

CONTRIBUTIONS OF S.SATYAMURTI IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE MOVEMENT IN TAMILNADU

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INTRODUCTION

Pudukkottai is the administrative headquarters of Pudukkottai District in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. It is a big town located on the banks of River Vellaru, it has been ruled, at different times, by the Early Pandyas, Muthurajas, Thondaimans, and the British. It is situated about 395 kilometres (245 mi) southwest of the state capital Chennai and about 55 kilometres (34 mi) southwest of Tiruchirappalli. The people in the city are employed majorly in tertiary sector activities. Being the district headquarters, Pudukkottai accommodates the district administration offices, government educational institutes, colleges and schools. Pudukkottai is a part of Pudukkottai constituency and elects its member of legislative assembly every five years, and a part of the Tiruchirappalli constituency that elects its member of parliament. The city is administered by a selection-grade municipality established in 1912 as per the Municipal Corporation Act. The city covers an area of 21.25 km² and had a population of 143745 in 2011. This paper attempts to bring out the contributions of Pudukkottai district in freedom struggle of India.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The princely state of Pudukkottai was created by Raghunatha Kilavan Setupati of Ramnad (1673–1708 A.D.) married Kathali Nachiar, the sister of Thondaiman. He appointed his brother-in-law, Raghunatha Thondaiman, as a chief of the district of Pudukkottai. Raghunatha Thondaiman earlier had ruled Thirumayam. In appreciation of Raghunatha Thondaiman's services, Raghunatha Kilavan Setupati gave Pudukkottai as an honour for his services. In later centuries, the Thondaiman rulers, while nominally feudatories of the Ramnad state, often

pursued an independent foreign policy, a trend common in all parts of India at that time. After the death of Raghunatha Kilavan Setupati Raghunatha Thondaiman become ruler of Pudukottai.

After becoming the ruler of Pudukottai, Thondaiman fought against the Nayaks of Tanjore in support of the Nayaks of Madurai and conquered Thirukkattupalli, a very important place. Then there was a direct clash between the Thondaimans of Pudukottai and the Nayaks, rulers of Tanjore. Thondaiman conquered the west of Thirukkattupalli. The next ruler, Raja Vijaya Raghunatha Raya Thondaiman, helped the Arcot Nawab against Hyder Ali, the ruler of Mysore. He was also loyal to the British Government. After some time, when Hyder Ali's army tried to enter Pudukottai, Thondaiman's army defeated them and drove Hyder's army away. Thondaiman captured Kilanilai and Aranthangi. He helped the British government against Tipu Sultan.

Pudukkotai finally came under formal British protection. This was arguably unavoidable, since the Thondaimans were much menaced in that period by a resurgent Mysore, ruled by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. When Tipu Sultan sought to leverage the power of the French against his British adversaries, Pudukkotai, in common with its neighbours, such as Thanjavur and Travancore, found it expedient to ally with the British.

Raja Rajagopala Thondaiman (1928–1948), the last and ninth in the line of Thondaiman rulers, was selected by the British Government and was crowned when he was six years old. After Indian independence in 1947, the Pudukottai Princely State was amalgamated with the Indian Union on April 3, 1948 and became a division in Tiruchirappalli District. The long history of the Thondaimans' rule came to an end.

Some of the major kings of the dynasty are Raghunatha Raya Tondaiman (1686–1730), Vijaya Raghunatha Raya Tondaiman, (1730–1769), Raya Raghunatha Tondaiman (1769 – Dec 1789), Vijaya Raghunatha Tondaiman (Dec 1789 – 1 February 1807), Vijaya Raghunatha Raya Tondaiman (1 February 1807 – June 1825), Raghunatha Tondaiman (June 1825 – 13 July 1839), Ramachandra Tondaiman (13 July 1839 – 15 April 1886), Marthanda Bhairava Tondaiman (15 April 1886 – 28 May 1928) and Rajagopala Tondaiman (28 October 1928 – 4 March 1948). Pudukottai became a princely state of British India under the political authority of Madras Presidency. The state had an area of 4663 Sq.miles and in 1901, a population of 380,000. The Rajas of Pudukkotai were entitled to a 17-gun salute. The last Thondaiman raja of Pudukottai acceded to newly-independent India in 1948, and the state became a division of Tiruchirappalli district of Madras State. The state was reorganised twice in the succeeding decade, taking its present form in 1956; it was renamed Tamil Nadu in 1968. On 14 January 1974, the present Pudukottai District was formed from parts of Tiruchirappalli and Thanjavur districts.

IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

At the beginning of the twentieth century, National Consciousness among the people of Pudukkottai was steadily growing. The social base of the National Movement was at first restricted to the elite of the State. But later it spread to all sections and became a mass movement. The atrocious measures adopted by the British to suppress the National Movement and the untold sufferings undergone by the freedom fighters in prisons kindled the emotions of the people of the state. Further leadership of Gandhi on the national front and S. Satyamurti, on the regional stages invited them to deeply involve themselves in national affairs¹

S.Satyamurti, who was born and educated in the Pudukkottai state, was one of the most prominent Congress leaders not only of Tamilnadu, but also of the whole country. Though he enrolled himself as a lawyer, he did not join the legal profession, but devoted himself to the cause of the nation. He first came to prominence during the Home Rule days of the first World War in 1914-18². The political activities of S.Satyamurti found greater scope outside the state yet he did not fail to kindle the nationalist feelings of the people of his home state.

In 1920 S.Satyamurti propagated vigorously the ideals of the Indian national Congress in Pudukkottai. His address in the Second meeting of the Pudukkottai people's Conference instilled in the minds of the people of the state to fight for self-government³. He pointed out the stark backwardness of the State and alleged that the dominant power of the British over the affairs of the state and the lack of National consciousness among the people were responsible for such a state of affairs. His fearless and powerful speech created a stir among the people⁴ and many became his ardent followers. Further the formation of the Congress Committee in the State strengthened the Freedom Movement and widened the sphere of the people's activity.

This development in the attitude of the people caused concern to the authorities of the state. To avoid misunderstanding and to maintain cordial relations with the British Government, the Diwan of Pudukkottai in consultation with the ruler who was then short story stay in Madras from his foreign trip issued an order, on February 2, 1921 objecting to the entry of S.Satyamurti to the state for his objectionable speeches in the Second Meeting of the Pudukkottai people's Conference.⁵ The people then held discussions over this affair at various places of the state and strongly felt that such an order was unjust, on February 14, 1921, a meeting of the people of Pudukkottai was held under the Chairmanship of P.V. Raghunatha Aiyar and a resolution was drafted to be presented to the ruler, in which they requested the ruler to revoke the order of internment against S.Satyamurti was trying to incite the passive people of the State for his political activities and expressed its reluctance to cancel the order⁶

The spirit of Nationalism among the people of the State gathered momentum as a result of several National movements in India. When Gandhi visited Thiruchirapalli in August 1920, the people of Pudukkottai thronged to the town of Thiruchirapalli to hear his address and express their full cooperation to the freedom Struggle,⁷ They also desired to offer a civic reception to Gandhi in September, 1921, during his visit to the State on his way to Chettinadu. But the Durbar took firm steps to frustrate their plans and issued an order through the State Superintendent of Police, objecting vehemently to the passage of Gandhi through the State. On this, Gandhi decided to divert his route and planned to reach Chettinadu through Dindugul and Madurai.⁸ Meanwhile, the State Congress Committee and a large number of people of Pudukkottai who were aware of the orders of the Durbar and the subsequent change of Gandhi's tour made grand arrangements for a mammoth meeting in the town. They collected large sums of money from the public to be presented to Gandhi on this occasion for his noble war against the British imperialism. People all over the State came to the Pudukkottai town to see him and express their support to his cause, when they came to know that the Durbar rejected permission to Gandhi to pass through the State, they were disappointed. However, they carried the portraits of Gandhi and other Congress leaders in a big procession all over the town. Later, the members of the State Congress Committee, Municipal Council and Representative Assembly along with several people proceeded to Karaikkudi and presented an address along with large sums of money to Gandhi.⁹ These events clearly exemplified the increasing patriotic zeal of the people of the State.

When the Durbar to know about this, it accused several members for their participation in the functions arranged for Gandhi and removed them from their respective positions in the Municipal Council and Representative Assembly. But the members were undaunted and one of them, S. Viswanatha Ayyar had already send his resignation before the Durbar called for explanation¹⁰.

The entry of Gandhi in the national political scene made the Freedom Movement a mass movement. His principles of politics attracted more and more people towards him¹¹. Gandhi's ideals and principles became gospel to the villagers of Pudukkottai. In spite of the hostile attitude of the Darbar to the National Movement and to Gandhi's principles, the members of the State Legislative Council passed a resolution for getting rid of the drink evil from the state, and for teaching spinning and weaving to boys attending schools in the State¹². In 1924, their enthusiasm found expression in the form of a Tamil Newspaper Janmitran which was started with the support of the Nationalists within the State and outside. This newspaper had to face several ordeals as a result of its Nationalist tendency. Its editor and several people who contributed articles concerning the National Struggle in its columns were subjected to harassment and imprisonment by the Durbar¹³.

In the second quarter of the present century, the Nationalist Movement became very vigorous and the struggle of the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Gandhi achieved momentous results. The attitude of the British also changed to a great extent resulting the formation and introduction of reforms to the Indian Community. Though rigorous measures were adopted to put down the popular struggle, they had to be extremely cautious about their steps. When Gandhi visited Pudukkottai in 1927 first time no prohibitory order was issued to prevent his entry into the district¹⁴. An unprecedented crowd gathered at Pudukkottai Town Hall and took part in the reception that was accorded to him. They presented to him large sums of money and promised to popularize Khadar, prohibition policy and other constructive programmes of Gandhi¹⁵.

The situation after the introduction of the Government of India Act of 1935 had again changed, as the Indian National Congress was not satisfied with the reforms of the British Government. The New Act which advocated the introduction of the federal principle depended, on the approval of the princies ofr the implementation of its central federal provisions. But the absence of princely co-operation had not accomplished its provisions and hence the conciliation of National Forces had been rendered more difficult¹⁶. Further the princes became more hostile to the Freedom Struggle and resented to the programmes of the Congress leaders. In Pudukkottai too, repressive measures were revived and the activities of the Nationalists were prohibited. In October 1936 they prohibited the entry of Jawaharlal Nehru into the town during his visit to Tamilnadu. The people were forbidden to accord a reception to Nehru. They were not even permitted to meet him. Further the entire rout of his journey was guarded with Police and Army and nobody was allowed to talk to him. The order of the Durbar required him to proceed along the outskirts of the town¹⁷.

However, the Nationalist tendencies in the district could not be controlled by these measures of the Durbar, while S.Satyamurti, the son of the district, was waging relentless wars outside the district in the Madras Presidency for achieving the National objectives, his followers in the district carried on their work in the district zealously. The strenuous efforts and heavy sacrifices of these freedom fighters gained independence for India on August 15, 1947.

CONCLUSION

S.Satyamurti joined the Indian National Congress when he was a young man. At the time the party advocated racial equality between Europeans and Indians of all creeds and castes. They demanded Dominion Status within the British Empire, which the British rulers had refused to grant. Satyamurti was one of the leading lights of the Swarajists who laid the foundation for parliamentary democracy in India, the

others being Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru. It required extraordinary courage of conviction to take a view opposed to Gandhi, who had captivated the entire nation, which in the 1920s was not for participating in legislative politics. But, it was left to the people like Satyamurti, Das and Motilal Nehru to project the need for acquiring experience in legislature. Therefore, though Gandhi did not approve of the objective of the Swarajists, he did not stop them from pursuing their own path. It was due to Satyamurti's efforts in the legislature that the Congress won the 1937 elections to the Madras Legislative Assembly. When Satyamurti became the Mayor of Madras in 1939, World War II had begun. The city of Madras was in the grip of an acute water scarcity and it was left to him to impress upon the British Government and colonial Governor the importance of agreeing to the proposal of Madras Corporation for building a reservoir in Poondi, about 50 km west of the city, to augment the water supply, especially in light of catastrophic global events namely the Second World War. In those days, the tenure of Mayorship was only for a year but due to his efforts, diplomacy in dealing with the British Governor, and his administrative abilities, the foundation stone for the reservoir was laid in a matter of eight months. Though Satyamurti was not alive to see the commissioning of the reservoir in 1944, the completion of the work in four years is considered, even by today's standards, something that is difficult to match. Even now, the Poondi reservoir is the only reservoir built purely for the purpose of Madras water requirements. Satyamurti is also remembered today as the political mentor of Kumaraswami Kamaraj, who was the Chief Minister of the State between 1954-1963. Because of his strong devotion to Satyamurti, Kamaraj got the Poondi reservoir named after Satyamurti. Additionally, the headquarters of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee was named Satyamurti Bhavan in his honour and in recognition for the work that he did for the Tamil Nadu Congress and for the goal of Indian independence as a parliamentary democracy. Like many other prominent Indian patriots, Satyamurti was arrested and incarcerated numerous times by the British. He was arrested in 1930 while trying to hoist the Indian flag atop Parthasarathy Temple in Madras.^[7] He was also actively involved in the Swadeshi movement and was arrested in 1942 for performing 'Individual satyagraha' at the height of the Quit India Movement. He was tried and deported to Amravathi Jail in Nagpur and endured a spinal cord injury during the journey. He succumbed to his injuries at General Hospital, Madras on 28 March 1943, two years before the end of WWII (15 August 1945) and four years before India's Independence (15 August 1947). He was a highly regarded politician of rare abilities, deeply mourned by his colleagues and the people of Madras Presidency, to whom he had dedicated his life to bringing freedom and justice. The prominent Madras paper The Hindu dedicated a column to Satyamurti under the caption "Tribune of the people". It said, "He was a born freedom-fighter. Hence, Pudukkottai district contributed much for the nationalist movement in India.

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