



Milestones Accomplished by Unsung Patriot S.Ambujammal – A Study

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Manuscript ID:
BIJ-SPL2-NOV25-MD-132

Subject: History

Received : 25.07.2025

Accepted : 24.10.2025

Published : 14.11.2025

DOI: 10.64938/bijsi.v10si2.25.Nov132

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Abstract

S. Ambujammal energized the nation and motivated citizens in their fight against British rule, often prioritizing the struggle over her own comfort. Unfortunately, her sacrifices and contributions have largely been forgotten in historical narratives. The research seeks to restore recognition to Ambujammal's legacy, underscoring her courage and dedication to the pursuit of independence for India. The paper aims to analyze her role in promoting social development in Tamil Nadu and Chennai, briefing her early life, positions in both governmental and non-governmental organizations, and her contributions to health, education, women empowerment, and child welfare. The paper emphasizes various milestones accomplished in her life with sacrifice. The paper concludes with findings that highlight her achievements and the honors she received from the Government of India for her dedicated service to the motherland, India.

Keywords: patriot, courage, social service, milestones, honors

Introduction

‘History is a record of Human Accomplishment, particularly of Great Souls’

- Thomas Carlyle

History is record of human achievement which leads towards progression and sets a passion for the future goals with meaningful compassions. S.Ambujammal was a selfless freedom fighter and an adopted daughter of Gandhi, whose efforts have had a lasting impact on Indian society. A passionate little girl, she was greatly influenced by her father Srinivasa Iyengar's powerful personality, who was then making his way into the national scene. Her aunt was a close acquaintance in her youth.

Objectives

The main objectives of this study would be as follows:

- To study about the early life and carrier of S.Ambujammal.
- To analyse and understand the opportunities used and challenges faced towards the growth in National carrier, patriotic and personal life of S. Ambujammal.
- To understand and recall the efforts, service and administration of S.Ambujammal through which greater milestones was achieved by her.



Methodology

Both Primary and Secondary data have been used and the description with narrative style have been followed throughout the paper.

Ealy Life and Passion for Education

S. Ambujammal was born on January 8, 1899, in Mylapore, part of the Madras Presidency. She hailed from a prominent family. Her father, Sriman Srinivasa Iyengar, was a notable figure in the Indian National Congress and later served as President of the Swaraj Party. Ambujammal married S. Desikachari, an advocate in Kumbakonam, and was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's views, particularly his agenda for social and economic development. Ambujammal pursued her passion for education by completing a teacher training course and subsequently worked at Sarada Vidyalaya, a girls' school in Chennai. Her commitment to women's education and societal improvement was evident during her tenure as a member of the Saradha Ladies Union Committee from 1929 to 1936. Through her active involvement in various initiatives, she significantly contributed to enhancing the status of women in society. Her dedication to social service also led to a close association with Sister Subbulakshmi, a well-known figure in the field of social work.

Mahatma Gandhi and Ambujammal

In 1925, Gandhiji and Kasturbai visited Ambujammal house and stayed there for three days. The book named 'Mother India' given by Gandhiji made Ambujammal herself to decide and involve in Indian National Movement completely. She accepted Gandhiji's words and considered him as her 'Political Guru' from that time onwards. From that visit, Ambujammal decided to do selfless service during her life tenure.

Milestones Accomplished through Various Activities

As Treasurer - The Women's Swadeshi League was established in 1930 to promote social awareness and development in alignment with Gandhi's initiatives.

Key figures in the organization included Janamma and Krishnabhai as secretaries, with Ambujammal serving as treasurer. Meetings were held daily at 3 PM in the inner hall of Jagannathadas's residence, at Teynampet where members conducted various educational classes, including spinning, Hindi, and flower printing on Khaddar clothes, as well as teaching the National Anthem to Women's. Ambujammal, encouraged by her father Srinivasa Iyengar, left her position as an honorary teacher to fully commit to the League's work. As the organization grew, she rented a house on Big Street for 20 rupees to accommodate its expanding activities. Additionally, Ambujammal and her companions actively promoted Swadeshi products made by women in the League, contributing to their social and economic empowerment.

As Patriot - Ambujammal, Jaanammal, and Kamalabai protested against foreign cloth shops in Rattan Bazaar on January 18, 1932. Ambujamma and her companions were arrested and held in a police lockup room. Her parents visited her in the lockup, but her father did not speak. Ambujamma and Jannammal refused to apologize, remained in lockup for two days. On 20 January 1932, Ambujammal and her associates were convicted in the Third Magistrate Court for violating Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code. Despite claiming they protested according to Gandhian principles, the court convicted them and sentenced them to six months imprisonment and a fine of Rs 250 each. On January 20, 1932, Ambujammal, Jaanammal, and Kamalabai were sent to Vellore Jail. They thought they were headed to a new social world for the good of the country, even though they were being hauled to prison. Registering their beliefs for freedom made them feel proud. They made a stop at Torapadi, a town with separate prisons for men and women, en route to Katpadi. A police van was used to transport Ambujammal and two other patriots to Torapadi Women's Prison. Ambujammal and other prisoners suffered a lot for all the basic needs including food, proper shelter, bathroom facilities, water, etc.,

As Founder and President - Ambujammal dedicated her life to supporting the poor and



marginalized, without concern for the consequences. The pinnacle of her humanitarian work, particularly for women and children, was the founding of a multifaceted international organization in 1948, which she named "Srinivasa Gandhi Nilayam" in tribute to her father and her political mentor, Gandhi. This organization was one of the first in Tamil Nadu to address the needs of vulnerable women and their children. The main goal of the Nilayam is to support disadvantaged women and children in the Mylapore area, regardless of caste, creed, or political affiliation. To achieve this aim, the institution has been running various divisions focused on education, welfare, and social and economic advancement.

As Chairman - Given that Ambujammal devoted her life to assisting the underprivileged, it was not unexpected that she was unanimously chosen to head the State Social Welfare Board from 1957 to 1964. In this role, she was instrumental in guiding welfare programs for women and children throughout the state of Tamil Nadu. Furthermore, she took the initiative to visit various other welfare organizations across Tamil Nadu, from Chengalpet to Kanyakumari, and implemented numerous strategies to ensure the effective operation of these organizations.

Socio-Economic Services - The socioeconomic branch of the institution, Srigam Printers, offered job and training opportunities for women. The printing press produced a range of materials, including visiting cards, college magazines, and books, employing many women across its various departments and publishing in English, Tamil, and French during its first ten years. During this time, at least one hundred trained girls were equipped with skills in composition, printing, and binding.

Diverse Training Programs - Through the Nilayam's tailoring and embroidery division, women were able to generate a monthly income by making uniforms and other clothing. The institute also provided classes in Veena, typewriting, shorthand, and various artisan skills. The small Rangoli designs and sandal garlands were especially sought after. A notable international charity from Oxford, England,

placed an order with the Nilayam for one thousand handmade tablets filled with sandal powder.

Healthcare Services - In addition to caring for pre-basic school students, the free medical center, staffed by a doctor and nurse, serves over 100 patients each month.

Remarkable Services - Ambujammal served as an executive member of the Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha and actively engaged in practical outreach alongside a team of pracharakars from 1925. She held the position of President at the Hayagreeva Vidyapeeth, an institution dedicated to the promotion of Sanskrit education and culture in 1936. In collaboration with Vino Bhawe, she took part in the Bhoodan Movement, making significant contributions through her door-to-door service in 1955.

Acknowledgment of Altruistic Contributions - Consequently, Ambujammal's achievements in social service reached a pinnacle in 1964 when she was honored with the Padma Shri award by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, who was the President of India at that time. Furthermore, in 1973, the State of Tamil Nadu awarded her the Thamara Patra to acknowledge Ambujammal's significant contributions to the liberation movement.

Findings

The study presents a variety of findings outlined below:

- Ambujammal was born into a wealthy family but relinquished all her comforts for the betterment of society and the nation.
- She led a modest lifestyle, donning Khadi sarees and simple beads around her neck.
- Prior to Independence, she actively participated in and executed several significant social development programs through the Recreation Club and the Women Swadeshi League.
- Through the Srinivasa Gandhi Nilayam, Ambujammal made substantial contributions to society across various social dimensions, including education, health, and cultural



programs, as well as classes for underprivileged children, women, and marginalized individuals.

- As the Chairman of the Social Welfare Board of Tamil Nadu, she established and managed numerous organizations, utilizing all funds received from the Central Social Welfare Board with integrity.
- During her tenure as Chairman of the State Social Welfare Board, she extensively visited every organization from Chengalpet to Kanyakumari, assessing their genuine needs and providing financial assistance for the development of socially disadvantaged individuals, regardless of caste or creed.
- Ambujammal had a close association with Mahatma Gandhi, earning the title of his adopted daughter.
- She donated her diamond jewelry to Mahatma Gandhi for the nation's welfare prior to Independence.
- Her social service organization, Srinivasa Gandhi Nilayam, located in Teynampet, Chennai, has been successfully providing various social services to diverse sectors of the population since 1948.
- According to Ambujammal, 'All are Equal before God and Nation.' Until her last breath, she was deeply involved in and contributed significantly to the advancement of society and the nation.

Conclusion

'If by strength is meant moral power, then women is immeasurably man's superior'

- Mahatma Gandhi

India has been privileged to nurture many remarkable and distinctive individuals, especially women, throughout its rich history, who have dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to improving society and supporting the underprivileged. Ambujammal's dedication to the empowerment of women was wholeheartedly endorsed by her father. She never sought recognition. The true nature of this modest woman is appreciated only by her closest

friends. She embodied the innocent spirit of a child, combined with a profound sense of humanity and compassion for the less fortunate and oppressed, traits that can only be cultivated through deep maturity and wisdom. Her efforts in social service exemplify the highest level of commitment. Even in her later years, she maintained the energy of youth. She was humble yet profoundly dedicated to her philanthropic endeavors. Ambujammal is a 'Lumen of Service' and continues to inspire all those who wish to make a positive impact on society.

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