



## ANTI - SECOND WORLD WAR EFFORT INDIVIDUAL SATYAGRAHA IN TAMIL NADU – A SCRUTINY

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### ABSTRACT

Formally, the Second World War started in September 1939. The Indian National Congress felt that British was fighting a War for the defense of British Empire and not for to save democracy in India. Congress reacted against the British as which were dragging India into the war unilaterally. It instructed all the Congress Ministries in India to resign. Consequently, the Government of Madras headed by C. Rajagopalachari resigned on 30 October 1939. The Madras Government took charge of the official machinery as well as its legislature. Meanwhile, Gandhi had long been preparing for this Individual of Civil Disobedience. He had in fact taken more than a year to reach a decision on the Individual Satyagraha Movement. He had a clear-cut plan in starting and conducting this symbolic movement, which was to vindicate the principle of non-violence. In keeping with this principle, he took all care to keep the movement “within limits and absolutely innocuous”. Keen on quality instead of quantity, Gandhi expected a prospective Satyagraha to suspend all private activities and to keep a log book of their daily activities in furtherance of the constructive programme which was the foundation of civil disobedience. It was a severe preliminary test for the Satyagrahis. It was decided to grant permission to offer Satyagraha to deserving persons only after an examination of their logbooks.

**KEYWORDS:** Second World War, British Empire, Civil Disobedience, Satyagraha Movement.

### INTRODUCTION

Formally, the Second World War started in September 1939. The Indian National Congress felt that British was fighting a War for the defense of British Empire and not for to save democracy in India. Congress reacted against the British as which were dragging India into the war unilaterally. It instructed all the Congress Ministries in India to resign. Consequently, the Government of Madras headed by C. Rajagopalachari resigned on 30 October 1939. The Madras Government took charge of the official machinery as well as its legislature. Meanwhile, Gandhi had long been preparing for this Individual of Civil Disobedience. He had in fact taken more than a year to reach a decision on the Individual Satyagraha Movement. He had a clear-cut plan in starting and conducting this symbolic movement, which was to vindicate the principle of non-violence. In keeping with this principle, he took all care to keep the movement “within limits and absolutely innocuous”. Keen on quality instead of quantity, Gandhi expected a prospective Satyagraha to suspend all private activities and to keep a log book of their daily activities in furtherance of the constructive programme which was the foundation of civil disobedience. It was a severe preliminary test for the Satyagrahis. It was decided to grant permission to offer Satyagraha to deserving persons only after an examination of their logbooks. Tamil Nadu the Satyagraha was proceeding in a law-abiding manner. This monograph tries to scrutinize all the facts related to the Satyagraha by refereeing archival primary data and even supported by secondary literature.



## PRELUDE TO THE SATYAGRAHA

The Individual Satyagraha was launched in October 1940. However, as a prelude mock disobedience attempts were made. On 26 January, 1940 Independence Day was observed throughout Tamil Nadu in a wider scale by organizing flag hoisting ceremonies meetings, door to door propaganda and rallies. At the meetings the audience signed the pledges demanding the government not to wage a war of imperialism. In January 1941 Congress men organized all over Tamil Nadu hoisted flags which were followed by well attended meetings.<sup>1</sup> The students of Madras held separate meeting at which a pledge was adopted and an effigy of British imperialism was burned.<sup>2</sup>

In Salem and Madurai towns there were large meetings. At Salem, it was estimated that there were 8000 people in the procession and 20,000 at the meeting.<sup>3</sup> The Madurai had two large meetings at one more than 1200 people signed the pledge and the other presided over by Muthuramalinga Devar.<sup>4</sup> Usually in the flag hoisting and processions the school children were most noticeable.<sup>5</sup> The North Arcot District Magistrate provided a report of anti-war speeches and meetings and recommended for prosecutions.<sup>6</sup> Arumuga Kurayar of Kumbakonam was prosecuted under defence of India Rules for writing anti-war slogans on wall in Kumbakonam.<sup>7</sup> Ramanathan alias Ramu of Nagapatinam was prosecuted for anti-war propaganda and distribution of cyclostyled leaflets.<sup>8</sup> A search warrant was issued to one Ramamoorthy of Tanjore for his anti-war activities.<sup>9</sup> The editor of *Naradar* a Tamil weekly was punished for publishing article in support of Germany.<sup>10</sup> The editor was advised not to publish reports without verifying accuracy. The editor of *Oolian* a Tamil weekly from Karaikudi published the negative side of British in the war consequently the district magistrate of Ramnad warned the editor that such a one sided focus about the war must be considered as prejudicial.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the Congress held the Tamil Nadu Provincial Conference at a small village near Chengalpet on 4 February 1940. In the conference, the general theme of the speeches was that the people should do as Gandhi said and that the fight for freedom should not be spoiled in anyway by aspiring for non-ethical deeds. There were anti-war speeches in North Arcot district made by members of the Congress - socialists. At Thiruvannamalai, in connection with two were prosecuted who were associated with Hindu Mahasabha and Arya Samaj respectively. They did a certain amount of propaganda against the war.<sup>12</sup>

K.Baladandayudham of Annamalai University was convicted in January 1940 for anti-government and anti-war speeches. He was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for one year. Annamalai University hostel students staged protest against the arrest. P.Sanmugam of Vellore was prosecuted under 38(1) of Defense of India Rules.<sup>13</sup> T.M.Kuppusamy of Thiruvannamalai was also punished similarly.<sup>14</sup> S.Rahmatullah of Natchiyar Koil was suspected to be in contact with the enemy. A Congress man in Coimbatore district was arrested for making anti-war speeches under section 108 of criminal procedure code. V.N.Balasubramaniyan and V.K.M.Subramaniyan were also arrested for anti-war speeches.<sup>15</sup> In April 1940, Jaganathan of Thiruvannamalai, A.D.Wilson of Madras, K.M.Rajagopala Iyengar were arrested.<sup>16</sup> In May 1940, Congress committees continued to translate themselves into satyagraha committees. Congress people had been addressing the public to prepare the country for civil disobedience at some future time. Distribution of literature was common in most of the towns in Tamil Nadu. At Erode three placards appealing the police to relinquish their post.<sup>17</sup>

Normally anti-war propaganda was within the bound of non-violence but there were instances of public involvement in violence. On 28 May 1940, Danushkodi passenger train was blow near Tindivanam. The editor of '*Vellore Enquirer*' was suspected for his article on a war publicity department long overdue. On the other side, the Madras presidency government ordered the district collectors to form war committees to propagate in favour of British military.<sup>18</sup>

## INCEPTION OF THE SATYAGRAHA

On 17 October 1940, Acharya Vinoba Bhave inaugurated the Satyagraha by delivering an anti-war speech at Paunar, near Wardha. This marked the initiation of the Satyagraha. The Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, which met at Pollachi on 20 October 1940, resolved to support the All-India Congress

Committee's decision to launch the Individual Satyagraha. This meeting was attended by C.Rajagopalachari, S.Satyamurthi and N.Muthuranga Mudaliar, besides several other prominent Congressmen.<sup>19</sup> Then the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee started to do necessary spade work for publicizing the aim and procedure of offering Individual Satyagraha all over Tamil Nadu.<sup>20</sup> Satyagraha committees were formed at district, taluk and village levels in Tamil Nadu. The response to the Satyagraha was spontaneous and enthusiastic. All over Tamil Nadu, anti-war pledges were taken, speeches were delivered, slogans were uttered, pamphlets and posters were distributed and anti-war bills were written on the walls.<sup>21</sup>

There was a common procedure for offering Satyagraha. The Satyagrahi (civil resister) who offered Satyagraha would inform the district magistrate of his/her intention to preach against the British war efforts along with the details including when and where he/she would go to offer Satyagraha. The Satyagrahi should be present at the proposed venue, as per his/her schedule. In many cases, the offering of Satyagraha had already been announced to the public by the beating of drum.<sup>22</sup> The Satyagrahi would be introduced to the public including his / her desire to serve the cause of the nation by a local Congressman. It was the ethical fashion among the Satyagrahis to wear a khaddar dress and cap during the Satyagraha. Some time the Satyagrahi would be garlanded either by a local leader or a relative or a volunteer.<sup>23</sup> After all of these formalities, the Satyagrahi would deliver an anti-war speech. The routine speech of each Satyagrahi was "As the British is (are) waging war essentially for its own imperialist ends and for the preservation and strengthening of its own empire, we the Indians never render the British either men or money".<sup>24</sup>

In accordance with the decision of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee meeting, M.Bakthavachalam offered Satyagraha at Madras by addressing the public meeting at Thiruvallur to prevent people from helping the British war efforts. He was also arrested and sentenced for nine months.<sup>8</sup> He boldly sent letters to political leaders and commissioner of police about the partiality shown by the British towards the natives and instructed the political leaders not to help the British war with men and money.<sup>25</sup>

On 1 December 1940, C.Rajagopalachari wrote letters to all the members of the Provincial War Committee including Mayor of Madras Mutthiah Chettiar and Abdul Hameed Khan (leader of the Muslim League group in the assembly) requesting all of them not to help the British with men and money. He sent a copy of this letter to the Governor of Madras on 3 December 1940, a portion of the letter is given as follows: Natural justice and principles of civilization require that the people of a country should be consulted through their representatives and their consent obtained before pushing that country into a terrible war and all its tragic consequences. This has been entirely ignored in the case of India. Rajaji was arrested on the same day and sent to Vellore jail sentencing one year imprisonment. Satyamoorthi offered Satyagraha on 13, December by shouting anti-war slogans and he was arrested with the sentence of nine months simple imprisonment.<sup>26</sup>

T.S.S. Rajan said in his appeal that "men of honour" had no choice but to disapprove of the government's action with regard to the war. He was convicted and sentenced to one year rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs.1000/- or in default to undergo six months further imprisonment. In Madras presidency, Rukmani Lakshmi pathy, Deputy Speaker in the Madras Legislative Assembly was arrested under section 38 of the Defence of India rules for her anti-war movement and individual Satyagraha. She was placed in "A" class prison. She was the first woman Satyagrahi in Madras. When she was taken to jail, she declared that. "let the women in India follow the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and maintain the honour and dignity of our motherland".<sup>27</sup>

T. Prakasam. President of the Andhra Provincial Congress and ex-Minister for Revenue in Madras was arrested and sentenced to one year imprisonment. V.V. Giri former Minister for Labour and Industries. Madras was arrested in front of Panagal Park, Theagaraya Nagar for shouting anti-war slogans.<sup>28</sup> The Madras Students Organization and the Tamil Nadu Students Federation took part in publishing pamphlets advocating not to render men and money to the British Government. They distributed pamphlets on seeking the support of the public for the success of Congress programme. The pamphlets were printed at Janasakthi Press, Madras. To counter-act the students propaganda the Government of Madras Presidency

arranged lectures on "Nazi Aggression", "Help to Allies", "War and Our Duty", "Why Britain is at War" and "The Duties of Indians to Britain".<sup>29</sup>

Rajam Bharathi of Madras was also convicted and sentenced to three month simple imprisonment and for failure of it she was asked to pay a fine of Rs.250/-. Like Rajam Bharati. N.S.Rukmini also shouted anti-war slogan for which the government gave her punishment of three month simple imprisonment, failing which she was also forced to pay a fine of Rs.250/-. M.S. Balambal and J.Navaneethammal, who belonged to Madras also courted arrest and kept in the Presidency Jail for women, at Vellore. They were put in jail for three months each.<sup>30</sup>

As public awakening was tremendous, the Madras Presidency government instructed the magistrates to punish the Satyagrahis with rigorous imprisonment. In the case of the members of the legislature, an order of the government said that if they were sentenced to imprisonment; for a period of one year or more, their seats would be declared vacant and a by-election would be held for such vacancies. Despite governmental action against the satyagrahis, the pro-British people of Tamil Nadu came forward to donate war fund liberally. By November 1941, the total collection by the War Fund Committee, Madras fetched Rs 62.00.000/-. The War Fund Committee instigated recruiting agents 10 recruit more men for military by offering a commission of Rs.2 to those who brought a successful-recruit to the army recruiting centre.<sup>31</sup>

Amidst government's pro-war propaganda and measures not minding arrest, many of the legislative members continued to offer Satyagraha. In January 1941 the Madras Congress Legislature Party adopted a resolution, endorsing the Congress High Command's resolutions. P.M. Adikesavelu Naicker. M.L.A., Member of Corporation of Madras and President of the Mahajana Sabha was arrested for offering satyagraha in front of Sir. Thiagaraya Park, Washermanpet. He was sentenced to undergo a term of 6 months under the Defense of India Rules.<sup>32</sup> K. Venkataswami Naidu. Deputy President of the Madras Legislative Council, Ex-Mayor of Madras, Leader of the Congress Municipal Party and member of All India Congress Committee was arrested.<sup>33</sup> Dr. P. Subbarayan, Zamindar of Kumaramangalam, Minister for Law and President of the Board of Control of Cricket, V.O. Munuswami Pillai, Ex-Congress Harijan Minister of Madras Presidency, Natarajan, Member of Madras Congress Socialist Party, T.S. Avinashalingam Chettiar, M.L.A. (Central) C.P. Subbaiah M.L.A. Madras K. Kamaraja Nadar, President Tamil Congress Committee were all arrested and sentenced to imprisonment under the Defense of India Rules for their individual Satyagraha movement by distributing anti-war pamphlets, shouting anti-war slogans, anti-war speech.<sup>34</sup>

The Madras Congress leaders formed volunteer corps in early 1941. The influx of refugees from Burma and a rumor that the Japanese forces would soon be India caused a panic in the Presidency, particularly in the city of Madras, which necessitated to form the corps to organize civil defense measures. The members of the corps distributed rice, oil. Carpet and some other essential items to the poor.<sup>35</sup>

The Individual Satyagraha offered in Madras gradually extended to most of the parts of the Tamil Nadu and it continued unabated till 1941. By May 1941 some 14.000 were in jail and the number swelled to 23.000. in the prisons all over India. In the case of Tamil Nadu, prosecutions under the Defense of India Act were launched in the Madras city and the districts of South Arcot, Coimbatore, Chingleput. Madurai, Salem. Tanjore. Thirachirappalli and Tirunelveli.<sup>36</sup>

In Coimbatore, many came forward to offer Satyagraha by delivering anti-war speeches. M.A.Alumba of Tirupur taluk, took part in anti-war Satyagraha in 1941. Arrested and sentenced to one month under section 38(5) of Defence of India Rules kept in central jail. Madras.<sup>37</sup> S.A. Duraisamy of Chellampalayam, Bhavani taluk, took part in anti-war satyagraha in 1941. arrested and imprisoned at Central jail, Gudalur, sentenced three months and imprisoned at Alipuram jail. P Ramasamy of Mettupalayam, sentenced to one year and kept in Alipuram jail.<sup>38</sup>

Prominent political women activists such as A. Lakshmi, A.K.Panjali, Lakshmi. Vice President, Taluk Congress Committee. Coimbatore, Pankajathammal, Savithri Ammal. Padmavathi Asher, Bagavathiammal and Sundarammal delivered speeches requesting the local people not to support the war by any means. They were awarded varying from 3 to 6 months imprisonment each.<sup>39</sup> The land owning classes in Tanjore

district aspired more to involve in the Individual Satyagraha by means of distributing anti-war pamphlets, leaflets and delivering speeches. In connection with, P.Ethirajulu, S.V.Muthaiah and R. Subbarayan of Sirkali, T.Narayana Iyengar of Kumbakonam, K.Sundararaja Iyengar of Vadaseri, S.Swaminatha Iyer of Needamangalam, R.Thiru vikaramanarayanan and Venkataramanian of Aduthurai were imprisoned at Madras, Alipuram and Coimbatore jails. The women arrested in connection with the satyagraha were Siva Saiadammal. Rajammal, Janaki and Rajamani Devi.<sup>40</sup>

In South Arcot district, the anti-war movement was intensive which necessitated for a huge arrest numbering more than 200 during 1940-41. S.Chidambaram Iyer the Municipal Chairman of Villupuram, was arrested even before he delivered the anti-war address. In January 1941 almost all the office bearers and prominent members of the Congress committees in district, taluk, town and village levels were arrested in connection with their anti-war activities.<sup>41</sup> Among them a few were. R.Vinayagam Pillai. President, Taluk Congress Committee, Chidambaram, S.Paramanda Raver. President, the Town Congress Committee, Chidambaram, U.L.Rajagopal. member the Town Congress Committee. Chidambaram. L.C.Subbaraya Pillai, Secretary, the Taluk Congress Committee. Chidambaram, C.Marimuthu Devar, President, the Village Congress Committee, Palayamcottah, Chidambaram taluk, K.Muthusamy. Secretary, the Taluk Congress Committee. Cuddalore. Sudarsana Naidu, President, the Town Congress Committee. Cuddalore, S.Muthuvarada Reddiyar, President, the Taluk Congress Committee, Villupuram and S.Rajamanickam, Secretary, the Taluk Congress Committee, Tindivanam. They were detained in Cuddalore, Tanjore, Thirachirappalli, Madras and Alipuram jails with terms between two and five months rigorous imprisonment for each. The most prominent women participants were Sakunthala Bai, C.R.Jagadambal Ammal and Muthulakshmi Ammal.<sup>42</sup>

In Salem district, Vekatachala Reddiar, President, Salem District Congress Committee, Arumuga Mudaliar of Gugai, Natesa Chettiar of Attur, Nagaraja Iyengar of Rasipuram, Ragunatha Chettiar of Illampillai and Perumal Chettiar of Kumarapalayam were sentenced to six months imprisonment each for their speech delivered during the November 1940 to January 1941.<sup>43</sup> S.R. Krishnan a native of Namakkal and Journalist by profession offered Satyagraha.<sup>32</sup> He was arrested and imprisoned at Madras jail. Narasimha Raju of Vallapadi was incharge of Town Congress Committee Salem. He was arrested and put in "C" class in Salem jail. Natesan of Namakkal was arrested for his anti-war propagation by beating drum, Selakan, an agriculturalist and native of Thottikulam in Namakkal Taluk, was arrested and imprisoned at Salem jail. Lingam who belonged to the same village, was also arrested and convicted. In Salem district, more than 500 offered individual satyagraha. The sentences awarded to them exceeded between 4 to 6 months. They were imprisoned at Madras, Coimbatore and other jails.<sup>44</sup>

In Madurai district, M. Karuppaiah, Secretary, District Congress Committee, Madurai delivered anti-war speech and for this he was imprisoned for a year. M. Subbaiah of Madurai was arrested at Sivakasi for his anti-war speech which resulted in internment of 9 months. S. Gurusamy Naidu and his wife G. Janaki Ammal of Madurai, were arrested for inspiring the public through national songs of Bharathi and Ramalingam Pillai. As per the reference of *Who's Who of Freedom Fighters of Tamil Nadu* by H.K.Ghazi, the total arrest in connection with individual satyagraha are 499.<sup>45</sup>

In Kanyakumari district. G. Ganapathy of Aralvoymozhi. A. Arumugham, S.Chettiar. S.Perumal Nadar, S.Subramania Pillai, Virabhahu Pillai of Agasteeswaram, S.Subramania Iyer, T.Mahalinga Saliar, S.Sivarama Nadar, S.Sivalinga Pannaiar, S.Pandaram, S.N.Krishna Pillai, S.Nagalingam Pillai, N.Subramania Pillai, S.Velayudham Pillai, S.Ramachandran, S.Subramanian, S.Sivathanu and S.Vasudevan of Nagercoil, and Kumbalingam of Nagercoil were arrested in connection with the individual satyagraha.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the participation of Congress cadres of different ranks from the President, Tamil Nadu Congress Committee to the members of the Village Congress Committees all over the Tamil Nadu, some of the well-known journalists and scholars of the period rendered the support to the movement. Among them were Pallikottai Nadimuthu Pillai, Nachiyappa Goundar of Salem, T.S.Chokkalingam, (Editor, Dinamani, a Tamil daily), S.S.Vasan (Editor, Anandha Vikatan, a Tamil weekly), R.Krishnamoorthy (Editor, Kalki, a Tamil weekly), T.P.Meenatchisundaram Pillai (familiar Tamil scholar), Thirunavukkarasu (son of



Maraimalai Adikal), Nilavathi Ramasubramanian and M.P.Sivagnanam (a Tamil writer). The total arrest relating to Individual Movement in Tamil Nadu is 1456.<sup>47</sup>

As the Individual Satyagraha gained momentum, more people who were not authorized by the Congress high command came forward to offer satyagraha and to voluntary arrest. Hence, the Government of Madras, as elsewhere in India ignored to arrest the ordinary but only influential satyagrahis. Gandhi instructed that the non-arrested satyagrahis may march to Delhi on foot carrying antiwar propaganda and uttering the slogan *Chalo Dilli* (go to Delhi) on the way and also explained that those who were unable to march to Delhi can indulge in door to door propaganda in the villages.<sup>48</sup>

### Closure of the Satyagraha 1941

On 4 December 1941, the Government of India announced its decision to release all the Satyagraha prisoners. However, Congress disappointed as the amnesty was restricted to Satyagraha prisoners only. Gandhi instructed the released Satyagrahis to offer Satyagraha again. Gandhi said that those who had voluntarily courted imprisonment or not had the liberty to care over the mother land than their own personal freedom.<sup>49</sup> Now the Congress had suspended the Satyagraha and awaiting for an opportunity to stage a mass demonstration against the British in order to force it to quit India.

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