

ROLE OF THE TAMIL WOMEN IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

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Abstract— Picketing of the shops selling foreign clothes was one of the features of the struggle against the foreign rule. The foreign cloth boycott was launched throughout India. Gandhi devised the Congress program mainly to suit for women volunteers in the congress to prepare for a long drawn out agitation like Satyagraha and imprisonment .Following Gandhi's advice a large number of women from Tamil Nadu took part in khadi spinning organization. Padmasini Ammal, Thayammal, Seethalakshmi and Subbulakshmi were notable Gandhian followers. In 1932 Ambujam Ammal was nominated as a Dictator. Along with 100 women volunteers, she started boycott of foreign clothes. Ambujam Ammal and her associates were in need of money for the national movement. By conducting drama and Swadeshi exhibition, they collected money. When Gandhi was arrested during 1929-1930, Muthulakshmi Reddy resigned her membership of Madras Legislative Council as a sign of protest and joined Gandhian group.Among the important freedom fighters who participated in foreign cloth boycott during the period 1930- 1932 were : Rajam Bharathi, Lakshmi, Kamalashiamal, Lakshmi Bai-Madurai, Muthulakshmi-Coimbatore, Kamakshi-Salem and Amirthammal-Ramnad. Many women took part in picketing liquor shops at Chidambaram in the South Arcot District. Among women, V.T. Kamalambal was arrested along with others. In Ramanathapuram, Mrs. Rajalakshmi was arrested and sentenced to six months imprisonment in Madurai jail. Rajamani Ammal was arrested and sentenced to one year imprisonment in Trichi jail In Tamil Nadu, women picketing liquor shops, increased aggressively. Among the notable picketers were Rakkammal-Kovilpatti, Ramalakshmi-Tirunelveli and Kamaladevi-Madurai. In Udumalpet, Janaki Ammal took active part and she was arrested and sentenced to two years and kept in jail for women at Vellore .Further s Tamil Nadu set an example for other States in the sphere of introducing Prohibition from 1937.

Keywords—Freedom Struggle, Role of Tamil Nadu, Women's Agitation, Swadeshi Movement,Boycott and Toddy shop Agitation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Picketing of the shops selling foreign clothes was one of the features of the struggle against the foreign rule. The foreign cloth boycott was launched throughout India. Gandhi devised the Congress program mainly to suit for women volunteers in the congress to prepare for a long drawn out agitation like Satyagraha and imprisonment.

Following Gandhi's advice a large number of women took part in khadi spinning organization. Padmasini Ammal, a woman activist carried khadi in the Madurai streets. At home, she spun khadi for her livelihood. In Madurai, the ' Sakodarigal Sangam' encouraged women to take up khadi spinning and selling and organizing foreign cloth boycott. The Sangam conducted spinning classes. The Sangam was organized by noted women nationalists of Madurai , called Thayammal, Seethalakshmi and Subbulakshmi.

The Sangam also organized a Chakra Procession in which 200 women participated during the Diwali celebration. A Special Women's Committee was formed by the Sangam to sell khadi clothes. L.K. Lakshmi, S.Thayar Ammal and some other women were members of this Committee.⁴ At Salem, Alamelu Ammal and Kamakshi Ammal were appointed by the Swadeshi organization to conduct special classes. Besides, Ammapatti Spinning Conference organized a spinning competition for women. At Tiruchi, a Swadeshi Sangam was started with a band of women members and V. Kalyani Ammal as its President. Finally, in Madras City, in 1931 women congress activists organized the Swadeshi League to conduct Charka classes, khadi selling program, Hindi classes and congress propaganda meetings. The League was organized by S.Ambujam Ammal, Manjubashini, Jannammal and Visalakshi. The League also organized Bhajan sessions, where women sang national songs, along with religious hymns. A large number of

women, equal to men, took part in foreign clothes boycott and in picketing shops selling foreign clothes. Ambujam Ammal and Seshubai, Govindam Ammal picketed such shops at Coimbatore and forced them to be closed.

At Madurai, on 15th May 1931, around sixty nine foreign clothes shops were effectively picketed and closed down by women. Thirty four women volunteers took part in a procession from the Congress office before picketing these shops. At Tuticorin, under the leadership of Sarathambal, thirty six volunteers picketed foreign cloth shops.

In Tamil Nadu, the Youth League helped the Congress in propaganda activities. The head of the League was R. Lakshmi. Member of Youth League started a Sangam known as Women's Swadeshi League. The chief aim of the League was to sell khadi cloth, spinning khadi and to conduct Hindi classes. In Madras City, R. Lakshmi took out a procession in front of the China Bazaar and persuaded people not to buy foreign clothes for which she was arrested and imprisoned for six months.

In February 1931, Congress women volunteers demonstrated before the textile shops such as those of Chellarams and Kanniah Chetty in Madras for their refusal to implement the decision of not importing foreign clothes from Britain. Women volunteers like Ambujam Ammal and Jannambal demonstrated before Chellarams. The demonstrators were arrested by the Police Commissioner, Ambujam was released on health grounds. R. Sivabogam Ammal, a leader of Madras Congress Association, went to picket the Chellaram shop in Madras on 12th February 1932 and she was arrested.

In 1932 Ambujam Ammal was nominated as a Dictator. Along with 100 women volunteers, she started boycott of foreign clothes. They went in a procession to China Bazaar and Rattan Bazaar in Madras and they shouted slogans in front of the shops, selling foreign clothes.

Ambujam Ammal and her associates were in need of money for the national movement. By conducting drama and Swadeshi exhibition, they collected money. She, along with Kamala and Janna Ammal led the boycott of foreign clothed at Rattan Bazaar and they were arrested. Ambujam Ammal was sentenced to six months imprisonment under section 4 of the Ordinance Act of 1932 and kept in the jail for women at Vellore. She was released on 19th July 1932.

During the Swadeshi Movement, Saraswathi Pandurangan was sentenced to two year imprisonment. She along with women volunteers, organized boycott of foreign clothes near Flower Bazaar Police Station for about six months. She wore only a gunny bag as the dress in the prison. In 1931, she was detained along with her child in the Cannanore jail. Anjalai Ammal also participated in the boycott of foreign clothes and she was imprisoned for six months.

When Gandhi was arrested during 1929-1930, Muthulakshmi Reddy resigned her membership of Madras Legislative Council as a sign of protest and joined Gandhian group. She was then the editor of Stri Dharma and President or Secretary of many women and child organizations. She organized many public meetings in open protest against the ill-treatment of women political prisoners. She underwent many hardships of a more intense type than that of the prisoners in the jail.

Among the important freedom fighters who participated in foreign cloth boycott during the period 1930-1932 were : Rajam Bharathi, Lakshmi, Kamalashiamal, Lakshmibai-Madurai, Muthulakshmi-Coimbatore, Kamakshi-Salem and Amirthammal-Ramnad.

According to Rajagopalachari, the war against liquor was an integral part of the War of Independence. Gandhi included prohibition as one of the items in Congress program and the picketing of liquor shops during the Non Co-operation Movement had some effect. The Central Legislative Assembly voted for prohibition in 1925.

Under the leadership of Rajagopalachari, picketing of liquor shops was launched in Madras. Many women took part in picketing liquor shops at Chidambaram in the South Arcot District. Among women, V.T. Kamalambal was arrested along with others. In Ramanathapuram, Mrs. Rajalakshmi was arrested and sentenced to six months imprisonment in Madurai jail. Rajamani Ammal was arrested and sentenced to one year imprisonment in Trichi jail.

A new chapter was opened in the history of women contribution to the National Movement when Sevadal for women was opened all over the country to train them for public work. 19 The Congress Working Committee met at Sabarmathi Ashram during 14-16th February 1930 and passed a resolution. The boycott of liquor shops was one of the major activities in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

In Tamil Nadu, women picketing liquor shops, increased aggressively. Among the notable picketers were Rakkammal-Kovilpatti, Ramalakshmi-Tirunelveli and Kamaladevi-Madurai. In Udumalpet, Janaki Ammal took active part and she was arrested and sentenced to two years and kept in jail for women at Vellore.

Kamalam of Coimbatore was also arrested and sentenced to six months at Vellore jail. In Cuddalore, Anjalai Ammal was arrested for the same reason. In Gopichettipalayam, Jeyalakshmi was arrested and kept in Trichy and Cannanore jail for two years. In Madras, four women, namely, Savithri, Sakunthala, Rukumani and Saraswathi were arrested for picketing of liquor shops. Thus Tamil Nadu set an example for other States in the sphere of introducing Prohibition from 1937.

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