



KHADAR AND BOYCOTT OF FOREIGN CLOTH CAMPAIGN IN TAMIL COUNTRY

G. Vellaiammal

Reg.No.7963 , Ph.D. Full Time Research Scholar ,
Manonmaniam Sundaranar University ,
Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu.



ABSTRACT

The Constructive Programme of Gandhi and Congress were started soon after the Chauri Chaura incident during the Non-Co-operation Movement. Among the items of the Constructive Programme, Khadar Campaign was directly connected with the economic activity. When the British economically exploited the Indians, the Khadar Programme gave a succor the village industries. To promote Khadar , the Congress volunteers involved in the picketings of the shops which sold foreign cloth. Boycott of foreign cloth occupied a central stage in the Khadar Campaign in Madurai, other parts of Tamil Country and even in the Madras Presidency. Many volunteers were arrested and severely ill-treated in prisons. The Khadar campaign was less successful in Non-Co-operation Movement and much successful during the Civil-Disobedience Movement in Tamil Country. This Movement became a flourishing campaign in the Gandhian Era . In the independent period, the Prakasam Ministry promoted Khadi Scheme with the full-fledged patronage of Gandhi.

KEYWORDS: Gandhi, Khadar, Tamil Country, Madras Presidency, Madurai, Constructive Programme of Gandhi, Prakasam.

INTRODUCTION

Following Gandhi's decision to give up non-cooperation programme, the Congress working Committee meeting at Bardoli on 11th February 1922 adopted his 'Constructive Programme'. This programme stressed the production of khaddar, temperance and the uplift of untouchables.¹ Indeed, Gandhi aspired and appealed that every village should produce and meet the basic necessities. His Swadeshi ideology paid attention on the production and popularising of Khaddar. The *Khadar* Department was left to the responsibility of Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, who diverted his entire energy for spreading Khadar. All much efforts were undertaken to induce the production of *Khadar*. The mill agents and shareholders in Indian cotton mills were appealed to support the movement, by regulating the prices, so as to keep their products, within the reach of the poor. Foreign cloth and yam importers were asked to cooperate by stopping all foreign orders and by endeavouring to dispose of their stocks as far as possible outside Indian. A Khadar campaign triggered on principally by means of picketing and burning of foreign cloth in public places.

In the Tamil Country, production of handspun yam and *Khadi* was given a great attention. Progress in this direction was realized because of the interest displayed by the patriotic professional weavers of Aruppukkottai. They were ready to weave all yam supplied by the nationalists. The weavers from Madurai

¹ . Arnold, David, *The Congress in Tamil Nadu, Nationalist Politics in South India, 1919-1937*, New Delhi : Manohar, 1977, p.79

also joined in their work. Due to their tireless efforts coloured *Khadi* clothes were produced. Such clothes were not not easily produced and seemed elsewhere in the Tamil Country.

Spread of *Khadar* and Boycott of foreign goods occupied a central place in the Non-Cooperation Movement. Madurai was well responded in this regard. A Swadeshi Prachar Sabha was functioning in Madurai. It made propaganda to the people to wear *Khadar* (hand-spun and hand-woven cloth) and boycott foreign goods. George Joseph, a prominent Congress leader served as the President of this Sabha and he was succeeded by C. M. Venkatachalapathi Iyer.² Encouraged by the *swadeshi* spirit the volunteers of Bharathashram made bonfires of foreign cloth at the end of public meetings in Madurai in 1921. This spirit was very much promoted when Gandhi visited Madurai in September 1921.³ A heap of foreign cloths and clothing made of foreign stuff were set fire in Madurai on this occasion. Mathura Baskaradoss (1892-1952) a great Tamil poet of Madurai in his *Hindu Desabimaniyal Sentamil Thiigam* (A Tamil book on Indian Patriots) published in Madurai in 1921, praised Gandhi and his *Khadar* programme much.⁴ He met Gandhiji at the Madurai Railway Junction on 23rd September 1921 and presented him a copy of his book. Gandhi appreciated the theme of the work and the work was narrated to Gandhi by Dr. T.S.S Rajan.⁵ The *Khadar* and boycott movement was accelerated on the arrival of Gandhi to Madurai in 1921 and it continued to go ahead.

The Government reacted against the Gandhian volunteers adopting suppressive policy. It was unable to suffer the increasing popularity and success of the Non-Co-operation Movement. The *khadar* promotion programme, temperance work and picketing of foreign cloth shops organised peacefully by the nationalists was successful. It drove the Madras Government to order a campaign against the donning of *khadar*, especially against what was popularly known as the "Gandhi Cap". Three nationalists of the Godavari District - Malpuri Narasimhan, Gollapudi Srirama Sastri and Prayoga Viswanathan were all sentenced to ten days simple imprisonment each under Section 228 of the Indian Penal Code for no other crime than wearing the Gandhi Cap while appearing before the District Magistrate. According to the latter they put on their head-dresses deliberately to insult his court. When this matter was discussed at the Madras Legislature one member demanded that the Madras Government should censure the District Magistrate. He said in Bombay and northern India pupils and scholars were wearing Gandhi Cap and Gandhi Coat of which nobody took notice.⁶ A few students of the Medical College at Vizagapatam were dismissed, apparently for indiscipline but really for daring to don *khadar*.⁷ The pure white cloth and cap, the symbol of *Swadeshi*, proved an absolute red-rag to some of the police and military officials. The Mappilla police earned an unenviable notoriety for their intensive campaign against *khadar*.⁸ Under Section 3 (6) of the Dramatic Performances Act, 1876, the staging of even innocuous plays like *Swarajya Soppanam* was prohibited as seditious and calculated to create disaffection and unrest.⁹ The worst part of the repression was forbidding Congress volunteers from rendering succour to the victims of the Mappilla rebellion in Malabar.¹⁰

All the Non-Co-operators including propagandists of *Khadar* and picketers against the sale of foreign cloth treated harshly by the British Government. They were arrested under shadowy pretexts. They were convicted and imprisoned after a mock trial. And treatment to political prisoners in jail was deplorable. One of the most serious blots of Willingdon's administration was the refusal to accord a tolerable treatment to

² *The Hindu*, 5 October 1920

³ History of Freedom Movement File No.108, pp.22-23.

⁴ Kandasamy, V., *Madurai in Indian National Movement*, Madurai ; Sarvodaya Ilakkiya Pannai, 1993, pp.45-46.

⁵ Ramasamy, A., *Tamil Nattil Gandhi*, (Tamil), Madras : Gandhi Nool Veliyettu Kazhagam, 1969, p.363.

⁶ Madras Legislative Council Proceedings, Vol.VIII, 1922, pp.170-179

⁷ . *The Hindu*, 25 September 1921

⁸ *Ibid.*, 27 March 1920.

⁹ Fortnightly Report, 2 February 1921

¹⁰ *The Hindu*. 7 September 1921

political prisoners in jails. Felons and political offenders were treated alike. The non-co-operators were huddled among a pack of criminals, dacoits and murderers, and were treated in the same manner as any other criminal.¹¹

The Khadar activity that had gained ground in Madurai since 1920 touched its high watermark since 1930. Gandhi wanted the role of women in the boycott of foreign cloth. His aspiration was materialized by the *Sagotharigal Sangam* (Sisters' Association) in Madurai. The members of this Association including Subbulakshmi Ammal, Thayammal, Padmasani Ammal and Dr. Pitchaimuthu Ammal made intensive propaganda for Khadar and the boycott of foreign cloth.¹²

In the beginning the propaganda for khadar and the boycott of foreign cloth did not gain momentum. The Sourastra Community of Madurai Town imported foreign cloth from Madras. This community also supported the Congress movement by offering regular monthly subscriptions. Hence the Congress leaders of Madurai was unable to picket of shops selling foreign cloth.¹³ To awaken the Sourastra Community leaflets were distributed and appeals were made to them not to import foreign cloth. A few traders agreed to stop the import of foreign cloth but the others did not stop the import of foreign cloth. Hence the Congressmen were left in crossroads and were unable discharge their boycott activities. For a while, in Tamil Nadu picketing of liquor shops was generally more successful than that of the Khadar activities.¹⁴

The movement of Khadar and boycotting foreign cloth gained momentum in Madurai after a settlement on 5th March 1931. A Khadar propaganda committee was formed which functioned in Madurai with its office near Thirumalai Nayak Palace.¹⁵ Subsequently public meetings were arranged and the propagandists appealed to the people to use *Khadar* and boycott foreign cloth. Peaceful picketing of shops selling foreign cloth was held at various streets in Madurai Town.¹⁶ In these picketing a number of women were participated. By May 1931, picketing of foreign cloth shops was very active in Madurai town and K. Bashyam, a Congress leader witnessed the peaceful picketings in Madurai and highly praised the Madurai picketers.¹⁷ When the Tamil Nadu Youth Conference was organized in Madurai on 6th June 1931, the picketing of foreign cloth shops was temporarily suspended for a few days. This Conference was presided over by Rukmani Lakshmipathy (Madras). The Conference expressed its faith in the boycott of foreign goods especially British goods and sincerely appealed the the youths to execute the picketing of foreign cloths. The picketing activity was restarted since 10th June 1931. From the beginning of September, the picketing operations were very active. The prominent Madurai Congress leaders like A.Vaidyanatha Iyer, Chinnasamy Naidu, Sivaramakrishna Iyer. Vedarama Iyer, Haji Mohammed Maulana Sahib, N.M.R. Subbaraman, Subramania Iyer, Sangiliah Pillai and A. S. Lakshmana Iyer actively involved in picketing activities.¹⁸ The merchants of Ezhukadal Street cloth shop motivated by the peaceful picketing campaigns of the Congress Volunteers stopped the sales of the foreign cloths and also agreed to sale native cloth.¹⁹ Boycotting of foreign cloth shops was so active. The Calcutta Shop in Amman Sannathi of Madurai Town declared its solvency and people did not even

¹¹ Sundararajan, Saroja, *March to Freedom in Madras Presidency, 1916-1947*, Madras : Lalitha Publications, 1989, p. 283.

¹² *Janavartamani*, 15 January 1924

¹³ . History of Freedom Movement File No.108, pp.3 -5

¹⁴ . Kandasamy, V., *op.cit.*, p.94.

¹⁵ . Ibid.

¹⁶ .Seshan , R., and Sivaramasamy, *Padmasani Ammal Vazhkai Varalaru* ,(Tamil), Sholavandan: 1960, pp.11-14

¹⁷ . Ibid.

¹⁸ Kandasamy , V., *op.cit.*, p.94.

¹⁹ .Chidambara Bharathi and Srinivasa Varadhan, *Madurai Zillah Thiyakigal Malar*, (Tamil), Madurai: Sutandira Prasuralayam, 1948, p.21.

come forward to take part in the auctioning of that shop.²⁰

Thus propaganda of Khadar and picketing was the most common form of open activity in Tamil Nadu and other parts of the country after the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements of Gandhi. Madurai, Madras, Virudhunagar, Tirunelveli, Coimbatore and Ramnad were the main centres for the spreading khaddar and picketing of foreign cloth in 1932 in Tamil Country.²¹

The Prakasam Ministry was far from being popular. It somehow managed to handle without much difficulty, the economic distress produced by the Second World War. The policy pursued by his Ministry in matters like the textile mills earned it condemnation from many quarters. It was Prakasam's policy in respect of textile mills that came under severest criticism. There were acute differences of opinion over this issue not only between the Congress party as a whole and the general public but between the Ministry and some of the rank and file in the party. In fact there was reason to believe that the Ministers themselves were not agreed on the policy that the Premier put forward officially.²²

A Gandhian to the core, Prakasam announced while implementing the *khadar* promotion scheme that no new textile mills would be started in the Presidency of Madras. Gandhi had taken the assurance from the Congress Ministries before giving his final approval for the *Khadar Scheme* that no more textile mills would be erected. Gandhi warned the Ministries that their *Khadar* scheme would be an eye-wash if while promoting *Khadar* they went on planting fresh textile mills in the Provinces.²³ Gandhi was therefore very happy with the policy pursued by T. Prakasam, Prakasam undertook to carry out big schemes in regard to *Khadar*, prohibition, and eradication of untouchability. Gandhi paid rich tributes to Prakasam particularly for his textile policy which would "benefit not only Madras but the whole Indian community".²⁴

To conclude at the end of the Non-Cooperation Movement, Gandhi announced Constructive Programme. This programme aimed at the promotion of the Indian villagers who economically impoverished by the British policy of economic exploitation. The Tamil Country, especially the Madurai region actively participated in the campaign of the Khadar and boycott of the foreign clothes. The Sourashtra Community of Madurai which once sold foreign clothes began to stop the sale of such clothes and extended their support to the Khadi Campaign and even came forward to sale khadi clothes. Hence the Khadi Campaign was successful during the Non-Cooperation and Civil-Disobedience Movements in Tamil Country. The Second World war gave a fillip to the increasing production of Khadar and the Independent Congress Ministry also extended its patronage for the promotion of the Khadi Scheme.



G. Vellaiammal

Reg.No.7963, Ph.D. Full Time Research Scholar, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu.

²⁰ Kandasamy, V., *op.cit.*, p.95.

²¹ Chidambara Bharathi and Srinivasa Varadhan, *op.cit.*, p.21.

²² The Hindu, 26 February 1947

²³ Tendulkar, D.G., *Mahatma*, Delhi: The Publications Divisions, Government of India, Vol.7, p.216.

²⁴ *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol.LXXXVI, p.282