International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

The Historical Sketch of Tamil Nadu in the Freedom Struggle

Dr. D. Senthilkumar

Associate Professor PG & Research Department of History Thanthai Periyar Government, Arts and Science College (A) (Affiliated to the Bharathidasan University), Tiruchirappalli – 23. Tamil Nadu, South India - India

Abstract

This article traces Tamil Nadu's contribution to the Indian freedom struggle from the late eighteenth century to Independence in 1947. It begins with the colonial background and the anti-colonial ideology of the national movement. It then follows the major episodes in the region: the Poligar Rebellion (1799), the South Indian Rebellion (1800-1801), the Vellore Rebellion (1806), the Madras session of the Indian National Congress (1887), the Swadeshi Movement (1905-1907), the Rowlatt Satyagraha (1919), the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922), the Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha (1930), the Quit India Movement (1942) and the impact of the INA trials (1945-1946). Leaders such as Kattabomman, Maruthu Pandyan, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Subramania Bharati, C. Rajagopalachari, S. Satyamurthy, T. Prakasam and K. Kamaraj feature prominently, along with the participation of women, workers and students. The study shows that Tamil Nadu was an active partner in the national movement and not merely a follower.

Keywords: Colonialism; Congress; Freedom Struggle; Indian National Movement; Non-Cooperation Movement; Poligar Rebellion; Quit India Movement; Rowlatt Satyagraha; Salt Satyagraha; Swadeshi Movement; Tamil Nadu; Vellore Rebellion

Introduction

The Indian national movement grew out of the basic contradiction between colonial rule and the interests of the Indian people. Its leaders came to understand that the British were using their political control to subordinate the Indian economy and society to the needs of the British economy and society. They saw that the country was regressing and underdeveloping, and on this basis they formed a clear anti-colonial ideology.

By the end of the nineteenth century the founding fathers of the national movement had worked out a clear understanding of the three modes of colonial exploitation: plunder, taxation and the employment of Englishmen in India; free and unequal trade; and the investment of British capital. They also grasped that India's colonial relationship was not an accident of history or a result of political policy, but sprang from the very character of British society and India's subordination to it. Their critique was focused in the theory of the drain of wealth from India, the theory that a large part of India's capital and wealth was being transferred to Britain.

Gandhiji's commitment to civil liberties was also total. At the height of the Non-Cooperation Movement, he wrote in *Young India* in January 1922 that the right of free speech and free association

must first be made good before any further progress could be made towards the goal, and that these elementary rights must be defended with one's life. In another article soon after, he explained that liberty of speech means that it is unsealed even when the speech hurts, that liberty of the Press is truly respected only when the Press can comment in the severest terms, and that freedom of association is truly respected when assemblies of people can discuss even revolutionary projects.

Tamil Nadu has a long tradition of fighting for justice, rights and fair play. This article presents a historical sketch of the region's role in the freedom struggle, from the Poligar Rebellion to the dawn of Independence.

The Poligar Rebellion, 1799

True to its tradition, the people of Tamil Nadu rose in revolt when their cherished rights were threatened and violated by the English East India Company. The Company's excessive direct control over the poligars provoked the Poligar Rebellion.

The Poligar Rebellion was spearheaded by **Jagavira Pandya Kattabomman**, Poligar of Panchalamkuruchi. Stung by the harshness of Collector Jackson, he had a tense interview with the Collector at Ramanathapuram on 19 September 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 him to rise against the British. The Madras Council viewed his move as a challenge to its authority. On instruction from Governor General Lord Wellesley, Major Bannerman mounted an assault on Panchalamkuruchi Fort in September 1799. Betrayed by the Poligar of Pudukkottai, Kattabomman was captured, tried, and hanged at Kayattar on 17 October 1799.

South Indian Rebellion, 1800-1801

Learning a lesson from the fall of Kattabomman, the rebel leaders of Sivaganga, Dindigul, Coimbatore, Malabar, Mysore and Maharashtra formed a coalition, planned their action and rose against British rule under the leadership of Maruthu Pandyan of Sivaganga. This South Indian Rebellion is claimed to be the First War of Indian Independence.

Vellore Rebellion, 1806

Undaunted by the suppression of the South Indian Rebellion, the rebels shifted their theatre of revolt to Vellore. They regrouped in strength, established contact with disgruntled sepoys, and on 13 July 1806 revolted against Company rule. The sepoys were particularly incensed by racist regulations: Hindus were prohibited from wearing religious marks on their foreheads, and Muslims were required to shave their beards and trim their moustaches. At one stroke both Hindu and Muslim sepoys were antagonised. Worse still, two of the soldiers sent to Fort St. George were given 900 lashes each and dismissed, and 19 soldiers were given 500 lashes each and forced to seek pardon. Though the Vellore Rebellion was repressed, it is regarded as a small-scale rehearsal of the major rebellion of 1857.

Third Congress Session at Madras, 1887

The first session of the Indian National Congress was described as "a ramshackle set of local linkages". A contingent of 47 delegates from Tamil Nadu attended the second session held at Calcutta in 1886. Madras had the honour of organising the third session of the Congress in 1887. It was held at Makkis Garden, now known as Thousand Lights. 607 delegates attended the session, and Badruddin Tyabji

presided over the meeting. The third Congress session had several distinctions:

- It was held in an open-air, specially decorated pandal.
- Of the 607 delegates, 62 were from the Madras Presidency.
- The expenses of the conference were largely met from donations collected from the public. The Tamil booklet *Congress: Questions and Answers*, written by M. Vijayaraghavachariar of *The Hindu*, who was Secretary of the Reception Committee, was sold in thousands at a concessional price and the proceeds were spent for the session.
- Raja Sir T. Madhava Rao, President of the Reception Committee, made the annual session a grand success.
- Rao Sahib Mookkana Chari took the audience by surprise by delivering his speech in Tamil.
- Lord Connemara, the Governor of Madras, graced the function by his presence and hosted a dinner for the delegates.

In short, the Madras session served as a model for other annual meetings of the national organisation. Subsequently, the Indian National Congress met at Madras in 1894, 1898, 1903, 1908, 1914, 1923 and 1927.

Swadeshi Movement, 1905-1907

The fire of the Swadeshi Movement started in Bengal and soon spread to Tamil Nadu. Swadeshism captured the imagination of the Tamil extremists. They encouraged the 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 Swadeshism to the masses. The Balabharat Association arranged popular discussions and debates in support of the movement, and the Swadeshivastu Pracharini Sabha popularised 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* showed that the movement had struck deep roots in Tamil Nadu, particularly in Tirunelveli District. More important, the launching of the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company by V.O. Chidambaram Pillai in 1906 challenged the maritime might of British imperialism, and the Company "marked the most spectacular development in the history of the movement".

Montagu's Visit to Madras, 1917

Montagu's Declaration promised the increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration. Following his declaration, he visited India on 10 November 1917 to study the political situation personally. He arrived at Madras on 14 December 1917. His historic visit activated the political groupings as well as the provincial government to present their claims and counter-claims before the visiting dignitary. The Home Rulers, the Congressmen, the Justicites and the Pentland Government vied with each other in pressing their competing claims and made Madras politics highly complicated.

Rowlatt Satyagraha, 1919

The Rowlatt Satyagraha had its genesis in Tamil Nadu. Even when the Rowlatt Bills were discussed in the Central Legislature, V. Srinivasachari warned that there would be an upheaval in India if the "Black Bills" were enacted into law. On 17 March 1919, Gandhi visited Tamil Nadu and stayed at the residence of Kasturi Ranga Iyengar to devise a way to oppose the draconian Bill. The Satyagraha Sabha was formed with Gandhi as its President. The Rowlatt Act was proclaimed while Gandhi was touring Tamil

Nadu. He announced that a national hartal against the Rowlatt Bills would 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. Protest demonstrations were held in several parts of the Presidency. Processions from many areas of the city converged on Marina beach. In the evening a mammoth public meeting was addressed by C. Rajagopalachari, Kasturi Ranga Iyengar, S. Satyamurthy and George Joseph. A separate meeting of workers was addressed by V. Kalyanasundaram, P.P. Wadia, V.O. Chidambaram and S. Dandapani Pillai. Complete hartal was observed at Sowcarpet under the leadership of Ramji Kalyanji, and several Muslim traders extended their support to the Satyagraha. Trams ceased to run and workers struck work. *Satyagrahi* was published defying the Newspapers Registration Act, and prescribed books such as *Sarvodaya*, *Indian Swaraj* and V.D. Savarkar's *Volcano* were sold by satyagrahis. Though the Satyagraha was mainly concentrated in the cities and towns, its reverberations were felt in the mofussil areas also. Thus Tamil Nadu earned a notable place in the national Rowlatt Satyagraha.

Non-Cooperation Movement, 1920-1922

The Non-Cooperation Movement gained momentum in Tamil Nadu under the dynamic leadership of C. Rajagopalachari and became a mass movement. The people hoisted the national flag, installed photographs of national leaders, and organised meetings, demonstrations and hartals. Several leaders, such as 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 elections. The workers of the Buckingham Mills struck work on 27 June 1921, and toddy shops were boycotted. The visit of S. Satyamurthy to several places, including Rajapalayam, roused the patriotic feelings of the people, and I.P. Arangasamy Raja laid a firm foundation for the historic Khadi Movement in the town. The anti-liquor agitation was intensified by leaders such as V.G. Vellingiri Gounder, K.N.S. Ramaswami Iyengar and E.V. Ramasamy Naicker. When the Prince of Wales visited Madras he was boycotted, though the Justicites gave him a rousing reception. There was a spontaneous emotional upsurge in Tamil Nadu when Gandhi was arrested on 18 March 1922.

Salt Satyagraha, 1930

C. Rajagopalachari, 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 headquarters from Madras to Trichy, which served as the centre of the Civil Disobedience Movement. He went to Madurai to seek the support of N.M.R. Subbaraman, President of the Madurai District Congress Committee, and A. Vaidyanatha Iyer, a leading local lawyer. At Iyer's residence the final decision was taken to stage a Trichy-Vedaranyam salt march similar to the Dandi March.

In March 1930, the day after Gandhi commenced his Dandi March, a mammoth public meeting was held at Trichy. T.S.S. Rajan of Trichy and Sardar Vedaratnam Pillai of Vedaranyam were responsible for fixing the starting place and the closing point of the march, and both extended their wholehearted support to the satyagraha. The salt march started from Trichy to Vedaranyam via Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, Mannargudi and Tiruthuraipoondi. 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 for the occasion by Namakkal V. Ramalingam Pillai. Despite the

warning given by the District Collector of Thanjavur, the villagers extended hospitality and welcome to the satyagrahis en route. After 16 days of marching they reached Vedaranyam on 26 April 1930, where thousands of people who had already gathered greeted them with thunderous cheers. The next day the volunteers observed a fast and prayed. On 30 April 1930, C. Rajagopalachari with 16 chosen satyagrahis defied the salt law and collected salt at Agasthiyanpalli. They were arrested and sentenced to six months' imprisonment in Trichy jail. After their arrest, S. Satyamurthi led the satyagraha, along with K. Santhanam, Mattaparai Venkatarama Iyer, K. Subramania Iyer and G.
Ramachandran, and courted arrest. The Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha lasted for one and a half months.
Parallel to the Vedaranyam salt march, Andhra Kesari T. Prakasam, on 13 April 1930, led a salt march to Tilak Ghat, Triplicane, Madras, defied the salt law, distributed 'Liberty Salt' and courted arrest. The salt satyagraha was staged in Madurai, Tuticorin, Cuddalore, Erode, Tirunelveli and Trichy, and thousands of volunteers were arrested. It rekindled patriotic feelings among the people.
As the salt satyagraha gained ground, the provincial administration unleashed repressive measures. In March 1930 the police opened fire on a meeting of workers at Choolai, Madras. Volunteers who picketed toddy shops at Madurai (17 July) and satyagrahis at Madurai (6 August) were subjected to police shooting, which killed many people. On 11 January 1932, the police resorted to a lathi charge to disperse a procession in which Tirupur Kumaran was brutally attacked; he died on the spot holding the national flag high and singing a 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, and the Valparai meeting was banned. The police brutality was widely condemned.

Quit India Movement, 1942

Following the failure of the Cripps Mission, Gandhi gave his clarion call of '**Do or Die**'. The Government arrested the top leaders of the Congress, and on 9 August 1942 Gandhi and other leading figures were arrested in a single sweep and shifted to an unknown destination. In Tamil Nadu, K. Kamaraj, Vellore V.M. Obaidullah, Thiruvannamalai N. Annamalai, C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar, M. Bhaktavatsalam and S. Satyamurthy were arrested while returning to Madras after attending the Bombay meeting, and were sent to Vellore jail.
The unexpected arrest of the national leaders provoked spontaneous protests across the country. In Madras a total hartal was observed. The workers of the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills, the Madras Port Trust, the Madras Corporation and the Tramway struck work, shops were closed and educational institutions did not function. The police resorted to lathi charges and firing, in which 9 died and several were wounded.
The Quit India Movement spread like wildfire to the districts. In the North and South Arcot Districts the agitators cut telegraph and telephone lines, burnt government properties and derailed goods trains. The students of Annamalai University plunged into the agitation. Tanjore district witnessed several attempts at sabotage and underground activities, and widespread violence broke out in Coimbatore district. Singanallur mill workers defied the law and went in procession. The Sulur aerodrome was burnt and about 200 tanks were damaged. About 30 agitators died in police firing. In a neighbouring village all the males were arrested and confined in a small place.
A total hartal was observed in Madurai district. At several places young agitators clashed with the police. A. Vaidyanatha Iyer, B. Chidambara Bharati, K. Rajaram Naidu and others were arrested for making inflammatory speeches. There was a confrontation between the public and the police at Jhansi

Rani Park, resulting in firing. A post office was burnt, and Circle Inspector Visvanathan was subjected to an acid bomb attack. Since the situation went out of control, a curfew was clamped and the district was handed over to the army.

In Virudhunagar district, Rajapalayam played a conspicuous role in the Quit India Movement. On 9 August 1942 the youth of the town organised a serpentine procession led by P.S. Vasanthan. The town police station was attacked and the statue of George V near the police station was smashed to pieces. The procession was lathi-charged and the leaders were arrested. The agitators then assembled at the Golden Jubilee Hall, condemned the arrests of their leaders and chalked out their further course of action.

Women of the town joined the agitation in strength.

Protest meetings were held in Sattur taluk, and hartal and picketing were observed in Aruppukottai taluk. During the second week of August the movement intensified in many districts, resulting in violent activities in most parts of Tamil Nadu. Conspiracy cases were filed against Congress leaders, who were given sentences of varying severity. The agitators of Tamil Nadu showed that they would not desist from violent and destructive activities in order to attain freedom for their country.

Impact of the INA Trials, 1945-1946

The INA trials and the RIN revolt made a tremendous impact on Tamil Nadu. There were demonstrations and agitations in Madras, Trichy and other towns demanding the release of Rashid Ali, an INA officer who was awarded a seven-year sentence in 1945. Madras city was in the grip of violent protest when the ratings of the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) went on strike on 18 February 1946. More than 200 workers struck work at the Madras airport, and students of colleges paralysed the city by staging demonstrations. **Women's participation in the agitation was conspicuous.** P. Jeevanandam, M. Kalyanasundaram, S. Krishnaswami Iyengar and M.P. Srinivasan, a student leader, addressed a well-attended meeting at Tilak Ghat, Triplicane, Madras.

Independent India, 1947

The agitation was resumed in Tamil Nadu when Gandhi commenced his 21-day fast on 10 February 1943. In Madras, hartal was observed in front of the State Secretariat and several activists were arrested. In towns like Trichy and Madurai the agitation was widespread and many courted arrest. On 9 August 1944 the people of Tamil Nadu celebrated the second anniversary of the Quit India Movement. The Congress swept the polls in the provincial elections held in 1946, and on 30 April 1946 T. Prakasam formed the ministry. Political prisoners were released. T. Prakasam was succeeded by O.P. Ramaswamy Reddiar on 23 March 1947. C. Rajagopalachari was included in the interim government headed by Nehru. Of the 49 representatives sent from the Madras Presidency to the Constituent Assembly, 22 were from Tamil Nadu.

When India became independent at the midnight of 14-15 August 1947, Tamil Nadu celebrated the event with gaiety and happiness. The national tricolour flag with the Ashoka Chakra in the middle was hoisted at Fort St. George, replacing the Union Jack. The Madras Legislature formally adopted a resolution welcoming the transfer of power to India.

Conclusion

Tamil Nadu's role in the freedom struggle was significant and sustained. From the Poligar, South Indian

and Vellore rebellions, through the Madras Congress session of 1887 and the Swadeshi, Rowlatt, Non-Cooperation, Salt Satyagraha and Quit India movements, to the celebration of Independence at Fort St. George in 1947, leaders, peasants, workers, students and women together made the region an active partner in the national movement.

References

1. Agarwal, R.C. (1984). *Constitutional Development of India and National Movement*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd.
2. Aparna Basu (1976). *Role of Women in Indian Struggle for Freedom*. New Delhi: Vikas Publications.
3. Arnold, David (1977). *The Congress in Tamilnadu: Nationalist Politics in South India, 1919-1937*.
4. New Delhi: Manohar Publications.
5. Baker, C.J. (1979). *The Politics of South India, 1920-1937*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt.
6. Ltd.
7. Baliga, B.S. (1960). *Studies in Madras Administration*. Madras: Government of Madras.
8. Baski, S.R. (1990). *Indian Freedom Fighters: Struggle for Independence*, Vol. 15. New Delhi: Anmol Publishing Ltd.
9. Bipan Chandra (1989). *India's Struggle for Independence*. New Delhi: Penguin.
10. Chopra, P.N. (1985). *India's Struggle for Freedom (Role of Association Movements)*, Vol. IV. Delhi: Agni Prakasham Publishers.
11. Gopalakrishnan, S. (1981). *Political Movement in South India, 1914-1929*. Madras: New Era Publications.
12. Majumdar, R.C. (1985). *Struggle for Freedom*. Madras: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. (1930). *My Experience as a Legislator*. Madras.
13. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, B. (1947). *History of the Indian National Congress, 1935-1947*, Vol. II. New Delhi: S. Chand & Co.
14. Rajayyan, K. (1980). *Thamilaga Varalaru 1565 to 1967* (in Tamil). Madras: Tamilology Publishers.
15. Rajendran, N. (1994). *The National Movement in Tamil Nadu, 1905 to 1914: Agitation, Politics and State*. Madras: Oxford University Press.
16. Ranan Mohan (1999). *Women in Indian National Congress*. Delhi: Rawat Publications.
17. Sabapathi, A.L. (1976). *Indiya Sudanthirapor* (in Tamil). Tiruchirappalli: Tiruchirappalli District Freedom Fighters Congress Committee.
18. Sastri, K.A. Nilakanta (1966). *A History of South India*. Madras: University of Madras.
19. Sivagnanam, M.P. (1983). *Viduthalai Poril Tamizhagam* (in Tamil), Vols. I and II. Madras: Poongodi Padippagam.
20. Velmani, K.S.K. (1998). *Tiruchirappalli District Gazetteer*, Vol. I. Chennai: Government of Tamil Nadu.
21. Venkatesan, G. (1985). *History of Freedom Struggle in India*. Coimbatore: Rainbow Publications.

22. Venkatesan, K. (2004). *Indiya Viduthalai Porata Varalaru* (in Tamil). Rajapalayam: V.C. Publications.
23. Zaidi, A.M. (1979). *The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress*, Vol. VII. New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd.