. In her college itself she became the member of the youth branch of the Indian National congress. Laxmi also looked upon Mahatma Gandhi as an angel and donated her jewels to the Indian National Congress. Then she studied medicine and got special training in it. She received a degree from Madras Medical College in 1938. After becoming a doctor, Laxmi served in the Victoria Cross Hospital at Madras as a gynaecologist. A friend of her from Singapore invited her to practice in Singapore since there was no lady doctor there. In 1940 she went to Singapore and rendered medical service to the poor Indians living there. In Singapore she established a clinic for the poor, mostly migrant laborers from India. She became one of the most popular gynecologists in the city of Singapore.

General Mohan Singh had started Indian National Army in Singapore. The Military people only joined in that army. For the other people Indian Independence League was started. Rash Bihari Bose was the leader of Indian Independence League. Laxmi had joined the Indian Independence League and started working in its women section.

In July 2, 1943 she was inspired by the speech of Nethaji Subash Chandra Bose in Singapore and had a conversation with him. In this speech Nethaji announced his plan of forming a women's wing of Azad Hind Government named after the great Rani of Jhansi Laxmibai. This announcement of Nethaji marked the turning point in Laxmi's life. Then with the advice of Subash Chandra Bose 'Jhansi Rani Regiment' was started especially for women. Laxmi was appointed as the captain of the regiment. Laxmi collected twenty women and trained them with the help of a Havildar from Azad Fauj. Laxmi herself started undergoing military training along with the others. Their trainee's number was growing day by day. The camp was built within three weeks and accommodated five hundred cadets. Laxmi was engaged throughout the whole day undergoing military training in the morning and evening and attending to office work during the day. In this Jhansi Regiment 75% of the cadets were Tamil women.

In 1943, October 27, Nethaji had formed a government called "Azad Hindi". Here Nethaji was the president. Captain Laxmi was the women's welfare minister. This was the additional responsibility. The other two positions were the chairmanship of the women's wing of the Indian Independence League and the commander of the Regiment. Laxmi was the first woman to win this honor. This assembly had ordered a war against the British. Japan had first sanctioned this assembly. Then Germany and Italy also sanctioned this assembly. This force went to Burma from Singapore in 1944. Because of heavy wind and rain they could not go forward. So they went into a terrible forest and they established a hospital there and Captain Laxmi gave treatment to the wounded soldiers. But British force attacked the hospital and many of the patients are died. The British force exiled Captain Laxmi to India in 4 March 1946.

In 1971 she joined the communist party of India (Marxist) and represented the CPI(M) in the Rajya Sabha. During the Bangladesh crisis she organized relief camps and medical help in Calcutta for Bangladesh refugees who streamed into India at the time.

In 1998 she got 'Padma Vibhushan' Award for her valuable social work. In 2003 Dr. Abdul Kalam contested the election for the place of president in India. Captain Laxmi also contested against him on behalf of in Communist Party. But Laxmi failed in this election. Laxmi is the pride of the community of women, since qualities such as beauty, intellect, courage, bravery, tenderness, helpfulness and toughness are rarely found in a single person. She is the first woman in the world to reach to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the army.

Swornathammal

Swornathammal was born at Madurai in 1916. She fought for the freedom of women, backward people's social freedom and also for India's freedom. In 1939 she protested for 'Thalith' (scheduled caste) people to enter in Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple and got success in it.

She went to all the areas of Madurai and spoke about the importance of Independence. So every day she was arrested and sent to Maeloor jail in Madurai. In 1942 she joined with the

Quit India Movement for the struggle for freedom. She was arrested and sent nakedly to Alagar Koil Forest. She sacrificed her life for women's freedom and died in the year 2007.

Nagammaiyyar

Nagammaiyyar was born in the year 1885 in Thathampatti, Salem District. His parents were Arangasami and ponnuthayi. In 1898 at the age of 13, she married E.V.R.Periyar. E.V.R.Periyar struggled for the Indian Independence and women's freedom. He was highly encouraged by Nagammaiyyar. In 1921 she participated toddy shop protest in Erode and went she came back from jail, she cut all the plam trees which had been planted in her garden.

In Vikkam, Kerala, the high caste people did not allow the low caste people to enter the Temple and street. Untouchability flourished in Vikkam. For this Kerala Congress Leaders asked help of E.V.R.Periyar. In this struggle Nagammaiyyar joined with E.V.R.Periyar and went to Vikkam and struggled for the low class people and got freedom for them. On 19 November 1925 they conducted a celebration for the victory of Vikkam protest. In this function, V.Kalyana Sundranar awarded E.V.R.Periyar as "Vikkam Veerar". He also spoke about the brave character of Nagammaiyyar.

Nagammaiyyar encouraged widow remarriage and self-respect marriage. She conducted the remarriages in her home and gave full security for people who were afraid of society. She worked as an administrative officer of newspaper 'Kudiyarasu'. She was involved in the entire struggle with Periyar and died on 11 May 1933. Tamil Nadu Government had given the name of Nagammaiyyar for a place in Chennai for her well known service. Also in 1989 Tamil Nadu Government had started E.V.R. Nagammaiyyar Memorial Women free Bachelor Education.

M.S. Subbulakshmi

She was born on 16 September 1916 at Madurai. She was the daughter of subramania Iyer and Shanmugavadiyu. Her full name was Madurai Shanmugavadiyu Subbulakshmi. Her initial 'M' denotes Madurai and 'S' her mother's name. Her mother was a great lyrist. She learned music from her mother in the childhood itself. Then she learned Carnatic music from Srinivasa Ayyangar at Madurai. In the age of 10, her recorded songs were released by Gramophone Company. In her age of 14, she started her first music program in Madurai. Then she performed many music programs in Trichi, Thanjavur, Nellai and Ramanatha Puram. She also performed her program in London, New York, Canada, Moscow etc. So she was applauded by not just Indians, but foreigners as well.

M.S.Subbulakshmi got the blessing of Gandhiji, when she went to Nagapuri near Calcutta. On that day she sang some songs in the prayer service. Gandhiji got excited and appreciated her. After the death of Kasthuri Bai she conducted some music programs and collected money for the memorable fund of Kasturi Bai. Gandhiji had sent a thanks giving letter to Subbulakshmi which was written by him in Tamil. She kept that letter as a 'Treasure'.

Some of her most famous works include Suprabhatam (early morning hymns), Bhajagovindam (composed by Adi Sankaracharya praising lord Krishna), Kurai onrum illai (composed by Rajagopalachari), Vishnu Sahasranamam (1000 names of Lord Vishnu), Hanuman Chalisa (prayers to Lord Hanuman) etc. Once the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru spoke in Subbulakshmi's music program he told, "I am an ordinary prime minister but Subbulakshmi is the princess of music". In 1966 she conducted the music concert in United Nation Organization. By singing in UNO she gets popular in all through the world.

Many of the Indian Universities awarded Doctorate for her music. She got 'Padma Bhushan' in 1954, 'Sangeetha Kalanithi' Award in 1968, 'Ramon Magsaysay' Award (often considered Asia's Nobel Prize) in 1974, 'Padma Vibhushan' Award in 1975, 'Kalidas Samman' Award in 1988. 'Indira Gandhi' Award for national integration in 1990. In 1955 she got the doctorate degree for seventh time. She got 'Bharat Ratna' Award in 1998. She died on December 11, 2004.

Maniyammaiyar

Maniyammaiyar was born on 10 March 1917 in Vellore as the daughter of Kanagasabai and Padmavathi. After the death of Nagammaiyar, E.V.R.Periyar married Maniyammai on 9 April 1949. After the marriage she changed her name as E.V.R.Maniyammai. She helped Periyar in all his struggles successfully. E.V.R.Periyar died on 24 December 1973. After his death Maniyammai did all works which he had left. In 6 January 1974 Dravida Kazhagam conducted a function in periyar Thidal, Chennai. In the function the members of Dravida Kazhagam selected Maniyammai as the leader of the party.

Maniyammaiyar was an able administrator. She administrated the institutions and orphanages which were started by Periyar in Trichy. She also started Periyar Maniyammai Higher Secondary School in Trichy. She went to jail many times for the struggle of self-respect marriage, women's freedom and India's freedom struggle. She died on 1978.

D.K.Pattammal

Pattammal was born in an orthodox Brahmin family in Kancheepuram of Tamil Nadu in 28 March 1919. Her father was Damal Krishnaswamy Dikshithar, mother Kanthimathi (Rajammal). Despite her orthodox background, Pattammal sang and showed considerable music talent at an early age.

In 1929, at age 10, Pattammal gave her first radio performance for Madras Corporation Radio, and three years later, she gave her first public concert at Madras Rasika Sabha in 1932. She was the first Brahmin woman to have performed Carnatic Music. Pattammal was the earliest Carnatic Musician to sing in films. She received many offers to sing for films, she only accepted those that involved devotional or patriotic songs. The first film Pattammal sang it was Thyaga Bhoomi in 1939. She was honored with Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1961, Sangeet Kalanidhi (Highest Accolade in Carnatic Music) award in 1970, Padma Bhushan award in 1971,

Padma Vibhushan award in 1988 and Sangeeta Saraswathi award in 2006. She died on 16 July 2009 at the age of 90.

Sarojini Varadappan

She is an Indian Social worker from the state of Tamil Nadu. She was born in Madras on 21 September 1921 to the former Chief Minister of Madras, M.Baktavatsalam and Gnanasundarambal. At an early age, she was married to her cousin Varadappan. Sarojini was 21 years old when her father was arrested for participating in the Quit India movement. After two years of imprisonment, he was released in 1944.

Sarojini resumed her studies after marriage and completed her master degree in political science from Mysore University through correspondence course. She also did her M.A. in Vaishnavism from Madras University. She joined the women's Indian Association at an early age and later became its president. Under her leadership, the number of branches of the organization increased from 4 to 76. She was also the member of Indian Red Cross society for over 35 years. Sarojini was awarded India's fourth highest civilian award, the 'Padma Shree' in 1973. In 2001 she got her Ph.D. at the age of 80 for her thesis on "Social Service and the Swami Narayan Movement". She was awarded the 'Jankidevi Bajaj' award for 2004 at a function in Chennai held on 23 February 2005. Sarojini was awarded India's third highest civilian award, the 'Padma Bhushan' for social service in March 5, 2009.

Anjalaammal

Anjalaammal was born at Kadaloor in 1890. From 1921 onwards she started struggle for the independence of India. She was the first woman who started the struggle for India's independence in South Tamil Nadu. In 1932 she participated in non-cooperation movement, liquor shop struggle and also in 1941 individual Satyagraha. In these struggles she was arrested several times and several years she was in Kadaloor, Vellore, Trichy and Bellari jails.

She was a good speaker. When the protest was going on in kadaloor salt struggle, she participated with her child in one hand and the Congress flag in another hand. When British soldiers beat her, she lost her child down but she did not lose the Congress flag down. She sold all her properties and gave the money to the struggle for India's Independence. She was a member in Madras Legislative Assembly from 1946 to 1952. She also sent her child Amma Kannu to fight for freedom. She was a school student at her ninth age when she was sent to jail for four years. Like this she struggled for the freedom in many ways and died on February 20, 1961.

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