



TODDY SHOP PICKETING UNDER GANDHIJI'S NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN MADURAI – A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Gandhiji held the view that if we get rid of the evil habit of drinking crocus of rupees could be saved and many wicked things would cease. Hence he advocated the picketing of liquor shops and the temperance campaign was one of the features of non-cooperation activity all over India. In Tamil Nadu the picketing of toddy shops was vigorously launched in 1921 by 'Periyar' E.V. Ramasamy of Erode. 'Periyar' E.V. Ramasamy's wife Nagammai and his sister Kannammal also came forward to take part in the picketing activity. 'Periyar' E.V. Ramasamy and many volunteers were arrested and sentenced to one month imprisonment for taking part in the toddy shop picketing.

Key words: *Evil habit, Liquor shops, Picketing, Toddy shops, Volunteers.*

1.INTRODUCTION

In January 1922, Congress propaganda meetings were held daily in important centers of Madurai town and R. SrinivasaVaradhan, Sadasivam, P. SundaramPillai and others spoke on 'Anti-drink', 'Boycott' and 'National Volunteer Corps'. With the intension of launching the picketing of toddy shops, National volunteers were enlisted in Madurai and the Bharadashram founded by Subramania Siva took much efforts in this regard. SrinivasaVaradhan, Krishna Kunthu and many other Congressmen became members of the Bharatashram and did propaganda for the picketing campaign. Public meetings were also held under the auspices of the Khilafat committee in Madurai near Sungam Mosque and South Gate Mosque. Muslim leaders like JanabImamuddin Sahib, JanabAlauddin Sahib, JanabSamsuddin Sahib and Sultan Bagdad spoke in the meetings about the launching of toddy shops picketing. The volunteers office for the picketing of toddy shops was opened at the Bamboo shop Mosque, with Sultan Bagdadi as the captain. The national Volunteers commenced the picketing of liquor shops in Madurai on 25 January 1922. They picketed the liquor shops at Goripalayam and other centers in the town and nineteen of them were arrested by the police.



The arrested were tried on January 26 and sentenced to one year RI with a fine of Rs 100/- under Section 145 and 341 of IPC. The volunteers declined to pay the fine and accepted another three months imprisonment. Thus for merely conducting a peaceful campaign against drinks the nineteen volunteers of Madurai were awarded 15 months R.I. The volunteers sentenced were committed to Trichy Central Jail. One important feature about the conviction is that 10 among the 19 convicted were Muslims. The January 1922 picketings in Madurai thus clearly showed that the Khilafat movement merged into the non-cooperation movement and also indicated that the local Congress Committee and Khilafat Committee worked in unison. Another important feature is that apart from the nineteen convictions in Madurai town there were no other convictions in the entire district of Madurai during April 1920-January 1922.

1.1.LAUNCH OF TODDY SHOP PICKETING

Picketing was continued on 27 January 1922 at the Goripalayam liquor shops under the leadership of P. Sundaram Pillai and two others like N.Narayana Iyer and Haji Syed Samsuddin Sahib were accused of disturbing the public tranquility and they were directed by the District Magistrate under Section 144 to abstain for two months from presiding over or attending any public meeting in Madurai district and from delivering any speech either in public or to a gathering of more than five persons at any place in Madurai.

1.2.GANDHI VERSUS TODDY SHOP

As a protest against the policy of virulent repression resorted to by the Government of British India, Gandhiji planned for the launch of civil disobedience movement in the form of no-tax campaign at Bardoli in Gujarat. But the violence at Chauri Chaura (UP) on February 5, 1922 which resulted in the death of 22 policemen terribly shocked Mahatma Gandhi. The Congress Working Committee met at Bardoli where Gandhiji had camped to inaugurate the civil disobedience movement and resolved on February 12, to suspend the Satyagraha Campaign. As Gandhiji felt that the atmosphere in the country was not propitious for launching drastic campaigns like civil disobedience, he only advised the congressmen to stop all activities designed to court arrest and imprisonment and concentrate their efforts on the constructive Programme which involved the people in the activities like hand-spinning and weaving. Leaders like Motilal Nehru and Lajpat Rai wanted to isolate Chaura and to go on with the civil disobedience. But the All India Congress Committee (AICC) which met at Delhi, on February 24 and 25 endorsed the resolution of the Working Committee to suspend the Satyagraha campaign. The All India Khilafat Conference held at Delhi on February 25 and 26, 1922 under the presidency of Mohammed Chotani of Bombay, however resolved to continue the non-violent non-



cooperation for the attainment of Khilafat demands. But Turkey's new leader Kamal Pasha deposed the Sultan of Turkey and abolished the Caliphate in November 1922. Even after this event, the Khilafatists held some conferences in an attempt to secure Muslim control of the Holy places. The activities of the Khilafatists may be said to have ceased by the end of 1923.

The anti-drink campaign persisted in Madurai and some other towns in Tamil Nadu even after the suspension of the Non-cooperation Movement in February 1922. There were some reports about the toddy shop picketing in Madurai during May 1922. Sheik Mohideen, Ganapathi Pillai and Krishnaswamy Naidu were sentenced to one year Simple Imprisonment for taking part in the picketing in Madurai in July 1922. During August 1922 seven volunteers of Madurai went to Nilakottai (45 kms away from Madurai) and made efforts to stop the [people from taking part in the toddy shop auctions. They arranged bhajans and passed through the streets of Nilakottai distributing pamphlets about the evils of drinking. They appealed to the people not to take part in the toddy shop auctions to be held on August 11, 1922. All the seven volunteers were arrested and produced before the Joint-Magistrate. As the volunteers refused to pay the fine imposed on them by the Magistrate they were sentenced to 2 days Simple Imprisonment.

As a result of the successful today shop picketing and the anti-drink propaganda made by the Congress Volunteers in Madurai town and some parts of Madurai district, the toddy sales in Madurai district went down from Rs.7,56,420 in 1920-21 to Rs.4,89,142 in 1921-22. Nonetheless, the non-cooperation movement did not achieve the primary objects for which it was launched. Gandhiji was also arrested and sentenced to six years RI for writing 'seditious' articles in Young India. Swaraj was not attained and the wrongs done to Khilafat or to Punjab were not remedied. The boycott features of the Non-cooperation Movement produced only insignificant results. The Movement in Madurai and elsewhere only disclosed that national awakening had penetrated the minds of the people from every stratum of the society and that the country had made great advance in fearlessness and self-sacrifice. The movement also initiated certain nation-building activities like hand spinning and weaving. The Civil Disobedience Movement, the second campaign in the history of India's struggle for freedom under Gandhiji's leadership, began in 1930 and until then the Congressmen in the country devoted their time in the constructive programmed and in some other nationalistic activities.

1.3.THE 1923 PICKETINGS OF MADURAI

Apart from the Nagpur flag struggle, the year 1923 is significant for one more event of national importance (i.e.) the July picketing in Madurai. After the suspension of non-cooperation movement in February 1922, the civil disobedience enquiry committees appointed by the AICC recommended that



provincial committees be authorized to sanction civil disobedience of a limited character on their own responsibility. The AICC also approved this recommendation and picketing were organized in Madurai on the basis of the provision. The main factor that contributed to the July 1923 picketing in Madurai was the return of the nineteen volunteers of Madurai convicted in January 1922 after undergoing 15 months. These patriots became members of national volunteers, an institution organized by R.Srinivasavaradhan. The national volunteers arranged *bhajans*, sang Bharati's songs and created nationalist awakening in Madurai town. About 200 volunteers were recruited and they were given sufficient training in the picketing process. The national volunteers held a meeting on June 23 under the presidentship of N.Narayanyer and passed a resolution requesting the district congress committee, Madurai, to permit them to picket liquor shops. They met again on June 28 and resolved to commence the picketing of liquor and toddy shops from July 2. They were given permission by the working committee of the Madurai district congress which had reported this matter to the provincial congress committee and sought for a grant of Rs. 1000/- for the expenses connected with the picketing work. Dr. E. S. Ramasubbu, LMP was selected to be the caption volunteers for the whole district and Sundararajayengar, Ramanathapillai and Irulandiservai were selected captains for the various batches of the volunteers. Public meetings were conducted to inform the people about the proposed picketing and notices were also distributed to them requesting to maintain perfect peace and a non-violent atmosphere in the places where picketing were to be held.

Picketing's of toddy shops was commenced in the evening of July 2, and toddy shop at Kosavapalayam and Goripalayam were picketed by the volunteers. The campaign was encouragingly successful and not even a single customer went into shop. On July 4 picketing operations were extended to the arrack shops at Sellur, Munisalai and Teppakulam. On July 5 picketing was continued in all the shops and on July 6 it was extended to the Pillaiyarpalayam toddy shop. Large crowds of people gathered before the Goripalayam toddy shop on July 6 and a group of 12 volunteers with Moideenpir (1889-1981) as their captain picketed that shop. The district magistrate (Russel) who visited the place on horseback asked the volunteers to disperse. But as the volunteers were resolute in the picketing campaigns they ignored the collector's direction and sat on the ground before the toddy shop. They were all ordered to be arrested. Another batch of volunteers about 6 in number picketed the Goripalayam toddy shop on the same day under the leadership of Swaminathamudaliar they were also arrested. All the 18 volunteers were prosecuted and on July 7 they were sentenced to 8 days RI.

The national volunteers of Madurai unmindful of the sufferings of prison-life held picketing daily in the town. Apart from the volunteers belonging to Madurai town, a large number of volunteers from Ramnad, Tirupattur, Virudhunager and Dindigul arrived at Madurai to take part in the picketing



campaign. KarmaveeraarK.Kamaraj was one of those who addressed the people in Madurai about the picketing campaigns.

The Madurai congressman took all efforts to make the picketing operations peaceful. An appeal was sent to the press by A.VaidyanathaIyer, Maulana Sahib, Narayanan Iyer and S.Ramanathan on July 14, inviting the cooperation of the people of Madurai to make the picketing campaign perfectly peaceful. They were asked to keep calm even under the worst provocative circumstances. A notice to this effect was issued by the Madurai district congress committee on July 15. It appealed to the citizens of Madurai to stop the evil Practice of drinking and to make the picketing campaign a success by the following Gandhiji's creed of non-violence. By tom-tom also the local congressmen prohibited the crowding of the people before toddy shops, the court and during the volunteers march to jail and the court house. In the public meeting held under the auspices of the local congress committee on July 18, with N.Narayanalyer in the chair 'periyar' E.V.Ramasamy, A.Kandasamyreddiar and A.VaidyanathaIyer spoke exhorting the people not to assemble anywhere when the volunteers picketed the toddy shop. Though the picketing operations were peaceful the local authorities in Madurai arrested about 112 volunteers and 92 of them were sentenced to one year RI on security conditions.

Madurai picketing campaign coincided with the Nagpur Satyagraha and Rrajaji, the president of the TNPCC visited Madurai on July 23 and suggested to the local congress leaders and volunteers to discontinue picketing in as much as the flag fight at Nagpur was assuming serious proportions. Responding to the call given Rajaji, the TNPCC met at Trichy on July 24 and decided to stop picketing in Madurai. The committee also passed resolutions praising Madurai volunteers for their glorious non-violent struggle. In pursuance of the resolution passed by the TNPCC, a meeting of the working committee of the Madurai district congress was held on August 10 and resolution was passed stopping the picketing of liquor shops by the congress volunteers in Madurai.

1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 1923 PICKETING OF MADURAI

In the whole of India during 1923, Madurai only save the recrudescence of non-cooperation movement in the form of toddy shops picketing. The campaign was held for about one month and it attained considerable dimensions. The picketing operations were also quite peaceful. But there are some reports which say that the methods of the volunteers employed in the picketing campaigns in Madurai during July 1923 had degenerated into actual obstruction and abuse of those who wished to approach the toddy shops. For a question raised by C.Ramalingareddy in the Madras legislative



council on August 19, 1924, the law member has stated that no person was convicted for picketing liquor shops in Madurai and several persons were about over to keep the peace because of their violent conduct towards those visiting the liquor shops. Diligent studies of the proceeding of the picketing operations in Madurai during July 1923, however, reveal that picketing operations were conducted in a peaceful manner. The volunteers sometimes prostrated before the customers approaching the toddy and arrack shops and requested them not to take the drinks. The action of the volunteers in prostrating the liquor shops is to be considered not as an obstruction to traffic but as an act of intense nationalism and self-suffering on their part to work for the national cause.

The government of Madras also opined that many of the volunteers who picketed liquor shops in Madurai during July 1923 were merely hirelings who adopted politics as a profession more paying than that normal avocation. But this opinion of the government was also a gross miscalculation. The volunteers from Madurai town, Dindigul and from some places in Ramnad District conducted anti-liquor campaign in Madurai in a genuine spirit of commendable self-sacrifice. They held peaceful picketing and suffered in prisons as true followers of Gandhiji's creed of non-violence. A few volunteers of Moideenpir, Pitchaikonar, Sadasivam, Krishnamari and Subbarayalu sentenced in July 1923 had already undergone the miserable prison life for having taken part in the 1922 January picketing. But in the love for their nation they forgot the sufferings of prison life and courted arrest for the second time. Not only that when the government of Madras ordered for the release of sixteen persons among the hundred volunteers convicted in Madurai, on condition that they should sign a statement expressing regret for action (of picketing) none accepted the condition and none therefore was releasing the 92 Madurai prisoners sentenced in 1923 was discussed in the Madras legislative council but the government did not consider their release as the prisoners refused to apologize for their picketing action. The Tamil Nadu provincial congress which met at Salem on September 4, 1923 aptly congratulated in Madurai congress volunteers for their bravery and suffering undergone in their attempt to remove the drink-evil.

Another point of importance is that the July picketing in 1923 produced a considerable fall in the prices fetched from the sales of toddy shop leases in Madurai District. In other districts the sales seemed to have pursued their normal course. The interest created by the July 1923 picketing was a factor that motivated the Madurai Municipal Council to pass a resolution prohibiting the opening of shops selling arrack, beer, brandy and other intoxicants within the Municipal limits. It was ordered that liquor shops situated outside the Municipal limits ought not to be kept open except between the hours of 9 A.M. and 5 P.M. It was also resolved that persons acting in contravention the resolution passed by Madurai Municipal Council the *Deenabandhu* (Masulipatam) appealed to all other local



bodies in the moral well-being of the people. The Dindigul Municipality followed suit and ordered all shops selling intoxicating drinks in Dindigul to be removed outside town limits and the *Janavartamani*(Madras) remarked that the people would doubtless be wanted to a great extent from the habit of taking drinks if other Municipalities also boldly came forward to act as Madurai and Dindigul had done. Madurai thus earned lasting name in the history of temperance campaign in the country.

1.5. LIQUOR SHOP PICKETING

While directing the civil disobedience campaign in the country Gandhiji requested the people not only to defy the salt laws; but also to picket liquor shops and foreign cloths shops. After the termination of Vedaranyam Satyagraha in June 1930, Madurai saw vigorous civil disobedience activities in the form of liquor shop picketing. Along with the congress office, a separate *satyagraha ashram* on the eastern side of the town was started with about 70 volunteers with the object of picketing of liquor shops in Madurai. On July 17, picketing of liquor shops in Madurai was started. 16 volunteers were sent to three shops, one toddy shops at Manal Road and two arrack shops one each at the northern bank of OblaGhat and Goripalayam. The campaign was organised by the ‘dictator’ MunagalaPattabiRamayya. Large crowds had gathered to witness the *satyagrahascene* and the police arrested the volunteers posted at the Mathichiam shop (opposite to the satyagraha camp) and took them to the police station. Lathi-charge was resorted to disperse the crowd but in vain. Tension mounted and in the evening the police opened fire. Some 12 people were injured in the firing. Seven of the injured were taken to the *satyagrahacamp*, given first aid and then taken to the Government hospital. One of the injured, KhadirBatcha, died in the hospital. Some of the injured received medical assistance through the efforts of T.V.S. Lakshmi Ammal. The arrested volunteers were kept in No. 1 Police Station and an anxious mob gathered in front of it and demanded their release. But the police lathi-charged the crowd and tried to break it up. Thereupon the infuriated crowd pelted stones at the police and by about 8-30 pm. The police opened fire at the crowd which resulted in the death of two persons and injury to two others. The names of the two dead were identified as one KasukkaraChetty and a boy called Ramasamy.

Picketing in Madurai town was conducted on July 18 by the volunteers under the leadership of Nageswara Mishra. MunagalaPattabiRamayya, J.P. ChelliahPillai of Ceylon and 14 other volunteers were also arrested on that day. Picketing was continued on July 19. The police lathi-charged the volunteers both on July 18 and 19. It was even reported that the police resorted to lathi-charged even when there was no picketing at all. In view of the virulent repression that prevailed in the town, the



local congress committee decided on July 20 to suspend the picketing campaign and advised the people not to gather in front of the toddy shops at the time of picketing. Accordingly public meetings were held in all parts of the town and there were *bhajan* processions also. On July 23 the Additional District Magistrate of Madurai sentenced Munagala Pattabi Ramayya and Dr. S.N. Konda, captain of the volunteers for the offence of forming unlawful assembly on the evening of July 17. They were each ordered to undergo RI for 7 months and 15 days. Nageswara Mishra who led the picketing campaign on July 18 was sentenced to undergo RI for 13 months and SI for 15 days. Four volunteers who picketed along with him were sentenced to undergo RI for 6 months and SI for 22 days. J.P. Chelliah Pillai and 14 others who picketed liquor shops on July 19 were also sentenced on that day. Chelliah Pillai and three others were sentenced to 4 months RI and 10 others to 10 weeks RI each. One of the accused was a juvenile and he was sentenced to 3 years detention in Borstal School. Thus the repressive policy of the Government put behind bars all the leaders and Volunteers who took part in Madurai picketing during July 1930. Nor was this all the government neither spared the congressmen of Madurai who aided in the prosecution of the picketing process. The additional District magistrate ordered N.M.R. Subbaraman, L.K. Tulasiram, T.K. Rama, Rajarammohan Roy and K. Sitarama Iyer to furnish to keep the peace for a period of one year. But as none of the five accused congressmen furnished the security, they were sentenced to undergo simple imprisonment for one year each. This is a clear evidence of the unbridled form of repression that was in vogue in Madurai and elsewhere in 1930 when the country was plunged in the civil disobedience campaign. As a mark of condemnation of the policy of repression followed by the government, L.K. Tulasiram, MLC, Madurai Urban constituency resigned his seat in the Madras Legislature.

Undeterred by the government repression the Madurai congressmen renewed the picketing of liquor shops in August. Until August 25, picketing went on smoothly and certain numbers of volunteers were arrested every day. In the whole of Tamil Nadu, picketing of liquor shops was active only in Madurai and Coimbatore Districts and in the entire district of Madurai civil disobedience activity was organized only in Madurai town.

Following the talks held between Gandhiji and Irwin, the viceroy, the Gandhi-Irwin pact was signed on March 5, 1931 and according to this pact civil disobedience movement in the country was suspended and making itself for domestic consumption was allowed. The also permitted the peaceful picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops. Prisoners about 90,000 arrested during the civil disobedience movement were released. The congress agreed to take part in the round table conferences held in London following the recommendations of the Simon commission. In appreciation of the Gandhi-Irwin, Mathura Baskaradoss the famous national poet of Madurai sang



some fine songs. The leading congressmen of Madurai after their release from prison, worked enthusiastically towards the eradication of drink evil. Public meetings were held in Madurai and the speakers appealed to the people to stop drink-evil. The SourashtraOolyasangam held meetings daily to further the cause of temperance. Temperance pictures supplied by Rajaji were also shown at these meetings. During 1931 the Madurai women including Akilandammal, Parvathavarthini and Mrs. GanapathiSathri assembled before Madurai taluk office gates and appealed to the people not to take part in the toddy shop actions. Owing to their propaganda the government fetched only very low income from the actions. However, when compared to certain other places in Tamilnadu picketing of toddy shops in Madurai since March 1931 was very poor of the 450 shops picketed up to September 18,1931 only 5 were Madurai. The active participation of Madurai congressmen in the picketing of shops selling foreign cloth was an important factor that led to the weakening in the picketing of toddy shops. Madurai saw active picketing of liquor shops by the end of September 1931 MattaparaiR.S.Venkataramaier, a leading congressmen joined with the congress leaders in Madurai and assisted in the toddy shop picketing operations.

Starting with nine the number of picketers increased day by day. By October 4, they totaled 64. Toddy shops at South Gate, Kusavapalayam, Mariamman tank, Ismailpuram were picketed. In some places picketing began even before sunrise and lasted till date night. Enthusiastic people assembled before the liquor numbers to witness the picketing spectacle. On the night of October 5 the reserve police attacked the picketers before the toddy shops at Semmattipuram with lathis and butt end of the guns in an attempt to disperse them. Many of the volunteers were injured and they including Ayyapillai and Kanadasamyhettiar, the leaders of the campaign, were taken to A. Vaidyanathalyer's house for treatment. As peaceful picketing was permitted by the Gandhi-Iwrin pact, several newspapers took strong exception to the action of the police in having made a lathi-charge on the congress volunteers at Madurai and they urged the government to contact an impartial inquiry into the Madurai lathi-charge incident.

As soon as Rajaji heard the news of the Madurai lathi-charge incident, he in a telegraphic message requested his Excellence the governor of madras to hold an open enquiry by the president of Madurai District Board. Rajaji informed this news to A.VaidyanantheIyer of Madurai also. But the representing and the condemnation by the newspapers were not heeded. The issue was also discussed in the madras legislative council. It was admitted in this council that lathi-charge was made on the congress volunteers who picketed the Sammattipuram toddy shop. But solely on the District magistrate's expert report and without giving any opportunity to the aggrieved, the government of



Madras, justified the police lathi-charge in Madurai on October 5, 1931. Rajaji condemned the action of the Government in this regard as a “travesty of administrative justice”

There was picketing of toddy shops in Madurai even after the lathi-charge events of October 5. A number of laborers belonging to Madurai labor union also took part in the toddy shop picketing. As a result Madurai which lagged behind other places in Tamil Nadu in the picketing of toddy shops became a strong center for that activity by the end of 1931. Sequel to the liquor shop picketing, the shops in Madurai town and in Madurai taluk limits had gone down and they failed to pay the revenue due to the government. As nobody came forward to take up the shops during the re-auction bids, five liquor shops in Madurai town and a few in Madurai taluk limits were ordered to be closed and sealed in November 1931. As the Government of British India under viceroy Willingdon enforced repressive ordinances in the country and Gandhiji and the congress were not satisfied with the outcome of the Round Table Conference held in London in 1931, the congress working committee resolved to resume the civil disobedience Campaign from January 1932. During this renewed phase of the movement the picketing of toddy shops was not as active as that of foreign cloth shops.

CONCLUSION

Madurai town has played a very commendable role in the country’s struggle for freedom. Madurai not only saw the events connected with all movements in the mainstream of India’s struggle for freedom; but also initiated certain movements the like of which were not seen in any other town in Tamil Nadu. Madurai’s crowning achievement lies in its participation in the civil Disobedience Campaign of 1930-34. Of all the towns and villages in Tamil Nadu, Madurai only supplied the greatest number of volunteers to the Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha organized in 1930. Convictions in Madurai on grounds of Civil Disobedience were more numerous than that in Madras. The picketing of toddy shops was most active and successful in Madurai. There was some persistent picketing in Madurai town during 1933 though the civil disobedience activity witnessed a lull in all other parts of Tamil Nadu.

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