



ROLE OF TAMILNADU IN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

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THE POLIGAR REBELLION, 1799

The Poligar Rebellion was spearheaded by Jagavira Pandya Kattabomman, Poligar of Panchalamkurichi. Kattabomman was a conscientious, god-fearing, law-abiding subject with a strong sense of duty, dignity and discipline. Stung by the harshness, rashness and ruthlessness of collector Jackson, he had a hiccup at an interview with the collector at Ramanathapuram on 19 Sep, 1797 and escaped with his brother Oomathurai and his minister Sivasubramania Pillai. Encouraged and supported by Maruthu Pandyan of Sivaganga, Kattabomman extended his help to the latter to rise against the British. The Madras Council viewed his move as a challenge to its authority. Once instruction from Governor General Lord Wellesley, Major Banmerman mounted an assault on Panchalamkurichi Fort on 5 Sep., pursued the rebel and betrayed by the Poligar of Pudukkottai, Kattabomman was captured, tried, and hanged to death at Kayattar on 17 Oct. 1799.

SOUTH INDIAN REBELLION, 1800 - 1801

Learning a lesson from the fall of Kattabomman, the rebel leaders of Sivaganga, Dindigal, Coimbatore, Malabar, Mysore, and Maharashtra formed a Coalition, conspired, hatched out a plan of action and rose in rebellion against the British rule and regime under the leadership of Maruthu Pandyan of Sivaganga. This South Indian Rebelhon is claimed to be the First War of Indian independence.

VELLORE REBELLION, 1806

Undaunted by the suppression of the South Indian Rebellion, the rebels had shifted their theatre of revolt to Vellore. They regrouped themselves in strength, established contact with the disgruntled sepoys, conspired against the English and on 13 July 1806 revolted against the Company rule. Though the Vellore Rebellion was repressed, it is regarded as a rehearsal on a small scale to the major rebellion of 1857", which is considered to be the Second War of Indian Independence.

PRE-CONGRESS POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS

Madras Native Association (1852), the Theosophical Society (1882) and the Madras Mahajana Sabha (1884). Besides these major political formations, the Muslims of Madras established the Madras branch of the Central National Mohammedan Association of Bengal (1883). Similarly, the Madras Christians formed the National Church with a view to assert their identity, free from the control of the European Missions.

FIRST CONGRESS SESSION, 1885

Of the total 72 delegates 21 delegates were from the Madras Presidency; of the 21 representative 16 were from the Madras Mahajana Sabha.

THIRD CONGRESS SESSION AT MADRAS, 1887

Madras had the honour of organizing the third session of the congress in 1887. It was held at Makkis Garden, now known as the thousand lights. 607 delegates attended the session. Badruddin Tyabji presided over the meeting.

THE MADRAS MODERATES

The followers of Gopala Krishna Gokhale were known as the Congress Moderates. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, P.S. Sivasamy Iyer, V.Krishnaswamy Iyer, T.R.Venktrama Sasthri, G.A. Natesan, author of 'Indian Review', T.M.Madhava Rao, S.Subramania Iyer, C.Vijaragavachari, S.A.Swaminatha Iyer were the distinguished Moderates of Madras.

THE MADRAS EXTREMISTS

The supporters of Bal Gangadhar Tilak were considered as Extremists. Selam Vijayaragavachariy, C.Rajagopalachari, T.M.Nair, S.Kasthuriranga Iyengar, A.Ramaswamy Iyengar, T.Rangachari were the well known Tilakites, V.O.Chidambaram Pillai was called Tilak of Tamil Nadu. Mandayam Srinivachari, Surendranth Ethiraj, Triplicane Krishnamachari, Sarkarai Chettiar, and Subramania Siva were the other distinguished extremists.

SWADESHI MOVEMENT 1905 - 07

The fire of Swadeshi Movement, started in Bengal, soon spread to Tamil Nadu. Swadeshim captured the imagination of the Tamil extremists. They encouraged boycott of foreign cloth and products and supported swadeshi goods. The Industrial Association established warehouses to store and sell swadeshi products. The Swadeshi League carried the message of Swadeshim to the masses. The Balabharath Association arranged popular discussion and debate in support of the mass movement. Similarly, Swadeshivastu Pracharini Sabha popularized the sale of locally made goods. A national fund was raised in support of the movement. Subramania Bharati's patriotic songs fanned the fire of Swadeshi nationalism and his articles in 'India' demonstrated that the Swadeshi Movement had struck deep roots in Tamil Nadu, particularly in Tirunelveli District.* More important, the launching of Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company by V.O.Chidambaram Pillai in 1906 challenged the maritime might of the British imperialism and the Company "marked the Most spectacular development in the history of the movement".

SUPPRESSION OF THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT, 1911

The Swadeshi movement spread like wild fire in southern Tamil Nadu. Sensing the danger of the movement going out of control, the Government decided to stem the tide.

Swadeshi goods were raided. Meetings and demonstrations were prohibited. Newspapers were proscribed.

ASSASSINATION OF ASHE, 1911

Collector, Vanchinathan on 17 June 1911 shot at and killed R.W.Ashe, who was traveling with his wife from Tiruvelveli to Kodaikkanal, at Maniachi station.

HOME RULE AGITATION, 1916

Madras was the home of Home Rule agitation. At a time when the Congress was extending support to the war efforts of the British Government, Annie Besant, the Irish firebrand lady, started on 3 sep. 1916 a Home Rule League in Gokhale Hall, Madras, demanding a free Indian nation within the British Empire.

Her Home Rule League expanded its activities through its branches at different parts of the presidency. It's first conference was held in Cuddalore under the Presidentship of V.P.Madhava Rao. Similar conferences were held at many other districts. Meetings and discussions were organized. The League's powerful newspaper New India effectively propagated the objectives of the League among the educated. Political propaganda pamphlets were widely circulated. By conducting Home Rule classes, organizing Boy Scouts and Volunteer Troops and converting the Theosophical Society itself into a political organization, Dr.Besant brought into the agitational politics of Madras hundreds of teachers, students, government servants and intellectuals. The Theosophical Lodges set up in the districts "served as centres of political agitation". Thousands of Home Rule Pledges were signed by those who were inspired by the League. The 'red hot agitation' for self-government soon "began to spread like wild fire from district to district".

On 24 July 1916 students staged a massive demonstration in front of the Egmore railway station protesting against exclusive reservation being made in the compartments for Europeans. There was a scuffle between students and Europeans at the Fort railway station. Rattled by the rapid development of the Home Rule agitation. Governor Lord Pentland banned the participation of students in the political activities of the League. Besant was asked to pay deposits for the journals she was editing. She was incarcerated in the Nilgiri prison. Government action had intensified the agitation. Thiru.V.Kalyanasundara Mudaliar resigned his job as Tamil Lecturer in the Wesley College, Madras and plunged into the agitation. The Workers in the Harvy Mills, Madurai, went on strike. Foreign goods were boycotted.

As the movement spread fast from madras to moffusil areas the Government released Besant from the Nilgiri prison. On her return to Madras, she was given rousing reception en route. C.Rajagopalachari with large gathering extended a warm welcome to Besant, the Heroine of the Home Rule Agitation, at Salem railway station. Besant became so popular she was elected Congress President in 1917. In a way. Home Rule Agitation was responsible for the E.S.Montague's 20 Aug 1917 Declaration.

MONTAGUE'S VISIT TO MADRAS, 1917

Montagues' Declaration promised the increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration.

ROWLATT SATYAGRAHA, 1919

Rowlatt Satyagraha had its genesis in Tamil Nadu. On 17 March 1919, Gandhi visited Tamil Nadu and stayed at the residence of Karthuri Ranga Iyyangar to device the way to oppose the draconian Bills. Satyagraha Sabha was formed with Gandhi as its President." Rowlatt Act was

proclaimed when Gandhi was touring Tamil Nadu. He announced that national hartal against the Rowlatt Bills will be observed on 30 March 1919 and then postponed the date to 6 April.

On 6 April 1919 anti - Rowlatt Day was observed in Tamil Nadu.

KHILAFAT AGITATION, 1919 - 1920

Tamil Nadu did not lag behind in extending its enthusiastic support to the Khilafat agitation. C.Rajagopalachari earned the esteem of the Muslims by his active involvement in the agitation. In the provincial Congress Conference he moved a resolution demanding the release of Ali Brothers who had courted arrest for spear-heading the Khilafat Movement. He also mobilized the support of the Hindus to observe the Khilafat Day on 17 Oct. 1919. Khilafat Committees were formed through out Tamil Nadu.

On 20 April 1920, Khilafat Conference was held at Madras under the Presidentship of Maulana Shaukat Ali. C. Rajagopalachari, Kasthuri Ranga Iyengar and T.Prakasam addressed the well-attended conference. Another such conference was held at Erode which was presided over by Ali Brothers. Gandhi toured Tamil Nadu in August 1920 seeking support to the Khilafat Movement. Vaniyambadi served as the nerve-centre of the agitation. Khilafat agitation was a conspicuous success though the Justice Party and the Liberal Party had not supported it.

NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT, 1920-1922

Non - Cooperation movement gained momentum in Tamil Nadu under the dynamic leadership of C. Rajagopalachari. It turned to be a mass movement. People of Tamil Nadu hoisted national flag, installed photos of national leaders, organized meetings, demonstrations and hartals. Several leaders like Madurai advocate George Joseph, S.Srinivasa Iyengar, N.S. Varadachari, S.Ramanathan and V.O. Chidambaram renounced their titles or resigned their posts and joined the Movement. By the end of 1920 Tamil Nadu Congressmen boycotted the legislature and the election. The workers of the Buckingham Mills struck work (27 June 1921). Toddy shops were boycotted. The visit of S.Satyamurthy to several places including Rajapalayam roused the patriotic feelings of the people. LP.Arangasamy Raja laid a firm foundation to the historic Khadhi Movement in the town. Anti-liquor agitation was intensified by leaders like V.GVellingiri Gounder, N.S.Ramaswami Iyengar and E.V.Ramasamy Naicker. When the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Connaught, visited Madras he was boycotted though he was given a rousing reception by the Justicites. There was spontaneous emotional upsurge in Tamil Nadu when Gandhi was arrested on 18 March 1922.

THE SWARAJISTS, 1923

When the Swaraj Party was launched by Pro-change leaders like C.R.Das and Motilal Nehru on 1 Jan. 1923, like minded Congressmen Kasthuri Ranga Iyengar, Srinivasa Iyengar, Vararajulu Naidu, Vijayaragavacharai, A.Rengasamy Iyengar joined the new party. In the election held on 13 Nov. 1923 for Central Legislature, Swarajists A.Ranga Sarny Iyengar, R.K.Shanmugam Chetty, N.Srinivasa Iyengar were elected from Tamil Nadu. Though the Swarajists won 41 seats in the election held for the Madras Legislature they were requested to form the ministry. They instead effectively non-cooperated with the Legislature led by S.Satyamurthy, the silver-tongue orator. The Tamil Nadu S warjist legislators offered uncompromising obstruction to all government sponsored laws. He strongly supported the

motion of no- confidence moved by C.R. Reddy against the ruling Justice Party. By their consistent legislature conduct, the Madras Swarajists rose up to the expectations of the Swaraj Party.

NEILL STATUE SATYAGRAHA, 1927

James Neill had served as the General of the Madras Regiment. He ruthlessly suppressed the Rebellion of 1857. Neill wrought inhuman vengeance on those whom he regarded as guilty; they were either humiliated or executed. When the British Government installed Neill's state at a central place in Madras in honour of his services to the Empire, the people of Tamil Nadu rose in revolt against the symbol of shame. A Satyagraha Committee was constituted under the presidentship of Nellai N.Somavajulu. It was decided to remove the statue. Madurai Srinivasanatha Iyengar and his wife Padmasani Ammal, R.Chidambara Bharati, Dr.P.Varadarajulu, lent enthusiastic support to the satyagraha. On 11 August 1927 the satyagrahis under the leadership of Subbarayalu Naidu and Muhammad Salia damaged the state. They were arrested and sentenced to 6 months rigorous imprisonment. Nellai Somavajulu, Gudiatham Swaminatha Mudaliar, Panruttu S.A.Devanayaga Ayya, who were Satyagraha Generals in turn, were arrested and sentenced. The Neil statue satyagraha started in August continued till December 1927 and during this period volunteers from several districts came to the city and participated in the agitation.

BOYCOTT OF SIMON COMMISSION, 1929-1930

The Congress at its annual session at Madras in 1927 resolved to boycott the all-White Simon Commission. When the Commission visited Madras on Feb. 1929, it was greeted with black - flag demonstrations. The boycott of the Commission turned into a mass movement. Behind the facade of official welcome, the Congressmen organized a massive mass agitation which resulted in police firing killing three people. T.Prakasam, Muthuranga Mudaliar and M.Bakthavasthalam were subjected to brutal lathi charge. Protest demonstrations were held against unprovoked attack on unarmed agitators. The Simon Commission and the Justice Party were condemned in the Marina meeting. Ranganatha Mudaliyar and Arokyasamy Mudaliar resigned from the . Justice Ministry in protest against Dr.P.Subbarayan who participated in the official reception given to the Simon Commission. Despite official support to the Commission, the boycott of Simon Commission in Tamil Nadu was a significant success.

POORNA SWARAJ DAY, 1930

On 26 Jan. 1930 Purna Swaraj Day was observed in every city, town and village. C.Rajagopalachari and Madurai A.Vaidyanatha Iyer actively participated in the celebration. National Flag was hoisted at Madras.

SALT SATYAGRAHA, 1930

C.Rajagopalachari, the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, was nominated by the Congress High Command to lead the salt satyagraha in the Presidency. He shifted the Congress Head Quarters from Madras to Trichi, which served as the center of Civil Disobedience Movement. He went to Madurai to seek the support of N.M.R. Subbaraman, president of Madurai District Congress Committee and A.Vaidyanatha Iyer, local leading

lawyer. At the residence of Ayer the final decision was taken to stage the Trichi - Vedaranyam salt march similar to that of Dandi March.

On 13 March 1930, the day after Gandhi commenced his Dandi March, a mammoth public meeting was held at Trichi. Then the Trichy T.S.S. Rajan and Vedaranyam Sardar Vedararathnam Pillai were responsible for fixing the starting place and closing point of the March. Both of them extended their untainted support to the satyagraha. Then the salt march started from Trichi to Vedaranyam via Tanjavur, Kumbakonam, Mannargudi and Tiruthuraipundi. C.Rajagopalachari led the first batch of 98 volunteers. The patriots with the national flag in their hands marched in rows of two chanting Bharati's songs and a song specially composed by Namakkal V.Ramalingam Pillai for the occasion. Despite the warning given by A.J.Dham, the District Collector of Tanjavore, the villagers extended hospitality and welcome to the satyagrahis en route. After 16 days of March they reached Vedaranyam on 26 April 1930. Thousands of people who had already gathered there greeted them with thunderous cheers. Next day, the volunteers observed fast and prayed. On 30 April 1930 C.Rajagopalachari with 16 chosen satyagrahis defied the salt law and collected salt at Agasthian Palli. They were arrested and sentenced them to 6 month imprisonment in Trichi jail. After their arrest, S.Satyamurthi led the satyagraha. He and K.Santhanam, Mattapara Venkatrama Iyer, K.Subramania Iyer, G.Ramachandran led the satyagraha and courted arrest. Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha lasted for one and a half months.

Parallel to the Vedaranyam Salt March, Andra Kesari T.Prakasam, on 13 April 1930, led a Salt March to Tilakar Ghat, Triplicane, Madras, defied Salt Law, distributed 'Liberty Salt' and courted arrest. Sankara Iyer and Munusamy Mudaliar produced salt at Solengapuram and Madras. Salt satyagraha was staged in Madurai, Tuticorin, Cuddalore, Erode, Tirunelveli and Trichy, and thousands of volunteers were arrested. The satyagraha rekindled patriotic feelings among the people.

As the salt satyagraha was gaining ground the provincial administration unleashed repressive measures. On 11 March 1930 police opened fire at the meeting of workers at Choolai, Madras. The volunteers who picketed the toddy shops at Madurai (17 July) and satyagrahis at Madurai (6 Aug.) were subjected to police shooting, killing many people. On 11 Jan. 1932, the police resorted to lathi charge to disperse a procession in which Tirupur Kumaran was brutally attacked and he died on the spot holding the national flag high and singing patriotic song. Police entered the Madurai College Hostel and lathi charged the inmates. The Congress meeting held at Town Hall Maidan, Coimbatore, was disrupted by police action. The Valpari meeting was banned. The police brutality was widely condemned.

INDIVIDUAL SATYAGRAHA, 1940 - 41

Disappointed with the August Offer of Lord Linlithgow (8 Aug. 1940) Gandhi preferred Individual Satyagraha instead of Mass Disobedience Movement to demonstrate the national disapproval in view of war situation. At the national level, Acharya Vinoba Bhave was chosen by Gandhi as the first Satyagrahi. In Tamil Nadu, Dr.T.S.S.Rajan was the first individual satyagrahi to court arrest. K.Kamaraj assumed charge of the Tamil Nadu Congress, toured across the Presidency, prepared a list of satyagrahis to lead the movement in turn. He was arrested at Goodur railway station on his way to meet Gandhi to get his approval of the official list he had prepared and lodged in Vellore jail. Large number of influential persons from several districts actively involved themselves in the individual satyagraha.

QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT, 1942

Following the failure of the Cripps Mission, Gandhi came out with his clarion call Mantra of 'Do or Die'. The Government arrested the top leaders of the Congress and on 9th Aug. 1942 Gandhi and other leading lights were arrested in a single sweep and shifted to unknown destination. In Tamil Nadu, K.Kamaraj, Vellore V.M.Ubayadulla, Thiruvannamali N. Annamalai, C.N.Muthuranga Mudaliar, M.Baktavatsalam, S.Satyamurthy were arrested when they were returning to Madras after attending the Bombay meeting and sent to Vellore jail.

The unexpected arrest of the national leaders provoked spontaneous protests across the country. In Madras total hartal was observed. The workers of the Buckinham and Carnatic Mills, the Madras Port Trust, the Madras Corporation and the Tramway struck work. Shops were closed. Educational institutions did not function. Police resorted to lathi charge and firing, in which 9 died and several wounded.

The Quit India Movement spread fast like wild fire to the districts. In the North and South Arcot Districts the agitators went berserk and cut off telegraph and telephone lines, burnt government properties, and derailed goods train. The students of Annamalai University plunged in the agitation. Tanjore district witnessed several attempts at sabotage and surreptitious activities. Widespread violence broke out in the Combatore district. Singanallur Mill Workers defied law and went on a procession. The Sulure aerodrome was burnt and about 200 tanks were damaged. About 30 agitators died in the police firing. In a neighboring village all males were arrested and confined in a small place.

Total hartal was observed in the Madurai district. At several places young agitators came into clash with the police. A.Vaidyanatha Iyer, B.Chidambara Bharati, K.Rajaram Naidu and others were arrested for making inflammatory speeches. There was confrontation between the public and the police at the Jhansi Rani Park resulting in firing. Post office was burnt. Circle Inspector Visvanathan was subjected to acid bomb attack. Since the situation went out of control, curfew was clamped and the district handed over to the army.

In the Virudunagar district Rajapalayam played a conspicuous role in the Quit India movement. On 9 Aug. 1942 the youth of the town organized a serpentine procession led by P.S.Vasanthan. The town police station was attacked. The statue of George V near the police station was smashed into smithereens. The procession was lathi charged and the leaders arrested. Then the agitators assembled at the Golden Jubilee Hall, condemned the arrest of their leaders and chalked out further course of action. Women of the town joined the agitation in strength.

Protest meetings were held at Sattur taluk. Hartal and picketing was observed in Arupukottai taluk. During the second week of August the movement was intensified in many districts, resulting in violent activities in most parts of Tamil Nadu. Conspiracy cases had been hoisted on Congress leaders and awarded varied degree of sentences. Tamil Nadu agitators demonstrated by example that they would not desist from violent and destructive activities in order to attain freedom to their country.