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Heritage Series

Kittur

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Bangalore



Heritage Series

Kittur

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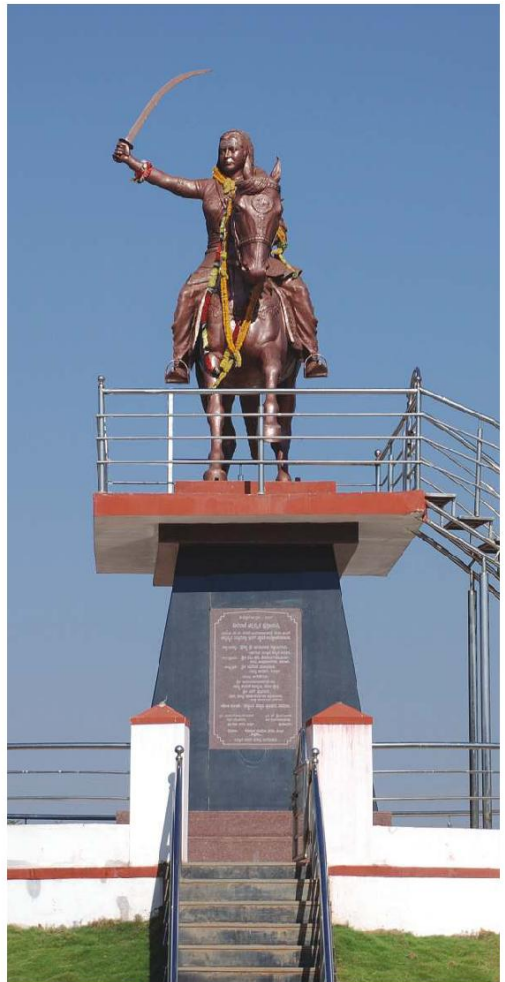
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Kittur

Though people of India resisted the British here and there against their treacherous attitude of invading India, the bravery exhibited by Tippu in South, Rani Chennamma in the central part and Surpur Venkatappa Nayaka in the Northern part of Karnataka is outstanding in the history of India. Kittur, a small kingdom taught a lesson of defeat to the British. For this reason, Kittur stands first in the history of India's struggle for Independence. Bravery, Patriotism and Political maturity demonstrated by Rani Chennamma against powerful British are noteworthy. The flame of Independence and patriotism lit by her among people are priceless. Kittur became famous because of her valour and unstinted fight against the British. Hence, Chennamma remains in the minds of people as a symbol of brave woman of India. She is identified as a "silver star" in the war of Independence against the British.



Brief History

Kittur was known as Geejaganahalli in 12th Century. Later, it became an important settlement and head quarter of the rulers of Kittur.

The history of Royal family of Kittur dates back to 1585 and continued up to 1824 (for 239 years). Twelve kings ruled the province during this period. This province was gifted by the Adilshah of Bijapur to Hiremalla Setty and Chikkamalla Setty the two brave commanders belonging to Sagar in Shimoga district. Because of his bravery, Hiremalla Setty was conferred with the title of 'Shamsher Jung Bahadur' by Adilshah in 1585, and also Sardeshmukhi of Hubli province called 'Hubballi paragana' was gifted to him by Adilshahi rulers. So, he settled at Sampagav and started ruling Kittur province.

Among the early rulers, Allappa Gowda Sardesai (1660-1691) was famous. Kittur became capital during his rule. Mudimallappa Gowda who succeed him was known to be very brave. Aurangzeb captured Bijapur and appointed Kepkhan as Nawab of Savanur including Kittur. Mudimallappa Gowda entered into a mutual agreement with Kepkhan and continued his rule thereafter. Shivana Gowda Sardesai followed by Rudra Gowda alias Fakir Rudrasarja became rulers. Rani Mallamma wife of Rudrasarja was a good administrator. Rudrasarja was strongly attracted by Niranjani and at Deshanur

he constructed a mansion for her, known as Niranjani mahal. He stayed there with her most of the time. As a result the entire responsibility of running administration was taken over by Rani Mallamma.

In 1746 Kittur was handed over to Marathas by the Nawab of Savanur and then onwards it came under the administration of Peshwas of Pune. Important events took place during the rule of Veerappa Gowda (1749-1782) who succeeded Rudra Gowda. Hyder Ali defeated Peshwas and occupied Kittur. Veerappa Gowda entered into agreement with Hyder Ali and retained the independent administration of Kittur.

Peshwa Parasuram Bhau in 1779, conquered Gokak and took Veerappa Gowda as a prisoner. Veerappa Gowda died in 1782 while in prison. A few days later his family adopted Mallasarja as his successor.

Mallasarja :

Mallasarja ascended the throne in 1782. He was the most powerful among all 12 Kittur rulers. Chennamma was his second wife. After his death in 1816, Chennamma took over the reins of administration completely.

His rule saw a critical period in the history of India. On one hand the British, French and Portuguese were competing with each other to conquer different regions of India. On the other hand number of princely states were fighting with each



other and trying to get favour from the foreign invaders. In 1785 Tippu took over Kittur and stationed a military contingent there. Tippu defeated Mallasarja in Deshanur war and kept him in the Kapladurga fort of Periyapatna as prisoner for three years. Mallasarja youth of 20 years escaped tactfully from that impregnable fort and came to Bableshwar in Bijapur through British territory and returned to Kittur.

According to a treaty between Tippu and Marathas in 1792, Kittur came again under Marathas. As Mallasarja allowed General Wellesley in 1802 to station his army at Sangolli, the British allowed Kittur to have independent internal administration. Wellesley who knew the strength of Mallasarja, hesitated to dethrone him and conquer Kittur. According to a treaty with Marathas, Mallasarja was paying them an annuity of Rs. 1,75,000. In spite of this the Peshwas did not treat him with respect. They imprisoned him by deceit and kept in Pune for three years. When he was about to die due to ill health he was released. Three days later, he died at Kittur. His eldest son Shivalinga Rudra Sarja (Bapu Saheba) ascended the throne.

Under Mallasarja, principality of Kittur comprised of parts of Belgaum, Dharwad and Karwar District. This included 286 villages and 72 majare's. Under Mallasarja, there was rapid progress in trade and employment. Being a lover of art he encouraged literature, drama and dance. He was too religious and ethical. There were hundreds of mutts among which Kallumata of Kittur was very famous. Rulers of Kittur had great respect towards the rajagurus of this mutt. The annual income of Kittur province was Rs. Five lakhs. Mallasarja had a strong army of one thousand soldiers. The province suffered throughout because of struggle between Tippu and Peshwas, Peshwas and British. In spite of this rulers of Kittur cleverly safeguarded their independence.

Shivalingarudrasarja who succeeded Mallasarja in 1816 was different from his father. He was more interested in literature and philosophy rather than politics and his health was also not good. Veeramma was his wife. It became inevitable for his mother Chennamma to shoulder more responsibility in the administration of Kittur. At the same time, the British were envious of the progress and development of Kittur. They feared that other province may be motivated from Kittur, unite together and revolt against them if Kittur was not conquered. Shivalingarudrasarja died of tuberculosis in Sept. 1824 and responsibility of affairs of state fell on entirely on Chennamma and she became the queen of Kittur.

Rani Chennamma

Rudramma the first wife of Mallasarja was a daughter of well known Tallur Desai. She was brave as well as learned. It is said that she participated in the Deshanur war. She was assisting Mallasarja in day to day administration. Chennamma the second wife of Mallasarja was a daughter of Kakateeya Dhoolappa Gowda Desai. She was known for her beauty, bravery and adventure from childhood. It was a historical event when Mallasarja married Chennamma and brought her to Kittur. Chennamma respected Rudramma as her elder sister, she looked after Shivalingarudrasarja (Bapusaheb) and Veerarudrasarja (Babasaheb) the two sons of Rudramma as her own son Shivabasavaraja (Babasaheb). When both Shivabasavaraja and Veerarudrasarja met with untimely death, she made Shivalingarudrasarja as successor to Kittur province and administered it on his behalf while Rudramma inclined towards spirituality, Chennamma began to rule with prudence. She loved her people and the province immensely. She was a very good administrator.

Problem of Adoption:

Shivalingarudrasarja who was suffering from serious illness had no issues. Therefore, a few boys from the families of his relatives were called. Among them Shivalingappa, son of Mastamaradi Basappa was chosen and adopted as his son. The process was completed in the presence of important persons and the fact was informed through a letter to the British political agent Thackarey who was in Dharwad. This became a pretext to the British who were eager to conquer Kittur. Chennamma did not like their interference in her internal affairs. She summoned leaders of the town and requested their allegiance to the province. Shivalingarudrasarja died on 12th Sept 1824. The letter drafted on 10th July about adoption when Rudrasarja was seriously ill, was sent to Thackarey on 12th September through Khannur Mallappa. Thackarey suspected the date of death and that of the letter. He alleged that the adoption was not in order as it must have taken place either after the death of Shivalingarudrasarja or when he was unconscious. He wanted to take over Kittur treating it as a province without a legal heir. A report to this effect was sent to Chaplin the commissioner of Deccan at Pune. In the letter he had stated that Kittur has no male successor and that he had taken action to safeguard its treasury. He deputed his army to safeguard the treasury and appointed his men to look after day to day administration. His unruly actions were opposed by Chennamma and Veeramma and a letter was sent to Chaplin explaining the humiliation caused by Thackarey towards the officials of the province. They also said that they were expecting from him the restoration of the province. But Chaplin was not different from Thackarey. As there was no reply, Chennamma decided to face the situation boldly. Thackarey started interfering in everything and took treasury under his control and appointed his men for the security of fort and began issuing orders.

Chennamma became furious with the humiliation meted out to her. When diplomatic measures failed, Chennamma addressed her generals and other officers after narrating the story in detail thus: "Kittur is ours, we are the rulers of our land. The people of Kittur love freedom more than their lives.... we will not budge whatever be the situation.... Kittur fights till its last breath. People of Kittur are aware that it is better to die rather than to live as slaves of the British".

These encouraging words aroused a sense of patriotism among soldiers and people. Then they raised slogans such as: "Victory to Kittur, Victory to Rani Chennamma" reverberating throughout the fort which heralded a war against the British.

Victory of Kittur :

It is said that on that very night, Chennamma in her dream, saw her deceased husband Mallasarja asking her to fight in the war wearing a male's dress



Kittur Flag

and safeguard the freedom and honour of Kittur. It is said that she promised to do so. She discussed with Sardar Gurusiddappa the commander-in-chief and others about the strategies of war. Then she summoned all Subedars, Sardars, Killedars, Dalvias and Sheth Sanadis to Kittur and asked them to be prepared for war.

Kittur had a good number of elephants, camels, horses and artillery. Learning about this, Thackarey reached Kittur with his army. He sent his agents into the fort on October 21st and forced the people there to sign an agreement on the protection of treasury. But nobody agreed to sign telling that permission of Chennamma was required to do so. Thackarey became angry and sent 100 soldiers to imprison military commanders.

Expecting this, Sardar Gurusiddappa ordered his soldiers to retreat them. The army of Kittur made a sudden attack and caused British army to suffer a lot. It was difficult for them even to escape and some of them were arrested. Chennamma treated the arrested ladies and children with respect and arranged for their stay. When Thackarey went to palace to meet Chennamma nobody wanted to speak to him. Chennamma was ready to face anything as he was mainly responsible for the humiliation of people and for gathering army near Kittur.

It was day of Mahanavami festivals, preparations were on in the palace. All the dignitaries were present Thackarey ordered commander Black to move his artillery towards entrance of fort-wall. A message was sent to Chennamma either to surrender or to face consequences. On the morning of 23rd October 1824, army was collected in the palace and doors of the fort were closed. Thackarey threatened to open the gates within 24 minutes or it would be blasted by cannons, but this was in vain. Contrary to his expectations, the gates

Rani Chennamma with army general Sardar Gurusiddappa in battlefield - painting in Museum



of Kittur fort were opened and the army of Kittur with a lightening speed attacked the British army. They were attacked from either side of the fort also seated on horseback, Rani Chennamma directed the army from the top of the fort. Her soldiers killed most of the British and recovered weapons. It was a great shock to British army. When Thackarey saw the plight of his soldiers, he galloped towards Chennamma seeing this Amatur Sadhunavar Balappa, the body guard of Chennamma aimed his gun at Thackarey and shot him dead. The soldiers of Kittur gathered round his body and torn it into pieces. Eighty British soldiers were killed and forty were imprisoned. Captain Black, Ley, Diaton and Sewell were killed in the battle. Thus, Kittur won the battle. The traitors and rebels were killed under the feet of elephants. Some British officers who were hiding were also imprisoned. This defeat put the British in a dilemma. The news of defeat reached Pune and Bombay.

A grand celebration was held on that day in Kittur. Lamps were lit on fort walls. It was a memorable day of victory over British and Kittur Chennamma honoured all soldiers with clothes and gifts.

Second war and Fall of Kittur

After the victory Chennamma had discussion with the Swamiji of Chowkimutt, Sardar Gurusiddappa, Sangolli Rayanna, Avaradi Veerappa, Sardar Himmar Singh, Sri Narasinga and others faithful to her. All of them pledged to fight, if the British failed to recognise Kitturs Independence. She was aware that the British would not remain quiet after this defeat. Therefore, she tried to negotiate with them through captured officers like Elliot, Stevenson and the ladies. The internal independence of Kittur should be recognized, failing which Kittur people will fight till their last breath.

The British also started preparation for war and sent to Kittur soldiers from Pune, Belgaum, Solapur, Bellary, Mysore and Vengurla. They also tried to divide people by threatening of punitive action.

Rani Chennamma and her associates sensed the futility of war against the British and waited for positive response from them. As a friendly gesture, she released forty Europeans who were kept in prison. She was in correspondence with the British and tried to retain sovereignty till the last minute. The British pretended to have talks till the army was collected. As soon as war preparations were over, Munroe, the acting collector at Dharwad sent a report to Chaplin, the commissioner of Deccan on 14th November 1824. There upon, Chaplin went to Bombay, discussed with governor Elphinstone and convinced him about the inevitability of conquest of Kittur. He returned back to Belgaum after obtaining full powers in the matter.

A big contingency of allied forces surrounded Kittur. Chennamma was expecting military assistance from Marathas of Kohlapur. But it was not possible at the last moment. Chaplin sent words through mediators to release two British officers and to surrender by midnight of 1st December, lest Kittur would be destroyed. Chennamma sent words through an advocate that she would release two officers subject to the condition that the British wages no war in future. Chaplin agreed to this and the two officers were released by Chennamma. But Chaplin did not keep up his promise and took pretext of the death of two soldiers in cross fire and fixed 10'0 clock of 3rd December to be the dead line for surrender, meanwhile, there was exchange of fire between two sides for one reason or the other. Chennamma behaved patiently and wrote to Chaplin to allow her to rule the province as per the sannad issued and to

act as deemed fit when the deadline was over, Chaplin ordered Col. Dicken to continue war till the fort was seized when all efforts of compromise failed, Chennamma decided to go for war. Her faithful generals pledged to fight till the death of the last soldier. British army was headed by Lt. Col. Meloid, Lt. Col. Munro, Lt. Trevenson, Col. Dicken and Col. Walker, where as the army of Kittur was led by Gen. Gurusiddappa, Avaradi Veerappa, Himmat Singh, Narashima Rao, Guruputrapappa, Sangolli Rayanna, Bichchugatti Channabasappa and Gajaveera.

There was heavy loss on both sides, in the fierce battle that took place on 3rd, 4th and 5th of December. First day battle was at Kemmana maradi and the second day was at Gadada maradi (near by bastions). Soldiers of Kittur fought bravely under the directions of Chennamma. But her army had to retreat to fort, later British artillery bombarded the fort. British connived with some traitors and followed a policy of conspiracy. Ammunitions were spoiled. Chennamma decided to die happily while fighting for the land, but death too deceived her. Though the traitors like Kannura Vecrasangappa and Hurakaddi Mallappa were traced and killed, Britishers took hold of the fort on the morning of 5th December. Both sides incurred heavy loss. Collector of Dharwad Munro was wounded in battle and he died on 11th December 1824.

Persuaded by her generals, Chennamma tried to escape through north east doorway, and reach sangolli with her daughter in law Veeravva and Janakibai, but were arrested. Few soldiers of Kittur escaped, Chaplin was overjoyed with victory. The British flag was hoisted on the fort with this, an important chapter of Kittur came to an end. The small army of Kittur was totally eliminated by British. However, the outstanding leadership, patriotism and bravery of Chennamma remains glowing in the history of Kittur.

After the war

Sardar Gurusiddappa, Sangolli Rayanna and others were kept in prison by Chaplin. The treasury was looted. Chaplin took into his custody Rs. 16 lakhs and jewels worth Rs. Four lakhs and a large quantity of arms, ammunition, horses, camels and elephants.

Rani Chennamma, Veeravva (Shivalingarudrasarja's widowed wife) and her daughter in law Janakibai (Shivabasavaraja's widowed wife) were kept in house arrest for a week in Kittur palace and later shifted to Bailhongal fort. Annual pension of Rs. 40,000/- was fixed to these three women.

Though grave silence engulfed Kittur, the palace and fort still continued to keep alive the flame of independence, in the minds of people. People did not lose faith and affection in Chennamma. Therefore, Chaplin decided to put an end to this. He ordered to demolish the front portion of the palace. Teak pillars, wooden frames and doors were sold at a cheaper rate. Permission was given to plunder the palace freely.

Chennamma was in Bailhongal prison for five and a half years dreaming about independence. Revolutionaries like sangolli Rayanna were meeting her secretly. She became weak day by day because of agony and breathed her last on 2nd February 1829. Later, her daughter in law Janakibai died on July 20th Veeravva, like Chennamma, was providing monetary help to some of the generals to organize a revolution. She was doing so with a hope to gain independence. Knowing this, she was shifted to Kusugal where she fell ill, she was sent to her relatives in Dharwad when she was very serious. It is said that Baber, the then collector of Dharwad poisoned her. Before her death, she went to the roof top of Ulavi Channa Basaveswara temple and looked towards Kittur palace and the fort. Sardar Gurusiddappa was hanged to death by then.

Sangolli Rayanna

The sparks of independence kindled by Rani Chennamma had not vanished. Sangolli Rayanna was a faithful follower of Desai's of Kittur. He was known for his bravery and adventure. Venkatappa Naik of Surpur too admired his valour. Rayanna organized a group of revolutionaries who were faithful to Rani Chennamma and revolted against the British. He attacked their strong centers from different corners. During 1830, he plundered the offices and treasury of Kittur continuously for four months. He attacked them in Nandagad, Beedi, Khanapur and Sampagav. People too supported him. He was a terror in the eyes of the British. A catch prize was also announced, but in vain. At last, Britishers planned to arrest him with the help of traitors like Lingana Gowda of Khodanapura.

One day Lingana Gowda and Venkanna Gowda of Neginahal while pretending to be faithful to Rayanna, caused him arrested when he was taking

bath and was without weapons. He was treated as a criminal and hanged publicly in his favourite place Nandagada on 28th December 1830. This was done just to create fear among people. When asked about his last wish Rayanna replied that his last wish was to be born again in the same land, fight against the British and throw them out. He was made to stand on a chair before hanging, but he kicked it, put the noose around his neck and made a sign to pull it. Thus ended the life of an immortal soul. In this way another valuable life was sacrificed at the altar of the British.



Later, in 1833 Shankaranna and 1836 a group of people under Nagappa Gajapati and Savai Rudrappa tried to revolt against the British. In 1837 adopted son Shivalingappa by name Mallasarja revolted against the British and it failed. Another revolt in 1837 also failed and he was imprisoned. Another attempt in 1857 also failed. In this way the flame of independence lit by Chennamma was alive for three decades and this laid a foundation for the first war of Indian Independence in 1857. Therefore, aptly she is recognized as a “Silver star” of Indian Independence.

There is a lot of folk literature on Chennamma and Kittur rulers. Many folk songs, songs and folklore praise the Kittur battle, King Mallasarja, Queen Rani Chennamma. Contemporary literature describe the memorable history of Kittur in an appealing way.

Monuments of Kittur

The Palace:

Now in ruins, Kittur palace was a beautiful building once. The most attractive feature of it is dvaramantapa. This is built on a strong foundation, its area is 100 ft x 300 ft. it had beautifully designed row of stone base and pillars made of teak.

The palace had three storied guest rooms provided with well maintained dining halls and bath rooms. Each room had two entrance doors connecting different rooms. Rooms were artistically designed.

A view of the Ruined Palace



The meeting hall was meant for holding secret meetings with generals and higher authorities. The dining hall attached to this was meant for royal guests. An open swimming pool was provided in front of the palace for the use of royal family. There was a good water distribution system made of copper pipes. The well behind the palace served as a source of water. We can see stone tubs and vessels which were used to store water.

Interior of the palace

The palace had number of dining halls, kitchen and bathrooms. There was a large dining hall where in one thousand people could dine at a time. A platform called "Sadara Katte" in front of the palace served as a sitout for aggrieved citizens.

Attached to palace, there was a beautiful garden with ponds and fountains. Bricks of different shapes were used here the ruins of which can be seen now. Decorated crystal stone, lime stone,



square stones and mortar were used for constructing the palace. We can see niches and arch like decorations on walls. Good ventilation was provided in all rooms. The flooring was made of geometrically designed coloured slabs.

On the left side a ruined room can be seen. It was used for a special purpose. There is an iron pipe with a diameter of 1.5' in the middle of the wall. It is opened towards the sky through which pole star was being observed.

The British destroyed this beautiful palace with aggression and revenge.



Open swimming pool

Garden attached to palace





Stone tubs for storing water



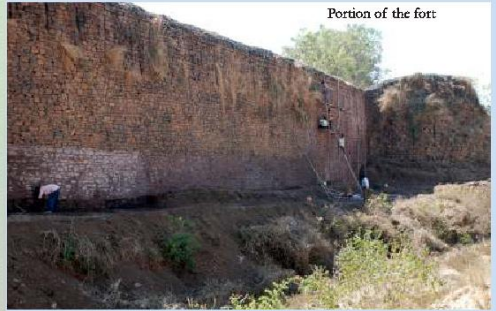
Palace Rooms in ruins



Pole star observation hall

Kittur fort:

It is circular with twin joining walls. There is a moat outside this there are semicircular bastions in outer wall on the outside. The main entrance is in the east which leads to a moat called 'Ane Honda' (Elephant's Pond). This was used to bathe elephants. There are ruins of horse sheds inside the fort. We may see strong foundation of officer's residences and a strong watch tower. Efforts are on to protect the dilapidated and weak fort walls.



Portion of the fort



Ane Honda (Elephant's Pond)

Kallumata of Kittur:

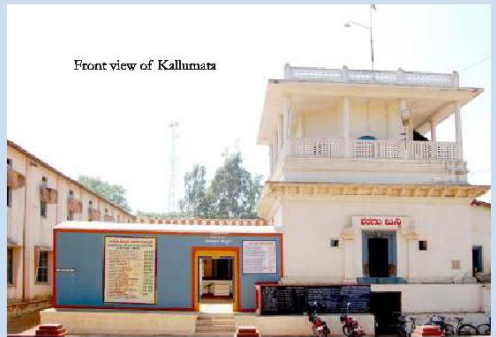
Kallumata and Chowkimata played important role in the history of Kittur. They were the centers of devotion and respect for Kittur rulers. Private consultation was held there during critical periods. Adjoining Kallumata there are beautiful tombs of Kittur rulers. Burials of Mudimallappa Sardesai, Fakira Rudra Sarja, Veerappa Gowda Sardesai, Mallasarja, Chennamma's son Balasaheb and Shivalinga Rudra Sarja are artistic though simple. Some tombs are in the under ground which are not easily reachable, entrance doors and architecture on walls are attractive. The special feature of burials are Shivalinga and Nandi (bull) kept on them.

Burial of Rani Chennamma at Bailhongal is simple on the top of it; a statue of Chennamma worshipping ishtalinga is recently installed.

There are also burials of religious heads in the premises of Chowkimata.

Burial of Sangolli Rayanna at Nandagad, Deshanur fort, Niranjani Mahal and residence of Tallur Desai still herald the history of Kittur.

Front view of Kallumata



In Dharwad we can see the tombs of Thackarey and other generals who died in the war on 23rd Oct. 1824.

All the monuments of Kittur stand as dumb witness to the valour and patriotism of Rani Chennamma. They are sources of inspiration to the present day youth of this country.

Ruins of Kittur palace





Inside View of Kallumath - Kittur



Tomb of Veerappadesai - Kittur



View of Chowkimath - Kittur



Tomb of Shivalingarudrasarja - Kittur



Tomb of Mudimalappadesai - Kittur



Stone carving of inside the tomb



Chennamma's Burrial - Ballahongal



Sangolli Rayanna's Burrial - Nandagada



Tree on which Sangolli Rayanna was hanged - Nandagada



Sangolli Rayanna memorial - Nandagada



Watch Tower - Kittur



Bastion at Gadada Marali - Kirtur



Cemetery of British army officers - Dharwad



Niranjani Mahal - Deshatnur



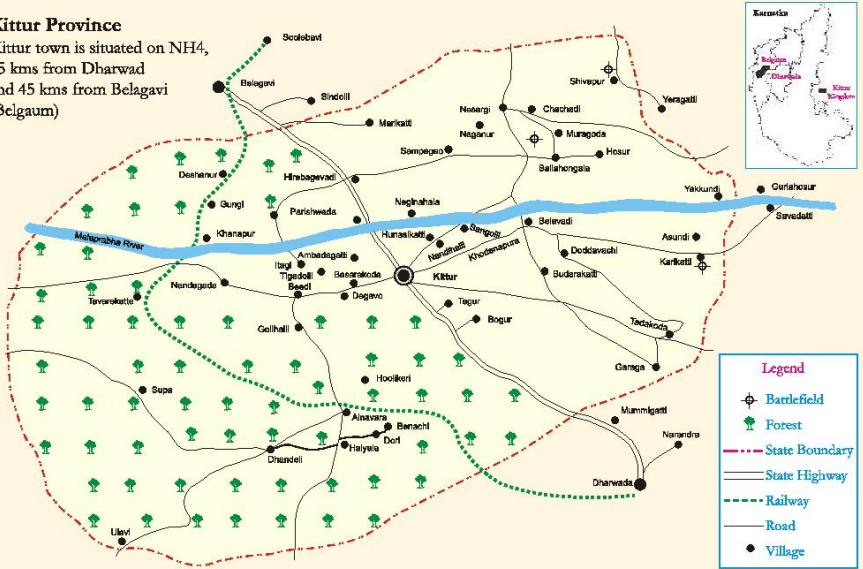
Desai Wade (Residential House) - Talur



Thackery Memorial - Dharwad

Kittur Province

Kittur town is situated on NH4, 35 kms from Dharwad and 45 kms from Belagavi (Belgaum)



Colour portrait of Chennamma in the battle field - in Museum



Weapons used during Chennamma's period Museum



Steel shield used at the war



Window of the palace

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