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अ. क्र.	संशोधकाचे नाव	शोधनिबंधाचे नाव	पृष्ठ क्र.
३०.	प्रा.डॉ.बाळासाहेब कोटलगी	तासगाव तालुक्याचे भारतीय स्वातंत्र्य लढ्यातील योगदान:एक दृष्टीक्षेप	२२५
३१.	Dr. Saraf Nitin Ulhasrao	Contribution of Anjangaon Surji Area in the Freedom Struggle : With Special reference to Shankarrao Bhayane Guruji	235
३२.	प्रा.डॉ.सौ.कल्पना राजीव मोहिते	क्रांतिवीरांगना राजमतीताई पाटील - बिरनाळे यांचे स्वातंत्र्य लढ्यातील योगदान	२३९
३३.	श्री.संदीप बळवंत गुरव	श्री.कुंडलिक गोपाळराव देसाई : एक अपरिचित स्वातंत्र्यसैनिक	२५०
३४.	प्रा.मनिषा श्रेणिककुमार पाटील	स्वातंत्र्य सैनिक बापुराव तुकाराम पाटील यांचे प्रतिसरकार व भूमिगत चळवळीतील योगदान	२५७
३५.	प्रा.शंकर नामदेव गेजगे	जावली तालुक्यातील स्वातंत्र्यसैनिक सय्यद अदम अबन यांचे स्वातंत्र्यलढ्यातील योगदान	२६५
३६.	श्री.विकास संभाजी नाईक	क्रांतीकारक श्याम येडेकर यांचे १९४२ च्या स्वातंत्र्यलढ्यातील कार्य	२६८
३७.	श्री.देसाई क्रांतीसिंह मारूती डॉ.नाडगौडा आरती बी.	भारतीय स्वातंत्र्य चळवळीतील क्रांतिवीर काकासाहेब गोपाळ देसाई	२७१
३८.	प्रा.डॉ.गाढवे किशोर गुलाब	स्वातंत्र्यसैनिक डॉ.श्री.माधवराव मारूतीराव जाधव यांचे स्वातंत्र्याच्या लढ्यातील योगदान	२७९
३९.	Dr. Waghmare Nalini Avinash	Environment Doctrines in Vachana Sahitya & its Contemporary Relevance	288
४०.	प्रा.डॉ.विधाटे गणेश शंकर	अहमदनगर जिल्ह्यातील कम्युनिस्ट पक्षाचे पतन	२९८
४१.	प्रा.डॉ.विश्वनाथ पवार	कोयना जलविद्युत प्रकल्प : जलाशय विंघन प्रक्रिया	३०८
४२.	प्रा.डॉ.महेन्द्र मोतीराम इंगळे	डॉ.बाबासाहेब आंबेडकर यांच्या सभा व परिषदातून हैद्राबाद मुक्तीसंग्रामात जनजागृती	३१४
४३.	प्रा.डॉ.जयपाल चंद्रकांत सावंत	डॉ.आंबेडकरांचे भारतीय जातीव्यवस्थेचा उगमाविषयीचे विवेचन : एक ऐतिहासिक विश्लेषण	३१९

Contribution of Anjangaon Surji Area in the Freedom Struggle : With Special reference to Shankarrao Bhayane Guruji

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The Indian freedom struggle was an unprecedented period in the history of modern India. This struggle demonstrated to the world an innovative way of fighting against a powerful, oppressive power. This freedom struggle showed the world that one can successfully fight against a dominant power without arms. This gave oppressed human societies in different parts of the world new techniques to fight against tyranny and injustice. Another particularly significant feature of India's unprecedented freedom struggle was that it brought together all directions of India. Millions of people, educated and uneducated, rich and poor, of different religions caste, under the influence of different rituals, and soldiers jumped into the Indian freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, even sacrificing their lives on the occasion.

People from small villages like Kapustalni, Nimkhedbazar, Takarkheda, Lakhad, Kalgavhan, Sategaon, Chausala, Pandhari Khanampur in the vicinity of Anjangaon area, took part in the freedom struggle under the leadership of Gandhiji. Late Bivappa Yavatkar, Late Nathuji Kale, Late Rajaramji Khode, Late Seshrao Khode, Late Mahadev Dhule, Late Ramchandra Jadhav, Late Amritrao Niwane, Late Rambhau Dindokar, Late Amrita Rao Kolhe, Late Mukundarao Tathe, Late Daulatrao

Sable² Late Sadashirao Chopde³ Late Jairam Vath & Late Narayan Lokhande and many more freedom fighters from Anjangaon area and nearby vicinity jumped into the Indian freedom struggle and sacrificed their lives on for the freedom of their motherland.

The story of one such soldier was recorded in the history of Amravati district. Mr. Shankarrao Kisanrao Bhayane Guruji was a famous soldier who was initially a teacher and popularly known as Bapu from Anjangaon Surji area. Shankar Rao was born on July 4, 1919 in the house of Mr. Kisanji Bhayne, a native of Kapustalni near Anjangaon Surji. The financial situation was not at all favorable which compelled Shankarrao to focus on the ancestral blacksmith's business after studying Marathi up to seventh standard in the village itself. After joining the city council as a primary teacher, he settled in Anjangaon Surji. Since then, His lineage still stays in the same town. Many stories about the sacrifices and struggle in the Bhayane Guruji's lifetime are still told with great awe from their family.

Shankarrao was a sincere and studious child since the beginning. His hobby was to read newspapers and books daily, even after discontinuing his studies. It became his daily routine to sit in the shop and read newspapers while pulling furnace. He used to get inspired by reading the brave stories of freedom war in newspapers. With the help of his same aged friends in the village, he decided to participate in the independence struggle, and he created a group of like-minded & same aged friends in Kapustalani. Secretly, planning for the freedom struggle began. Keeping in mind that it is dangerous to do this work sitting in his own shop, he took the help of the rich and famous people of the village. He collected money by selling the skins of dead animals. With this money, he established the Shivaji Public Library at Kapustalni on 5th May 1935. He made an important contribution to the work of enlightenment by spending the money collected for the development of the library. Through this, their movement started. His work has been praised by Rashtrasant Tukdoji Maharaj in written form.⁵

After Gandhi's Satyagraha in 1940, Bhayane Guruji began to carry out his work openly. He conducted village meetings in the area, and impressed people with his inspiring oratorical style. Many people joined his organization after being attracted by his passion, zeal and knowledge for the freedom struggle and worked unitedly. His fame was spread everywhere in the district. Bhayane Guruji was also active in Mahatma Gandhi's 1942 Quit India Movement. He used his eloquence and effective speech against the unjust oppression of the British. With his provocative speeches, he ignited the desire for freedom in the hearts of many.⁶

The British government was horrified by the 1942 Quit India Movement warning, and decided to put down the revolution completely. The leaders of the movement were arrested, and the officers started committing atrocities in order to terrorize the people. Public meetings and secret meetings of Bhayane Guruji⁷ continued in this frenzy of fear. From this movement, revolutionary work gained momentum in the area. On August 20, 1942, Nanasaheb Shelke was imprisoned by the police in a public meeting at Takarkheda at 10 o'clock in the night. At that time, Bhayan Guruji guided the huge crowd present for half an hour. As soon as the police patrolling started, while the National Anthem was being played, Bhayane Guruji took advantage of the darkness and left towards the village of Sakhri. The next day, on the morning of August 21, when Bhayane Guruji was shaving in front of the public library, two policemen dragged him and approached the police car.

The then Chief Saheb Suraj Prakash ordered, "Isko Abhi Anjangaon Le Jakar Hawalat Me Band Kar Do",⁸ and he was locked up in custody at Anjangaon. He was imprisoned for 7 months and 27 days from 11th September 1942 to 8th May 1943 for giving a lecture in violation of the ban on speech. After his release from the jail, the people of the area took him in a procession. Interestingly, the members of Bhayane Guruji's household tried to dissuade him from this work but Bhayane Guruji continued his work without caring about the householder. In recognition of his service to the country, the

Government of India awarded him a copper plate in 1972, while the Government of Maharashtra expressed its gratitude to him by awarding him a Certificate of Honour. Central government and state government pension also started to give him pension as a due recognition and honour of his immense contribution.

He established Geeta Dharma Mandal in the year 1978, in which Srimad Bhagavadgita was elaborated to the hundreds of Gita lovers. Gita Jayanti lecture series was started and it continues even today. Gram Sudhar Mandal was formed and continued its work through it. Shankarao, who was an iron man by nature, is known as 'Bapu' in the locality. Bapu departed from this world on 19 November 2001, but is Holy Spirit; his inspiration is still revered in the area.

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Note : By interviewing many people who came in the company of Bhayane Guruji and many unpublished papers written by Bhayane Guruji have been used for this writing.