

RISE OF INDIAN NATIONALISM: THE FIRST EXPERIENCE OF PEOPLE OF SALEM REGION

P. SINGARAM

Ph.D – Research Scholar (Full Time)
Department of History, Annamalai University
Annamalainagar, Tamilnadu, India

Abstract:

Gandhi's entry into the Indian politics set a new trend for political struggle involving masses. With the launching of Non-Co-operation Movement aiming at mass participation Gandhi evolved suitably the programmes. Hence different walks of people easily joined in the main stream of Indian politics. The movement did grind mass base not only in urban, but also in rural areas. The people of Salem region indulged in swadeshi, boycott, temperance, no tax and other campaigns in the support of the movement, which otherwise gave an experience of nationalism to its people. The movement lasted for two years and then suspended in February 1922.

Key Words: Gandhi – Non-Co-operation Programmes, Swadesi, Boycott, Temperance, No Tax, Suspension.

In the special session of the Indian National Congress held at Calcutta on 4 September 1920 Gandhi introduced non-violent, non-cooperation resolution advocating swadeshi, boycott of schools, councils, titles, government functions, etc.,¹ The resolution was confirmed at the Nagpur session of the Congress held in December 1920 under the presidentship of Salem Vijayaragavachari.² Adhering the resolution of the Congress the people of Salem region began to non-cooperate with the British government by organizing and participating in a number of anti-

British demonstrations. This gave them a new experience of nationalism and chance to exhibit it in a proper manner.

In support of the Non-Co-operation Movement, the Congressmen in Salem region began to propagate swadeshi ideologies through meetings, processions and door-to-door propaganda.³ In September 1920, the Congress leaders of the Salem region such as C. Rajagopalachari, C. Vijayarahavachari, E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker and K.V. Subba Rao. gave wider publicity to swadeshi and boycott of foreign goods.⁴ For the first time in history Congress Committees were constituted at different levels in the region. Heads of the Committees took the responsibility of mobilizing mass support as well as propagating the ideologies of non-violent non-co-operation and truth.⁵

In August 1920, the District Congress Committee Salem conducted a number of public meetings, rallies, door to door propaganda and indoor meetings to popularize the non-co-operation ideologies.⁶ On 28 August, 1920 a public meeting was held at Salem advocating swadeshi.⁷ On 28 August, 1920, a procession was organized at Salem town which ended with a meeting wherein the local leaders asked the people to use khadar and other hand-made articles.⁸

On 28 August, a meeting was held under the presidentship of Rajagopalachari at Salem with more than thousand people. On that occasion, he opened a swadeshi store in Salem the town. In course of time, its branches were opened all over the Salem region.⁹ Rajagopalachari and other leaders toured the region and exhorted the public to make use of khaddar, abstaining from foreign made clothes. On 29 August, a public meeting was held at Kondappanaykanpatti in near Salem, where in Narashima Iyer, with khadar attire spoke

advocating the merits of khadar.¹⁰ He insisted that self reliance and self respect would be obtained through khaddar. P.Varadarajulu Naidu declared in a conference at Salem that he did not agree with Gandhi's conception of non-violent non-co-operation and that the violence was the only thing to bring the government to its senses.¹¹ Such a 'Pro-Cheryen' attitude did not let the non-cooperation activities slackened. Gandhi visited Salem Town. He was received at the Salem railway station by Venkattappa Chettiar, Municipal Chairman, Salem, P. Varadarajulu Naidu, Adinarayana Chettiar and Srinivasa Sastri of Gugai and other Congress workers.¹² The Municipal Chairman, which address Venkattappa Chettiar appreciated the local people for their active participation in the Non-co-operation Movement. He also requested the Congress people to include Non-violence and Hindu-Muslim Unity in their working plan.¹³ The "Sourashtra Association" organized a swadhesi propaganda meeting. The assemblage was including of women and lower strata of the society.

In support of the Non-Cooperation Movement the Congress leaders of Salem asked the leader an public not to vote and the leaders not to contest the election.¹⁵ C.Rajagopalachari toured and asked the people to boycott the election as decided by the Calcutta session of the Congress. Vijayaragavachari, S.Srinivasa Iyengar and Adinarayana Chettiar who had filed their nomination, withdrew their candidature. Finding lack of support another candidate too decided to withdraw his candidature and they canvassed the voters to boycott the polls.¹⁶ Despite such measures, Justice Party own over the election in the Madras Presidency. The Party formed the ministry under Subbarayalu Reddiar. The papers of the Justice Party supported council entry. The party leader did intense in support of the party.¹⁷

The boycott of law courts was one of the major off shoot of the Non-Co-operation Movement in Salem region. The lawyers V.S.Subramaniya Iyer, M.Ramaswamy Iyer,

K.V.Subba Rao and D.S.Gopalachari gave up their practice.¹⁸ In January 1921 M.G. Vasudevayya renounced his practice and spared his time to promote Congress ideologies and in connection with he was arrested on 10 January 1921.¹⁹ Leaflets, posters and texts were distributed.²⁰ There were instances of writing anti British messages on the walls in the region.²¹ A.R.Vaidyanatha Iyer, the sub-divisional Magistrate of Salem issued an order which banned such writing on walls. He also placed restrictions on the issue of leaflets. He also passed an order which stipulated that there should not be any picketing of shops or place of business with the motive of enforcing their closure or suspension of business and not to intimidate anyone who desire to carry on with their usual business.²²

The Congress supporters of the region as a way of Non-co-operating with the government withdrew their children from government as well as aided schools and colleges. In Salem region, the students left their school and colleges and participated in the Congress programmes. At Salem a Placard procession was organized involving the students who abstained their scholars condemning the Salem Magistrate for his activity of flying the union jack flag.²³ Prominent leaders of Salem like V.M.Ramaswamy Iyer, K.V.Subba Rao and M.G.Vasudevayya withdrew their children from the government and grant-in-aid in schools.²⁴ Bupathi Lakshmana Raju of Salem who delivered a speech at Ambur on 13 February 1921. He said, "...we should have national education. Then you will understand the British injustice. Then they would find it difficult to live. Until you get rid of your timidity you will not attain Swaraj. It may happened that you should take up sword and fight". He was arrested while he was addressing.²⁵ M.G.Vasudevayya, V.M.Ramaswamyayyar, N.Rama Rao, D.S.Gopalachari were also imprisoned for instigating the people against the government.²⁶ Women of the district also stood in support of boycott of schools. They demanded the starting of a National Girls School in Salem

and the inclusion of spinning for girls as a subject in the schools. They also came out with offers of financial help to this ventures.²⁷

As a mark of exhibiting their protest people of Salem did not associate with any functions organized in the name of government.²⁸ It is worthy to role here one of important incident. The Prince of Wales visited India in 1921. Following this visit Lord Willingdon, the Governor of Madras toured the presidency. Attempts were made to boycott him in Salem. But, to earn the good will of the Governor his ministers in the Council from Salem welcomed the Governor. The Salem Municipal Council resolved not to present him with a welcome address. The members of the council contended that they were no longer under the control of the Governor and there was no need to present a welcome address to the Governor. The Governor was greeted with black flags at Harur. Finding the anti-government spirit the Governor suspended his tour in the region and left for Madras on 16 April 1921.²⁸

The government reacted against the non-cooperation by taking stringent measures against them. The protesters were lathi charged. In Salem region alone 147 persons were arrested in 1920-21 for taking part in different demonstrations against the British. P. Varadarajulu Naidu of Salem in his *Prapanchamitran*, wrote in favour of the movement and criticised the suppressive measures of the sort. The government with a view of suppresses the publication of it, demanded Rs. 1000 as security. He was also arrested and sentenced to nine months imprisonment for the publication of an article in the October 1921.³⁰

Endnotes:

1. D.G. Tendulkar, Mahatma, Vol. I (New Delhi: Govt. of India, 1953), p.294.
2. B.M.Taunk, Non-Cooperation Movement in Indian Politics 1919-1924 – A Historical Study, (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakasam, 1978), pp.68-72.
3. The Hindu, 25, September 1920
4. Fortnightly Report, September 1920
5. The Mail, 27 August 1920
6. Swadeshmitran, 27 August 1920
7. The Hindu, 22 August 1920
8. Nava Jothi, 22 August 1920
9. Fortnightly Report, August 1920
10. Ibid
11. Fortnightly Report, February 1921
12. The Hindu, 28 July 1921
13. Under Secretary Secret Safe File, 428/1920
14. The Hindu, 15 September 1921
15. Fortnightly Report, September 1921
16. Ibid
17. Justice, 16 December 1920
18. Ibid
19. Govt. Order 265, Public Administration Govt. of India
20. The Hindu, 5 December 1921
21. Swadeshmitran, 15 February 1921
22. Under Secretary Secret Safe File, 347, June 1922
23. Govt. Order 1020, Public Administration Public Administration Govt. of India, 1921

24. Ibid
25. David Arnold, The Congress in Tamil Nadu, p.53
26. Under Secretary Secret Safe File, 307, p(4), July 1921
27. Fortnightly Report, August 1922
28. Govt. Order 838, August 1920
29. Ibid
30. Govt. Order 1020, Public Administration Govt. of India