

Individual Satyagraha in Nagapattinam District – A Study

R. Alamelu
M.A., M.Phil., Associate Professor/Head
Department of History
A.D.M. College for Women
Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu, India

Dr. D. Julius Vijaya kumar
M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., Associate Professor
PG & Research Department of History
TBML College, Poraiyar
Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract:- The Individual Satyagraha is a salient feature of freedom struggle. The Individual Satyagraha Movement in Nagapattinam District was very active. A persistent antiwar propaganda was started in the various parts of the Districts. It took several forms Anti-war pamphlets were distributed; Anti-war speeches were made; Anti-war posters struck to walls; Antiwar propaganda was carried on from house to house and antiwar slogans were shouted in public places. Ettukudi is a small village in Thirukkuvalai Taluk conducted Padayatra. All forms of Individual Satyagraha were carried out by the freedom fighters. People of all religions lived in Nagapattinam District had participated vigorously in the freedom struggle.

Keywords:- Individual Satyagraha, Nagapattinam District, Padayatra, Anti War Pamphlets, Significant Role.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Second World War (1939 - 45) was a turning point in the history of freedom struggle in India. The war began when Hitler invaded Poland on 1st September 1939. On 3rd September 1939, Lord Linlithgow the Viceroy of India declared war against Germany without consulting the Indian leaders particularly the Congress. Indian troops were sent to the various theatres of war for the defence of the British Empire. India had been forced to contribute and to participate in the war. The Viceroy's declaration was condemned by the Congress leaders. The Congress prepared the country for freedom by assuming administrative responsibility and by concentrating on constructive work. The congress decided not to participate in the war. The congress insisted on the people's right to refuse to participate in a war waged purely to save British Imperialism. All the Congress Ministries were asked to resign in Tamil Nadu Sri Rajagopalachari's resigned in October 1939 and the Government was carried on by the Governor with the aid of civilian advisers. The war situation grew grave during the middle 1940 and Great Britain was in dire need of India's real support in the prosecution of her war effort. On 8th August 1940, Lord Linlithgow made an important announcement with subsequently came to be known as the "August Offer". The August Offer conceded the right of Indians to draft their own constitution and promised Dominion Status after the war. But the offer however fell far short of expectations regarding formation of war Advisory Council. The August Offer failed to fulfill the expectations of the people. Even Leader like Gandhi, Nehru and Rajagopalachari who were for extending conditional

cooperation to the British War effort turned against them. Gandhi was invited by the Congress to lead the movement against the British Government. Gandhi wanted the movement to be symbolic in character in order to register India's moral protest against the British attitude and to draw the attention of the world to the right of Indians to freedom. This was Gandhi's direct action plan to resist the British war efforts. On 13th October 1940, Gandhiji got the approval of his scheme of Individual Satyagraha in the meeting of Congress working committee at Wardha.

The Campaign was inaugurated on 17th October 1940, when Vinoba Bhava offered Individual Civil Disobedience as the first Satyagrahi. He started his march making antiwar speeches in the village of Paunur and was arrested. Jawaharlal Nehru was the second Satyagrahi. He was arrested at Gorakhpur even before he formally began the campaign. This provocative act forced Gandhiji to extend the scope of the civil disobedience to include members of the working committee, the AICC and the central provincial legislatures.

II. INDIVIDUAL SATYAGRAHA IN TAMILNADU

The Individual Satyagraha is a salient feature of freedom struggle. Everywhere congress committees were formed; antiwar speeches were made; anti war Pamphlets were distributed antiwar posters were displayed. The Tamil and Andra provincial committees transformed themselves into Satyagraha councils and enrolled volunteers. All this antiwar propaganda led to a very large number of arrests and imprisonment for different terms.

Among the most prominent congress leaders in the presidency who were arrested and sent to jail for offering Individual Satyagraha were Rajaji and Satyamurthi. On 1st December 1940, Rajaji wrote letters to all the members of the provincial war committee requesting all of them not to help the British War with men and money. Rajaji was arrested on 3rd December. Satyamurthi offered Individual Satyagraha on 13th December by shouting anti-war slogans. He was arrested and sentenced to 9 months simple imprisonment. T.S.S. Rajan was jailed even before Rajaji. He opened the campaign in Trichirappalli in November. He was convicted and sentenced to one year rigorous punishment and a fine of Rs.1000/-. T.S.S. Rajan was the first Individual Satyagrahi in Tamil Nadu. K. Kamaraj assumed charge of the Tamil Nadu Congress toured across the presidency prepared a list of Satyagrahis to lead the movement in turn.

Among the members of the central legislative assembly who were arrested the most popular leaders were C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar, T.S. Avinashilingam Chetty and P.S. Kumarasamiraja, B. Sambamurti, Rukmani Lakshmi pathi, Deputy Speaker of the Madras Legislative Assembly, K. Venkataswamy Naidu, M. Bhaktavatsalam, N.S. Varadhachari, N. Bapineedu, Ahmad Thambi Mohideen Maricar, Kaleswara Rao, K.P. Karanth, P.S. Murti and A. B. Shetty were the other public figures to court arrest.

Ahmad Thambi Mohideen Maricar of Nagapattinam took part in Individual Satyagraha in 1940. He was arrested and kept in Tiruchirappalli, Madras jail for 6 months under defence of India Rules. He was one among the 41 active members of the Congress and Parliamentary Secretary in Rajaji's ministry 1937.

The individual Satyagraha Movement in the Presidency continued unabated into 1941 although many leaders were already in jail. Persons from the commercial and land owning classes as well as publicists went to jail in 1941. Among them Pattukkottai Nadimuthu Pillai, Nachiappa Gounder of Salem, T.S. Chokkalingam (Editor of Dinamani, a Tamil daily) S.S. Vasana, (Editor Anandavikatan, a Tamil weekly) and R. Krishnamurti (Editor, Kalki a Tamil weekly) deserve special mention.

R. Krishnamurti, (Editor, Kalki a Tamil weekly) belonged to Mayiladuthurai Taluk of Nagapattinam District entered into freedom movement in his school days itself. He took part in Individual Satyagraha and got imprisonment.

The Number of arrests and fines imposed on Satyagrahis in Tamil Nadu were 424 and Rs.29,030/-. As the movement gained momentum, more and more people came forward to offer Satyagraha and court imprisonment. As a result the Government was eventually compelled to ignore all but the leaders and to arrest only those who were influential. Gandhiji instructed the non-arrested Satyagrahis to perform Padayatra (to march on foot) to Delhi carrying on antiwar propaganda on the way. It was then that the Slogan Chalo Delhi (go to Delhi) was raised.

III. NAGAPATTINAM DISTRICT

Nagapattinam District is a unique District with all its historical and cultural significance. Nagapattinam is one of the constituents of Cholamandalam, acclaimed as the most prominent among the ancient Tamil kingdoms. Coastal town Nagapattinam was the Headquarters of a region during the period. Nagapattinam is derived from Nagar, referring to people from Sri Lanka who settled here and Pattinam referring to town. During the tenth century, Nagapattinam came under the complete sway of the cholas, who were the most powerful rulers of South India in this period. It became later one of the earliest settlements of the Portuguese on the east coast and was called by them "the city of Choramandel". It was naturally one of the first centres of the Portuguese mission. The Portuguese had commercial contacts with this town during the Thanjavur Nayaks rule - Sevvappa Nayakkar and Acchuthappa Nayakkar. The Portuguese commercial centre was established in 1554.

Later this town full into the hands of British in 1781 From 1799 to 1845 CE Nagapattinam was the Headquarters of Tanjore District. Nagapattinam and Nagore were incorporated as a single municipality in 1866 C.E. The town remained one of the chief ports to the Madras Presidency. Nagapattinam District, the land of communal harmony, was carved out by bifurcating the composite Thanjavur District on 18-10-1991. This district has traditionally been referred to as East Thanjavur and paddy granary of South India.

The District of Nagapattinam lies on the shores of the Bay of Bengal between latitude 10.7906°N and Longitude 79.8428°E an area of 2,715 square Kilometres (1048 Sqml). The District Capital, Nagapattinam lies on the eastern coast 350 kms down south of the State capital Chennai and of Tiruchirappalli. It has an average elevation of 9 metres (30 feet) above the mean sea level. The district has a coast line of 187 Kilometres. This is Peninsular delta District surrounded by Bay of Bengal on the East, Palk Strait on the South and land on the West and Northern Side. The district has two Lok Sabha constituencies, namely Nagapattinam and Mayiladuthurai. It has 8 taluks: Kilvelur, Kuthalam, Mayiladuthurai, Nagapattinam, Sirkazhi, Tharangambadi, Thirukkuvilai, Vedaranyam. Nagapattinam District played an important role in the history of freedom movement. The freedom fighters participated in all stages of freedom movement from 1919 to 1947.

IV. INDIVIDUAL SATYAGRAHA IN NAGAPATTINAM DISTRICT

The Individual Satyagraha Movement in Nagapattinam District was very active. Nagapattinam district, the land of communal harmony was carved out by bifurcating the composite Thanjavur district on 18-10-1991. During the Satyagraha Campaign, Thanjavur became more active. A persistent antiwar propaganda was started in the various parts of the districts in Tanjore, in Kumbakonam, in Arantangi and in Nagapattinam. It took several forms Anti-war pamphlets were distributed; Anti-war speeches were made; Anti-war posters struck to walls; Antiwar propaganda was carried on from house to house and antiwar slogans were shouted in public places. In Nagapattinam alone 17 persons were arrested for participation in individual Satyagraha. One of the form, anti-war pamphlets were distributed by two persons, Haja Allauddin and S.K. Natarajan in 1st December 1940. Through the leaflets they requested all the sons of India to abstain from joining the present war and from rendering any financial assistance. For its prosecution, they were arrested and sentenced imprisonment for 5 months. Apart from them, in Nagapattinam the congress members under the leadership of K. Lakshmana Naidu who was permitted by Mahatma Gandhiji participated in the agitation. They conducted padayatra and raised slogans against war on 15th June 1941. They organised a meeting at Ellaiyamman Sannathi Street at Tiruvarur. In that meeting another group of Padayatra under the leadership of Ettukudi Kanniah also participated. Thus in Nagapattinam Taluk several village people who were permitted by Gandhiji took part in this Satyagraha in large numbers. It became really peoples movement. All the

Satyagrahis were taken into custody under Defence of India Act and imprisonment at Trichy and Madras Central jails.

Ettukudi is a small village in Thirukkuvalai Taluk is famous for the temple of Lord Muruga K. Kanniah, a freedom fighter, was an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi with a sense of sacrifice, he made Individual Satyagraha during 1941. In his school days itself he was the President of student congress and joined the freedom movement. He became the Secretary of Ettukudi Village Congress Committee. He issued a notice that showed under the leadership of the Panchayat Board President K. Natarajan, congress meeting to be held on 28-05-1941 and K. Kanniah was going to conduct individual Satyagraha by shouting anti war slogans. Accordingly he started the Individual Satyagraha at 09-00 A.M. on 29-05-1941 in front of Panchayat Board High School, Thirukkuvalai. As the congress Secretary, he followed and carried out the direction of Mahatma Gandhi as a servant selected for the purpose with devotion. He organised Padayatra, Delhi Chalo Movement, started his march by walk. This Padayatra – one of the form of Individual Satyagraha was conducted from 29-05-1941 to 25-06-1941. During this Padayatra he emphasised the Satyagraha Movement among the village people. He went to almost all villages by walk and made anti-war propaganda. Nearly 60 villages located in Tiruvarur, Thiruthuraiipoondi, Kilvelur, Nagapattinam witnessed the Satyagraha March. During the year 1941, Individual Satyagraha was in full swing. The freedom fighters from various districts such as Ramanapuram, Tirunelveli, Madurai joined and participated in this Individual Satyagraha. They made antiwar propaganda by conducting public meetings and raised antiwar slogans by giving their moral support to Ettukudi Kanniah. These public meetings were attended by Thiagaraja Chettiar of Devakottai, Sriraman of Pazhaniyanur of Sivagangai, N.K.A. Ayyappa Naickar of Narayanapuram, Muthukali Thevar of Valathur. This showed that there is no regional differences among the freedom fighters of Tamil Nadu.

Another important feature of this Individual Satyagraha was freedom fighters delivered speeches on “War and our unity” R. Singaravelu and T.K. Ramanatha Rao of Tiruvarur, Velayatha Raja of Rajapalayam, V. Nataraja of Sathur, Ramadoss Naidu of Alivalam, Ramachandran of Vijayapuram were the Veteran freedom fighters who spoke on freedom and supported Kanniah. Government only witnessed the meeting of Satyagrahis in the villages without arresting them and allowed them to indulge in Satyagraha. Likewise, Kanniah of Ettukudi took active part in freedom struggle and anti-war propaganda. Another important fact that the people of Ettukudi and the surrounding villages gave his hearty cooperation for his Satyagraha and attended his public meetings in large numbers. His contribution to Indian freedom movement is an example for the future younger generation to develop their patriotic deeds.

He maintained a personal diary of events about the daily progress of Individual Satyagraha. His personal diary revealed how Kanniah was very active in echoing the

feelings of the mind of the people in Tirukkuvalai area against British Imperialism.

In other parts of Nagapattinam Districts, Individual Satyagraha was conducted by the great congress leaders. In Mayiladuthurai Taluk, congress leader G. Narayanasamy Naidu involved in Individual Satyagraha and arrested from 23-01-1941 to 20-02-1941. He got imprisonment for 29 days at Mayiladuthurai jail. Along with him freedom fighters, S. Ramasamy, T. Chinnadurai, R. Govindan, K. Nandagopal of Mannalmedu actively participated in this movement. On 04-04-1941, Nandagopal made antiwar propaganda in the villages. On 16.04.1941 he conducted Padayatra to Madras. After 14 days, he reached Madras on 30-04-1941. On 1st May he was arrested and imprisoned at Madras Central jail. Totally 20 freedom fighters contributed towards Individual Satyagraha.

Tharangambadi Taluk of Nagapattinam District deserves special mention in the history of freedom movement. Thillayadi Valliammai, Young woman patriot was a well known freedom fighter. She fought against the British at South Africa and occupied a special place in the history of freedom movement. T.A. Subramaniam Achari, native of Thillaiyadi. One among the personal friends of Mahatma Gandhiji. After participating civil disobedience movement along with Mahatma Gandhi at South Africa returned to India in 1910 and continued his patriotism towards our Nation. He involved in Individual Satyagraha of Mahatma Gandhiji. He died on 20-09-1942 and sacrificed his life for our Nation. K.R. Chandrahasan, T.N. Mahadevan, Kolandai Vadivel, S. Ramalingam were the other freedom fighters also participated in this Satyagraha.

Sirkali Taluk, birth place of popular freedom fighter Nilakanda Brahmachari, is famous for congress movement conducted Mahatma Gandhiji's Individual Satyagraha. Narayanasamy Chettiar, R. Ethirajalu, T. Narayana Iyengar, Sundararajan Iyengar, Swaminatha Iyer, S.V. Muthaiah, Subbarayan, Thiruvikrama Narayanan, Venkatrammaiah of Sirkali Taluk staged the last phase of Indian freedom movement (i.e) Individual Satyagraha in 1940-41. They got imprisonment under the Defence of India rules.

V. CONCLUSION

The study explored the fact that individual satyagraha was conducted in all parts of Nagapattinam District particularly in villages. The patriotic contribution of freedom fighters enriched the historical importance of Nagapattinam District especially in the history of freedom movement. It also proved that the congress movement was vehement in character.

The Aim of Individual Satyagraha was to express the people's feeling that they were not interested in the war. Freedom fighters expressed the feelings of the people of Nagapattinam District. The descriptive study is a fitting tribute to the freedom fighters who made individual Satyagraha in Nagapattinam District. Their regional contribution should be honoured and properly recorded in the annals of history. It is true that after the visit of Mahatma

Gandhiji to Nagapattinam district, freedom movement gained momentum.

If we examine the history of freedom movement in Nagapattinam District we can see that the freedom movement has Steady growth and reached the highest level of participation in Individual Satyagraha of 1940-41. The Individual Satyagraha was not to seek Independence but to affirm the right of speech. People of all religions lived in Nagapattinam District had participated vigorously in the freedom struggle. The present generation should realised the heroic deeds of those freedom fighters and should derive inspiration from their patriotic deeds.

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