

FOREST SATYGRAHA IN SIRA TALUK OF MYSORE STATE

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INTRODUCTION

In this article preliminary attempt was made to highlight the role of the peasant in the National Movement in Sira taluk of Mysore State. At the outset it must be made clear that a major limitation of this is that it deals with quite a particular agitation and region viz., Forest Satyagraha in Sin Taluk.

Sira, a taluk of Tumkur district in Karnataka at present, was a part of Mysore State. It has actively participated in all the National Movements called by Nationalist leaders. Foundation of Mysore Congress by its first session at Shivapura in 1938 which is a significant event in the history of Mysore State. After the birth of this political organization; leaders started extensive tour to harness all potential enclaves of discontent of Sira as well as Mysore peasant and politicize them to achieve responsible Government. For this In Sira taluk meetings were held at important centres i.e., in, Tavarekere, Pattanayakanahally, Baraguru, Bukkapattana and Kallambella. Subject of these meetings was mostly the local grievances and exorbitant land revenue levied by Government from farmers.

Leaders of Mysore Congress assured the peasant that if responsible Government assumed to power, Kandayam will be greatly lessened contrary to the present burden of heavy assessment. The Congress leaders kept handing a post dated cheque to the peasantry which read 'When responsible Government comes all your grievances would go'. It is true that peasant believed in cashing the cheque at a future date.

Thus, the mobilization potential of Congress in the late thirties had substantially broadened. Peasants also readily responded to the assurance made by Congressits who were visiting the villages. After Dwaja Satyagraha was ended by Mirza-Patel treaty in May 1938; the next major movement started under the auspices of Mysore Congress was Forest Satyagraha in September 1939.

During the month of August, all top leaders toured the state to make preparation for September Satyagraha. The Satyagraha was manifested in various forms like disobedience of all prohibitory orders; the cutting down of a palm trees (out of which toddy was made), picketing of liquor shops and trespassing (entering into) prohibited areas. It spreaded over Tumkur, Kolar, Chitradurga and Shimogga districts. The Government responded brutally. In two months 21 dictators and 2500 Satyagrahis were arrested and on the 25th of September the public security Act was promulgated. From September to November there was reign of Terror' in Mysore*¹.

In case of Sira, 28 September on which date the movement broke out in the form of Forest Satyagraha under the auspices of the Tumkur district Congress. Malimariyappa, Advocate of Madhugiri, the First Dictator of Tumkur District Congress Inaugurated a Campaign of cutting date trees at Tavareekre, Eliyur and Voddanahally in Sira taluk simultaneously. The activities were purely localized ones and they did not spread to the other taluks in Tumkur district and it continued till the 30th November.*²

Eliyur is on the Sira-Tumkur high road about 5 miles from Sira; Tavarekere is about 8 miles from Sira on Sira-Hiriyur Road; Voddanahally is an interior village about 10 miles from Sira to the west. These three centres actively participated and pooled the Satyagraha from difference parts of taluk.

The Satyagraha camp at these villages were started over night and marched in procession from the villages to the date groves accompanied by a number of villagers. Apart from them there were 500 to 1000 on lookers. The villagers were addressed by leaders regarding the purpose behind this action, it was cutting the date trees. In this manner, they axed at the very root of the Evil of drinking from which the Government derives so much revenue at the expense of the poor and illiterate who do not know what is good for themselves.

The Government officials of this taluk thought that this movement was an artificial agitation which would die soon. *³ But the leaders of this taluk adopted tactics to keep alive the movement for a longer period as simultaneous disobedience of laws at three difference places would considerably deplete their resources of men and money. For this, instead of three batches offerings Satyagraha simultaneously at the three places, they were doing it at a single place. It does not seem the villagers were indifferent towards the movement which needed the

volunteers for keeping alive the movement. To substantiate this, many villagers liberally supplied food materials and money to campaigning. *⁴

Even the leaders of Congress made use of caste pontiff to mobilize and motivate the villagers. Revannaguru pontiff advised the Kunibars to abstain from drink Ryots of Kurubar caste Pattanayakanahally, Kamganahally, Hemdore, Bevinahally, Dwaranakunte and Veeraganhally were assembled on 26th October 1939 and made them to come to an agreement that if any one violated the understanding and drink that person must pay penalty. *⁵

One interesting point to be noted here, that taluk officials reported to government that is 'wherever the village officers were strongly on the side of the Government there has been no appreciable contribution of men or material for the furtherance of the subversive agitation. *⁶

So far from the inception of the Aranya Satyagraha in Sira taluk 290 persons have been arrested and 281 convicted till 1st December 1939. In Sira taluk itself, 26 villages had contributed volunteers, Eliyur village topping the list with 30 next; comes Sira and Hunasahally 13 and 11 respectively; Handenahally, Bevinahally, Dwaralu, Kamganahalli and Baragur also played an important role by contributing volunteers to Aranya Satyagraha.

This number is limited only those who were convicted. But many of the Satyagrahis were warned and left off. It was very difficult to manage them with insufficient accommodation in police lockup and jails. This tactics was adopted in handling such insignificant and ignorant villagers, whom the Government documents which frequently mentioned those who were participated in movement. *⁷ Further official reports say that they were not professional agitators and a large number of Satyagrahis had given apologies.

The question of apologies is very interesting in the case of Sin taluk as it affected in the other parts of Mysore. When the movement was in trouble the National Congress intervened. Gandhi sent his trusted private secretary Mahadeva Desai to Mysore in December 1939 to make a report. He visited Satyagraha affected places and reported. He remarked in his report; 'Bulk of them due to beatings and tortures and also due to the victims being ignorant and unsophisticated villagers. There are certain number of apologies which show that people who joined in the first flush regretted having done so and got out. *⁸ This unseemly torture consisted of Urine being forced down their throats whilst in police lockups. There were several cases of an attempted indecent assault in order to extort apologies from them.*⁹

Further Desai's report made some positive and negative remarks on the movement; that 'My tour through the State has convinced me that the Congress has acquired a firm hold on the mass mind and in spite of the apologies upon which the authorities seem to pride themselves. But Congress did not take any care which might have been exercised in the selection of people offering Satyagraha, especially from villages, where there is more need for Educational propaganda. In many villages it has not been strictly confined to adults. A large number of Juveniles participated.¹⁰ As per the decision of Mysore Congress Working Committee on 18th November 1939 Satyagraha was stopped.

SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF ARANYA SATYAGRAHA

Statistical analysis of the particulars of persons arrested in the whole Sira is worthy of consideration. Available data concerning the impact of Aranya Satyagraha gives some indication of the varying response of different Social Groups. Of 290 persons convicted, most of them were Agriculturists and unemployed. This indicates that more than 2/3 of the arrested and convicted persons were drawn ethics from .the Agriculturists or unemployed.

As per the available data, 197 persons of different castes participated and were convicted. Among them, most were non-Brahmin viz., Kunchitiga, vokkaligas, Palegar, Naikar, Kurubar, Devanga, Lingayat, Thigald Sadar, Gowda Banajigar, Setti Banajigar, Adi Karnataka, Dhobi, Adidravida, Upar, Voddar, Gollar, Gangadikar etc., (of this 37 were Kunchitgar 30 lingayat, 13 Kurubar, 20 Thigalar).

One typical example that illustrates the assimilation of different castes which shows the participation of peasants. Eliyur. was a tiny village and important Satyagraha centre: Inhabitants of that village actively participated in agitation for which each family contributed its own share.

Social composition of convicted Satyagraha who hailed from Eliyur village

Sl.No.	Name	Caste	Occupation
1	Nanjundappa	Lingayat	Agriculturist/ Cooly
2	Siddaiah	Thigalar	Agriculturist/ Cooly
3	Miriyanna	Thigalar	Agriculturist/ Cooly
4	Venkata Rangappa	Lingayat	Agriculturist/ Cooly
5	Doddaiah	Thigalar	Agriculturist/ Cooly
6	Thimmaiah	Thigalar	Agriculturist/ Cooly
7	Nanjappa	Lingayat	Agriculturist/ Cooly
8	Danappa	Lingayat	Agriculturist/ Cooly

9	Rangappa	Thigalar	Agriculturist/ Cooly
10	Hanumanthaiah	Thigalar	Agriculturist/ Cooly
11	Ugrappa	Nayaka	Agriculturist/ Cooly
12	Chikkahanumaiah	Thigalar	Agriculturist/ Cooly
13	Thimaiah S/o Kariyanna	Thigalar	Agriculturist/ Cooly
14	Puttarangappa	Lingayat	Agriculturist/ Cooly
15	Siddangappa	Lingayat	Agriculturist/ Cooly
16	Gangappa	Thigalar	Agriculturist/ Cooly
17	Shamanna	Thigalar	Agriculturist/ Cooly
18	Naganna	Thigalar	Agriculturist/ Cooly
19	Veeranna	Lingayat	Agriculturist/ Cooly
20	S. Mallaiah	Lingayat	Agriculturist/ Cooly
21	Kappanna	Lingayat	Agriculturist/ Cooly
22	Shivasankaradhya	Lingayat	Agriculturist/ Cooly
23	Y.Kariyana	Lingayat	Agriculturist/ Cooly
24	Chikka Siddaiah	Thigalar	Agriculturist/ Cooly
25	Dodda Hanumaiah	Thigalar	Agriculturist/ Cooly

Source: Forest Satyagraha, Tumkur District.

Note: Here are mentioned only those who possessed the occupation as Agriculturists and Coolies.*¹⁰

Kunchitigar Vokklaiga caste peasants were the main stay of the movement as a whole in taluk. But in Yaliyur village Satyagraha constituted of two major castes of Lingayat and Thigalar. Naturally in this centre, Satyagrahis hailed from these castes. Even today we can see majority of the inhabitants in this village are Lingayat and Thigalar

Harogere Channabassappa, Ramanna alias Ramegowda, Siddappa of Sira, Taregowda of Tavaregere, Nanjundappa of Yaliyur were the important leaders of this taluk who led the agitation. It clearly shows that movement was in the hands of dominant castes of the society i.e., Kunchitigarvokkaliga and Lingayat.

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