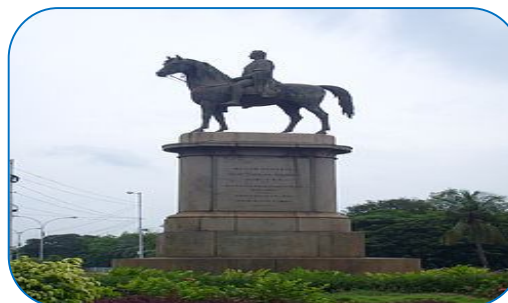




A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF NEILL STATUE SATYAGRAHA IN TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT :

The Neill Statue Satyagraha launched in Tamil Nadu in 1927 was as an act of opposition exposure by the statue of general Neill at public gaze at Mount Road, Madras. General Neill was a military chief of Madras Presidency during the time of Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. This research paper is focused on A Historical Analysis of Neill Statue Satyagraha in Tamil Nadu. The history of Indian freedom struggle is replete with a number of anecdotes revealing the patriotic fervor of the Indians. One such historic incident focusing much of the fervour is the Neill Statue Satyagraha of 1927. There was an agitation for the removal of the statue of General Neill, which was at Mount Road, Madras. The general Neill suppressed the Mutiny of 1857. The Madras Presidency Government erected a bronze Statue for him in 1860 opposite to the Madras club, Mount Road, Madras. The Congress activists of the Tamil region considered the Neill Statue as a standing insult to the self-respect of the citizen of India as he indulged in of many barbarous and blot thirsty acts of revenge such as wholesale burning of villages shooting and burning alive the thousands of men, women and children during the Mutiny of 1857. Hence, the Congress Activists of Tamil Nadu insisted that the Government should not be allowed to stand in the public view. The Congress activists were inspired by Nagpur Flag Satyagraha in the Central Provinces and the word Satyagraha in Madura decided to deface the statue. Gandhi himself approved of their activities ad considered that the statue represented terrorism and falsehood of the British in India.

KEYWORDS : Neill Statue , Historical Analysis , Congress Activists.

INTRODUCTION

The Neill Statue Satyagraha was started on 11 August 1927 and lasted for four months still December 1927. People from different walks of life and different parts of Tamil Nadu indulged in different programs opposing the presence of the Statue in the public view amidst of government repressing and cruelty. This paper tries to trace the sufferings and scarifies of the people of Tamil Nadu in their attempt of removing the Statue which was an insult to Indians. This paper is mainly based on primary archival data and supplemented by secondary literature. In August 1927, there started a Satyagraha/Movement in Madras with the object of removing the statue of General Neill. Neill was a British military officer who played a significant role in maintaining the British authority in India. He suppressed the Mutiny of 1857 with his iron hand. His died on September 1857. The British erected a bronze statue valued at Rs. 12,000 to honor his military service to them in 1861 at Mount Road, Madras.¹ One Srinivasa Varadan of Madurai once happened to see the Statue in 1927 and conceived the idea that the statue of his cruel foreigner must be removed from the soil of mother India. He came forward with that idea. As he was a member of Tamil Nadu Volunteers Crops, he discussed it with some of the other members like Kulandai and Kuppusamy of Ramnad, N. Annamalai Pillai of North Arcot and

S.A. Deivanayaga Ayya of South Arcot district.² A meeting was held in Ramnad in which they planned to start the Neill Statue Satyagraha on 11 August 1927 and also vested all powers on Somayajulu Naidu of Thirunelveli to lead the Satyagraha by appointing him as the Director of the Satyagraha.³

As proposed, Somayajulu initiated the Satyagraha on the proposed date. He went to Madras along with some volunteers and offered satyagraha by attempting to break the statue. They broke a portion of the statue and hoisted a national flag on it. He and another satyagrahi by name Mohammed Salia were arrested and imprisoned.⁴ At this N. Annamlai Pillai took the place of Somayajulu, but the government put him immediately behind prison bars which led S.A. Deivanayaga Ayya to assume the directorship. Anantha Achari, a native of Cuddalore, become treasurer. After assuming the directorship, he issued a statement to the people.⁵ In the statement he said;

"I am glad to thank you all for selecting me to lead the Satyagraha. I request you to give me at the Satyagraha, the unstinted support which you have been giving hitherto. God willing, we the young Tamils will march until the goal is reached, weather may be the suffering and hardships in this way."⁶

Deivanayaga Ayya formed a "Neill statue Satyagraha Committee" in Villupuram and asked the people to enroll mass support for it. It is said his activity caused considerable impact on the people. Over two hundred individuals joined the committee and people all over the district stood in support of the Satyagraha. The members of the committee prepared themselves to offer Satyagraha willingly in Madras whenever they were required.⁷

The first batch of Satyagraha volunteers headed by K.V. Ganapathy Ayya, an astrologist of Vridhachalam in South Arcot district, went to Madras on 29 August 1927. It is worthy to note here that Angachi Ammal, wife of Ganapathy Ayya was included in that batch. The satyagrahis went near the statue and attempted to wreck the statue by the axe and hammer. This daring act excited the passersby and bystanders. After some moment, the crowd began to swell more and more. At the same time, the Madras City Police came to the spot and strictly and repeatedly warned them to leave the place. But the Satyagrahis did not obey the words of the police. So the police arrested Ganapathy Ayya and fined Rs.50 along with one week's simple imprisonment, which was bound over for one year under section 106 of Criminal Procedure Code.⁸

Ganapathy Ayya's arrest stimulated the people of the Madras Presidency especially South Arcot district. His wife Angachi Ammal, a Tamil scholar, took out a demonstration on 1 September in Madras condemning the atrocities of the government. She was arrested under section 75 of the City Police Act and imprisoned for one week's simple imprisonment. Ganapathy Ayya became excited over the arrest of his wife and condemned the government. He started a hunger strike in the jail.⁹ A government report said, "He refused to take food and proposed to remain on hunger strike until the statue removed". There was a widespread protest in the district in support of the Satyagraha in keeping with the Congress creed. Two important public meetings were held at Chidambaram. At the first meeting, M.S. Subramanya Iyer blamed the government for not solving the food problem and advocated agitation for Swaraj. At the second meeting, Annamalai Pillai said that Swaraj was not far off, and that the Civil Disobedience Movement was not far off, and that, when it came, the people should follow the lead of Gandhi.¹⁰ Gandhi himself visited the district in September 1927, attracted a large crowd and produced a deep impression on the masses.¹¹

By September 1927 there were frequent attempts of defacing the statue. In connection with Lokaih Naidu of Madras arrested on 1 September 1927. He was imprisoned for 15 days with a fine of Rs. 50. On 5 September Thangaraju Mudali of Madras arrested and convicted under section 75 City Police Act 3 weeks and a fine of Rs. 50 in default one week simple imprisonment bound over for one year. Jamadagni Naicker of Walajabad was arrested on 8 September 1927 and convicted under section 353 Indian Penal Code. On 13 September G.M. Swaminathan of Gudiyatham was arrested under 108 Criminal procedure code and sent to jail for one year failing to furnish a surety.¹²

A team of satyagrahis including two women named Anjalai Ammal, a house wife and Ammakannu Ammal the wife and daughter respectively of Muruga Padiayachi, headed by the same Muruga Padayatchi reached Madras on 1 September. They attempted to break the statue. At this, two police constables arrested him and examined him for prosecution and put him on trail. He was awarded

for three months' rigorous imprisonment. Meanwhile, Muruga Padayatchi said to the constables that he was not guilty of that charge and that he said his duty of destroying the statue as it was shame on the part of all Indians and that the statue should not be kept in a public place. His arrest aroused anxiety and tension among his supporters. In the absence of Muruga Padayatchi, his wife continued to offer Satyagraha.¹¹ On 12 September, she and her daughter were arrested and they were sentenced to one week's simple imprisonment each. The daughter was detained at Children's Home, Madras.¹³

One T.G. Lakshmanaswami, a local tailor who figured the Neill Statue Satyagraha campaign made himself obnoxious, during the early part of September 1927 by making intemperate and objectionable speeches at meetings organized under the auspices of the National Volunteers Corps. He was arrested and sent to central jail, Trichirapalli.¹⁴ On 25 September 1927, some volunteers headed by Srinivasa of Cuddalore went to Madras for breaking the statue with axe and hammer and one of the volunteers Srinivasa Varma was arrested and imprisoned at Madras jail, then transferred to Vellore jail. Meanwhile the many came forward to break the statue. Among them Krishnamoorthy of Kallakurichi and Muhammed Salia of Panruti offered Satyagraha on 8 November, 1927. This was fifth batch from the South Arcot district. The police arrested these two and imprisoned them for one year rigorous imprisonment under section 562 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Notwithstanding the police arrest, Deivanayaga Ayya continued his activity. He addressed a number of meetings, both in Madras and other places.¹⁵

Four people from South Arcot district consisted of Kanniah Padayatchi, a merchant, Ganasundaram, Velusamy Raja and Govindharaj, natives of Cuddalore were arrested and courted imprisonment for one month rigorous imprisonment, which would be extended over even for one year.¹⁶ These arrests provoked the Congressmen in Madras. They led out a procession of 250 persons in Madras, but the police banned it and arrested some of them and prosecuted them for one month's rigorous imprisonment.¹⁷ The government got alarmed over the over enthusiasm of the people and posted a tight police security guard at the spot both to safeguard the statue and to thwart the attempt of the Satyagrahis. At this, the Satyagrahis took an alternative measure and diverted themselves to arouse the entire people by their effective propaganda. Meetings were widely organized in Madras and some in the South Arcot district. By the end of the month, a political meeting was held at Kapaleeswara temple, Madras under the president ship of Nainiappa Pillai from Chidambaram. In his address, he said that the object of the meetings was to remain the people about the atrocities committed by Neill. He concluded that the statue must be removed from the public gaze. The police banned the meeting, arrested him and put him to Palayamcottah jail for two years. He was placed in second class in the jail. The food supplied to him and other facilities provided to him were very poor physique. The reporter of Tamil Nadu, a daily who interviewed him said, "It may be believed that the sufferings of Congressmen like him (Nainiappa Pillai) will lay the foundation stone for the country's freedom and that honouring them is similar to worshipping of Goddess of Independence."¹⁸

The severe punishment inflicted on Nainiappa Pillai kindled the indignation of the Satyagrahis and stimulated them. On 5 October, a meeting was held at Gangadhareswara temple, Purasawakkam to condemn the arrest of Nainiappa Pillai. Deivanayaga Ayya addressed the meeting. In his address he said that if they were united, no amount of repressive laws would threaten them. In another meeting which was held at Parthasarathy temple in Triplicane in Madras, Deivanayaga Ayya remarked that the statue must be removed not because it was of a foreigner but of a tyrant.¹⁹

The Neill Statue Satyagraha Volunteers held a meeting at Mallikeshwara temple mandabam, Lingu Chetti street, Madras under the leadership of Santhamurthi. Who already moved a resolution in the Legislative Council Madras suggesting the removal of the Statue. But it was rejected. In the meeting Thertegri of Gudiyatham, observed that despite the defeat of the resolution in the Council the volunteers were determined to continue the agitation.²⁰

A public meeting was held on 18 September 1927 at the Beach of Triplicane under the auspices of the Madras District Congress Committee and the Madras Mahajana Sabha. Satyamurthi, the prominent Congressman and nationalist moved the following resolution; "This public meeting of the citizens of Madras held under the auspices of the Madras District Congress Committee and the Madras

Mahajana Sabha express the opinion that the statue of General Neill in Mount Road Commemorates a man who, whose barbarous, and cowardly acts of revenge do not reserve any recognition in any humane or civilized country and is further and insolent reminder to India of our helplessness and subjection at the hands of foreigners. Another one of this meeting, is that "the statue should be removed forthwith by the Madras Government from public views if it claims to be humane civilized and responsive to public opinion".²¹ They succeeded in breaking the sheath of the sword carried by Neill and hoisted the National Flag on it.

The movement attracted a large number of volunteers from all parts of the presidency. On 12 November 1927, Andhraparadeh Congress Committee held a meeting at Anandhapur, which was attended by delegates and visitors from several parts of Andharapradesh. Prominent among them were T. Prakasam, K. Nageshwara Rao, B. Santhamurthi and others. A resolution supporting the satyagraha was moved by K. Nageshwara Rao. B. Rama Rao traced the history of the Satyagraha and detailed the various cruelties committed by Neil in his times. He said that the statue was found in Madras and the Satyagraha was started by Tamil Brothers it is to be considered a all India movement.²²

The total arrest in connection with the satyagraha under section 427 I.P.C. and under section 562 C.P.C. and under section 75 of the City Police Act was 90 including a few women. Leaders such as Gandhi opposed the severe punishment given by the Magistrate against the peace full patriotic minded young man. The participation of the volunteers to remove the statue was intensive and widespread however, the satyagraha/movement did not reach its desired goal-the removal of the statue of General Neill in a stipulated time. Fortunately the Congress ministry, headed by C. Rajagopalachari, keeping in mind the sacrifice of the innumerable people of Tamil Nadu, removed the statue from the public gaze in 1937. The removal of the statue from the public view is still a right proof for the traits of patriotism and perseverance of the Tamil society.

To sum up the Neill statue Satyagraha though a minor political struggle had gained support from different walks of life from the region of Tamil Nadu and supported by leaders like Gandhi and SatyamoorthiThe government of Madras presidency reacted the against the movement as usual by taking stringent measures which did not do anything in front of the national and patriotic sprit of the people of the Tamil district.

ENDNOTES:

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