

Salt Satyagraha Movement in Vedaranyam

Mrs. S. Sharmila

Ph.D., Research Scholar, PG Department & Research Centre in History, Rajapalayam Rajus' College, Rajapalayam.

Abstract— The paper provides a detailed account of the Salt Satyagraha Movement in Tamil Nadu during the Indian independence struggle, particularly focusing on activities in Vedaranyam. While British policy aimed at granting Dominion Status, the Indian National Congress sought complete independence, authorizing civil disobedience including salt tax refusal. Gandhi initiated the movement through the Salt Satyagraha, challenging the oppressive Salt Tax with the historic Dandi March. The movement galvanized nationwide participation, including significant involvement from Tamil Nadu, marking a pivotal stage in India's struggle for freedom. This movement targeted the oppressive Salt Tax, symbolizing British exploitation, and became a significant step in India's freedom struggle. Rajagopalachari led a march from Tiruchirappalli to Vedaranyam to defy the Salt Laws, garnering widespread public support despite government opposition and intimidation. The movement involved extensive local propaganda, volunteer recruitment, and disciplined nonviolent resistance. The British government employed measures to suppress public protests and propaganda in order to counter the movement. Ultimately, the Salt Satyagraha in Vedaranyam, alongside movements across Tamil Nadu, fostered significant mobilization among contributing to civil disobedience movement against British rule.

Keywords: Civil Disobedience Movement, Salt Satyagraha, Vedaranyam, Salt Tax, C. Rajagopalachari, Tamil Nadu, etc

I.INTRODUCTION

Viceroy Irwin declared on 31st October 1929 that the goal of British policy was to confer Dominion Status on India.¹ The Lahore session of the Congress in 1929 passed a resolution that the ultimate goal of the Congress was the attainment of 'Purna Swaraj' or complete independence and it had authorised the Working Committee to launch a programme of civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes.² In February 1930, the Congress Working Committee

authorized Mahatma Gandhi and his associates—who regarded non-violence as a fundamental principle—to initiate civil disobedience whenever they deemed appropriate and in whatever form and scale they chose.³ Several meetings were organized by the leaders to raise awareness among the people.

The Tamil Nadu Congress Committee volunteered to play a part in the campaign. At the time, C. Rajagopalachari served as the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee's president. In March 1930, he moved his formal headquarters from Chennai to Tiruchirappalli. T.S.S. Rajan was then the secretary of the party. Gandhiji and his supporters marched to Dandi on 12th March, 1930, in defiance of the salt laws. The town of Tiruchirappalli, where the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee focused its efforts, served as a hub for the civil disobedience movement in Tamil areas.⁴ The moment Gandhiji begin his Dandi March on 12th March, 1930, Rajaji visited every district in Tamil Nadu and gave speeches at a number of public gatherings. It was expected at this point, the campaign's scope is to be expanded, and the Provincial Congress Committees are to plan acts of civil disobedience that are appropriate for the local conditions.⁵ Tamil Nadu carried out Gandhian-style Salt Satyagraha in a number of locations, including the Marina Beach in Madras, Sholinganallur, Vedaranyam, and Tuticorin, as well as in non-coastal and minor coastal villages like Killai, Owari, Devanampattinam, and Tharuvaikulam. such as Madurai, Salem, Nilgris, Coimbatore, Ramnad, etc., which instilled in people a sense of patriotism.

II.PLANS FOR THE VEDARANYAM CAMPAIGN

On March 13, 1930, the Congress Committee arranged a public gathering in Tiruchirappalli. Rajaji, T.S.S. Rajan, and others actively utilised the platform to rally support for the campaign. As the Congress Committee

received positive feedback from other district committees, the movement in Tamil Nadu gained traction.⁶ In the resolution passed by the All-India Congress Committee at its meeting on the 21st March, 1930, however the hope was expressed that provinces would, as far as possible, concentrate on a civil breach of the salt laws. According to the plan, this second phase should progressively grow into a widespread popular movement. It is thought that the Provincial Congress Committees are planning for civil disobedience by recruiting volunteers and members of Congress⁷.

C. Rajagopalachari travelled to Gujarat for the working committee and AICC meetings, as well as to witness the walking Mahatma, prior to initiating the southern campaign. At a massive rally in Bombay, the primary speaker asserted that the "explosive salt of civil disobedience would terminate the present system of Government".⁸ Having decided the day of his march, he made a decision and dispatched an advance party to organise lodging and supplies at appropriate stops as well as to mobilise support from the local populace. The driving force behind the entire campaign was TSS, Rajan, secretary of the TNCC, and Rukmini Lakshmi, head of the Madras League of Youth.⁹

On 27th March, 1930, the government released confidential directives outlining their stance on violations of the salt law. They stated that they did not want large-scale arrests or the detention of unimportant individuals; however, they did want to be consulted before making any such arrests, even though it might be necessary to consider the arrest of leaders and prominent individuals.¹⁰

C. Rajagopalachari published in the Hindu, dated 31st March 1930 that a 'first batch' of 50 volunteers will proceed from Tiruchirappalli by road on the 13th of April for Vedaranyam through Thanjavur, Kumbakonam, Mannargudi and Thiruthurai, going 10 miles a day. The government considered this 'body' as an unlawful assembly and further thought of arresting Sri C. Rajagopalachari at an early stage, for his lead may enlist much sympathy for the moment. But finally, they abandoned this idea.¹¹

There was an intensive propaganda for the great march of C. Rajagopalachari's 50 volunteers. Meetings were

held along the line of the intended march – Thirukattupalli, Thiruvadi, Thanjavur, Papanasam, Kumbakonam, Mannargudi, Vedaranyam. The object was to stir up enthusiasm, raise funds and enrol volunteers. C. Rajagopalachari himself addressed meeting at Thiruvadi and Tanjore.¹²

III. SELECTING THE BATTLEFIELD

On 20th March, 1930, C. Rajagopalachari went to the Vedaranyam Salt Factory in the Tanjore District. A factory licensee gave him a tour of the Vedaranyam Factory. He also went to the nearby salt swamps. He had a conference at Vedaranyam where he determined that Vedaranyam would serve as the "battlefield" and that hostilities would start on April 12. His plan was to organise a spectacular march from the South to Vedaranyam.¹³

There are vast salt swamps surrounding Vedaranyam, a sizable and significant industrial. By the end of April, there will probably be significant salt formations. If there isn't any rain in April, it's the perfect location for gathering spontaneous salt. C. Rajagopalachari has decided to set up camp in Vedaranyam, just outside the boundaries of the salt plant, next to the salt lines and the residences of the Sub-Inspectors. He didn't apprehend any raid on the factory. Since salt officers lack the authority to deal with crimes, authorities adopted preventative steps by stationing police troops there.¹⁴

IV. TECHNIQUES TO ELICIT SUPPORT

Techniques employed to persuade others to support and join them were

1. The march through the district
2. Local propaganda and
3. Propaganda spread over a large area.

In order to collect the subscriptions, satyagrahis have spread across the districts and outside of them. Initially, they were able to earn a small amount of money, but it appears that they received a lot of supplies. For instance, 20 bags of rice having come for the Vedaranyam camp lately from Nagapatnam and Karaikal neighbourhood. They raise such support by the usual methods of propaganda and mostly from middle class people.¹⁵

V.METHODS FOR GATHERING MONEY FROM VARIOUS CLASSES

1. The ordinary method of soliciting subscriptions – especially successful on the demonstration marches. Money subscriptions usually came from Brahmins and Vaishyas or from lawyers and merchants.
2. Supplies were also contributed by the riots.
3. The usual 4 anna Congress subscription which mounts up.¹⁶

VI.RECRUITING MEN AND RESOURCES

C. Rajagopalachari had started gathering resources and men. He claimed that only individuals prepared to serve long prison terms, even death, were eligible to participate in his march. He chose Vedaranyam, a location on the Tanjore coast, as the marchers' destination. Participants would walk around 150 kilometres from Trichy. Convenient salt swamps and Vedaratnam Pillai, a merchant prepared to host a struggle, were two of Vedaranyam's advantages.¹⁷

At the end of the March, C. Rajagopalachari, the campaign's leader, announced the general course of action, which involved recruiting volunteers who had committed to nonviolence and were ready to march in groups to Vedaranyam in order to violate the salt laws. He also made a request for funding. As a result, the Tanjore district was the focus of all Tamil Nadu forces outside of Madras.¹⁸

VII.SALT SATYAGRAHA CAMPAIGN AT VEDARANYAM

Salt Satyagraha Campaign in the Tamil Country had greatly concentrated in the Tanjore District. Meetings were held at Tuticorin on 5th and 6th April, 1930, and was little successful in getting recruits. He proposed to conduct a recruiting Campaign between April 6th and 12th and to start on the 13th from Trichinopoly for Vedaranyam¹⁹.

The collector and District Magistrate, Tanjore, Mr. J.A. Throne, issued a communication in demi-official form to the local bodies' authorities and other important personages under the caption "Sedition-Civil Disobedience Programme in Tanjore district", of which he has given a detained programme of the

movements of the Tamil Nadu Satyagraha Campaign party which, he says, is invading this district for purposes of civil disobedience.²⁰

From 9th April 1930 to 12 April, 1930, the Satyagrahis is noted in the margin and others numbering about 100 arrived at Trichy. They were received by Dr. Rajan and harboured in his residence at Cantonment. Dr. Rajan also erected pandals within the premises of his bungalow, for the accommodation and made arrangements for their boarding. The avowed object of the satyagrahi's was to start in a procession under the leadership of C. Rajagopalachari on 13th April 1930 and proceed to Vedaranyam, on foot to break the salt laws there, visiting villages and holding meetings and enlisting the sympathy of the masses along the villages en route.²¹

The first batch of hundred Tamil Nadu volunteers under C. Rajagopalachari set out for Tiruchirappalli to offer Salt Satyagraha at Vedaranyam on the morning of 13th April, 1930.²² On 13th April 1930, morning, a batch of Satyagrahis about 100 left Dr. Rajan's residence, under the leadership of C. Rajagopalachari went throughout the big bazaar street, Trichy and went to Srirangam on foot. Dr. Rajan also accompanied the batch to Srirangam walking, and made a speech en route, at the entrance to the Rock Fort, exhorting the public to wish God speed for the Satyagrahis. Again, on 13th April 1930 evening Dr. Rajan was present when the procession of Satyagrahis left Srirangam for Thiruvadasolai. On 14th April 1930 he went to the Grand Anicut, and hence to Koiladi, and thirukattupallyetc., places to make arrangements for the reception of the Satyagrahis.²³

The receptions on the way in the Tiruchirappalli district were enthusiastic. They entered into the Tanjore district at Koviladi. Their entry was marked by the promulgation by the District Magistrate of Thanjavur of a circular in Tamil to terrorise the people, of which the following is an English rendering.²⁴

To make matter sure the District Magistrate of Tanjore had sent the Deputy Collector, Tahsildar, Magistrate and the police officers with their battalion of constables in uniform and in mufty to the village of Koviladi. They intimidated the Trustee of a big Chatram from giving accommodation to the satyagrahis and camped themselves on the verandah of

the Chatram. The whole village however assembled to a man and offered a cheering reception to the party led by C. Rajagopalachari with music and a huge meeting was addressed by C. Rajagopalachari.²⁵ The first village in Thanjavur district having thus successfully disobeyed the District Magistrate's order the subsequent march of the Satyagrahis was a triumphant procession.

The party consisting of 100 strong entered the Tanjore district at the Grand Anicut on the 14th April 1930. They had with them two carts with the supplies. The first halt in the district was at Koviladi. The Chavadi was closed to them and they slept on the river bed. An obscure Ayyangar of the place was induced by K.V Rangaswami Ayyangar, M.L.A, who had come from Srirangam to assist the party, to take in Rajagopalchari, made themselves comfortable in the riverbed.²⁶

The party reached Tirukattupalli on 15th April, 1930, where the local people gave them a warm welcome and arranged for their stay at the temple. That same evening, they continued their journey to Sattanur. Since the Chavadi was locked, they had to sleep outside. On the morning of 16th April, the group arrived at Thiruvadi. They were warmly welcomed by the local people, and a gathering attended by around 1,000 individuals was held. The group stayed at a mutt run by a Congress supporter before continuing to Tanjore, where they arrived later that evening.²⁷

They reached Tandankorai on the evening of the 17th, arrived at Manojinpuchavadi on the morning of the 18th, and proceeded to Ayyampet later that evening. A small number of the group were reportedly accommodated in a Brahmin household, while the majority, including C. Rajagopalachari, spent the night outdoors. On the morning of the 18th, the group rested in a coconut grove. Later that evening, they arrived at Ayyampet and stayed in a village mandapam at Vilutur, though most of them, including C. Rajagopalachari, slept on the riverbed. A crowd had gathered that evening, but the decorations were quite modest. On the morning of the 19th, the group arrived at Papanasam. Their original plan had been to stop first at a place called Nidar, but they were forced to continue their journey because no accommodation or shelter was provided there.²⁸

Because of government intervention, the group was denied accommodation at Sundaraperumal Kovil and was therefore compelled to continue their journey without halting there. The Vice President of the Tanjore Taluk Board welcomed C. Rajagopalachari with a garland between Thiruvadi and Thanjavur, while the Vice Chairman of the Mayavaram Municipality presided over a meeting in Mayavaram where Rajagopalachari delivered a speech. During the stretch between Papanasam and Kumbakonam, the party was forced to alter its travel plans after being refused lodging at Sundaraperumal Kovil, where they had originally intended to stay.²⁹

According to *The Hindu*, a Karnam from Shyali Taluk, though not directly connected with the route of the march, reportedly resigned from his position due to his dissatisfaction with the government. In Tanjore Taluk, two village headmen were said to have participated in welcoming the party, while a Karnam from Papanasam Taluk was also reported to have greeted them. The crowd that gathered on the outskirts of Tanjore to welcome the party was estimated at around 30,000 people, which amounted to nearly five-sixths of the town's total population. All the accommodation that had previously been arranged for the party was withdrawn, and its advance team was consequently forced to make alternative arrangements. Meanwhile, the Vice President of the Tanjore Taluk Board Garlanded C. Rajagopalachari between Tiruvadi and Tanjore. The two retired Deputy-Collectors took part in the welcome at Tiruvadi³⁰.

C. Rajagopalachari and his party arrived at Kumbakonam on the morning of the 20th and were accommodated at the residence of V. Panthulu Iyer, a prominent and influential mirasdar, a committed Congressman, former member of the Legislative Council, and a member of the Working Committee of the Tamil Nadu Provincial Congress Committee.³¹

They were welcomed by around 1,000 people, and C. Rajagopalachari was provided private hospitality, while the rest of the group stayed in a shed on the riverbank. The reception was warm and cordial. In Kumbakonam, Pantulu Iyer accommodated all the marchers at his residence for two nights. and arranged food for them. He was later sentenced to six months' imprisonment.³² The party departed from

Kumbakonam on the evening of the 21st and received a warm welcome, where a significant portion of the gathering was made up of Muslims.³³

On the morning of the 22nd, they reached Semmangudi, where Kallars and Adi-Dravidas formed the majority of those who welcomed them. At Semmangudi, C. Rajagopalachari learned that some government employees had joined the welcoming crowd. He remarked that such courage indicated that freedom had, in a sense, already been achieved. As expected, those officials later lost their jobs.³⁴ On the evening of the 22nd at Nidamangalam, the party once again received a warm welcome.³⁵

The party reached Mannargudi on the evening of the 23rd April, 1930, where they received a rather conspicuous welcome.³⁶ The party reached Thiruthuraipundi, a place 22 miles distance from Vedaranyam, on the 25th evening. The arrangements for reception, lodging and boarding were made by Ramachandra Naidu, a wealthy and influential landlord of the place.³⁷ He was a young well to do young mirasdar of the locality, intended to give the satyagrahis accommodation in his chattram.³⁸

The party reached Vedaranyam on the evening of the 28th. Along the route between Tiruturaiipundi and Vedaranyam, they were shown some degree of hospitality. A large crowd was already gathered at Vedaranyam, where the party arrived on April 28, the sixteenth day of the march. C. Rajagopalachari, though visibly tired but smiling, stated that he accepted the welcome address as read and the garlands as duly worn. He then announced that he would break the Salt Law on the 30th and expected others to follow suit thereafter. The reception at Vedaranyam was cordial, and the 29th was observed as a rest day.³⁹

C. Rajagopalachari maintained strict discipline among his followers, and the satyagrahis remained consistently obedient to his leadership throughout the march.⁴⁰ The 29th April, 1930, was observed as a day of fasting and prayer. That night, C. Rajagopalachari sent a letter to the Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Mannargudi, who was then camping at Vedaranyam, informing him that he and sixteen volunteers would begin breaking the Salt Law at 6:00 a.m. on April 30th. The salt swamps were guarded by the police and excise officers on the look-out. Next morning C.

Rajagopalachari and the 16 volunteers went to the salt swamp and broke the salt law. The Superintendent of police with his subordinates and about 50 constables, and the Assistant Commissioner of salt, had stationed themselves on the road on the road to another swamp with your view to prevent C. Rajagopalachari's party from proceeding further.⁴¹

On the arrival of the police under the district superintendent of police, they were ordered to hand over the salt they had scrapped up. They declined. On 30 April Sri Rajagopalachari was told to order his men to distribute the salt and to break up. He refused to do so.⁴² Immediately the officers came to the scene and the D.S.P. arrested C. Rajagopalachari at about 8:00 a.m. for Breaking the salt law and for leading an unlawful assembly.⁴³ Then he was arrested and the sentence under section. 145, I.P.C., to 6 months simple imprisonment and under section. 74 of the salt Act to a fine of rupees 200.⁴⁴

C. Rajagopalachari was taken to the Salt Factory, where the Sub-Divisional Magistrate conducted his trial and sentenced him. He was awarded six months of simple imprisonment under Section 145 of the IPC and fined ₹200 under Section 74 of the Salt Act. In case of non-payment of the fine, the court also imposed an additional term of simple imprisonment.⁴⁵ C. Rajagopalachari was sent away on the noon train under escort. News of his arrest had already reached the public through passengers traveling on the 8:35 train. He had about an hour and a half's wait at Tirutturaiipundi for a connecting train, which allowed sufficient time for demonstrations to be organized there. However, the crowd at the Tirutturaiipundi platform numbered barely 100; they occasionally raised slogans but remained orderly. At Tiruvarur, a crowd of around 200 gathered, but no demonstration took place. Between Tiruvarur and Tanjore, Nidamangalam was the only location where any significant demonstration occurred.⁴⁶

VIII.AFTERMATH OF C. RAJAGOPALACHARI'S ARREST

After C. Rajagopalachari was arrested, the other leaders who had accompanied him tried to continue the Satyagraha. Each day, groups of volunteers violated the Salt Law, sometimes succeeding in bringing salt back to the camp. The collected salt was

left out in the open to dry, but on one occasion the police raided the site and seized it. Following this, the satyagrahis organized public meetings, which were addressed by their leaders.⁴⁷

C. Rajagopalachari nominated K. Santhanam to take charge of the Satyagraha camp at Vedaranyam. In his letter to the volunteers, he urged them to maintain strict discipline, uphold a spirit of brotherhood, and adhere to absolute non-violence in thought, word, and deed. In a message to Mahatma Gandhi, he remarked that he had “taken him in the race by a few days.”⁴⁸

The District Collector planned to arrest K. Santhanam and Vedharatham Pillai as soon as possible, as Santhanam was the only member of the group who claimed leadership status and was also a wealthy individual who provided financial support to the volunteers. Vedharatham Pillai is a local man and a salt licensee. He is not one of the volunteers but is indispensable to them both for his local influence and for his special knowledge of salt affairs and the locality. Both these men refrain from going out with the parties. District Collector expected to charge them under valid sections of law he is confident that if they are arrested no prominent and influential persons from outside assumes the leadership. The party will tend to disintegrate⁴⁹.

IX.CONTINUATION OF DEFIANCE OF SALT LAW

There were attempts to break the law by pretending to sell contraband salt in Tanjore, along with an incident of a congressman scraping salt at Arantangi. Speeches were delivered by T. K. Srinivasa Ayyar from Mannargudi and Venkatakrishna Pillai from Tanjore. The District Collector was expected to prosecute them under Section 117 of the IPC read with Section 74 of the Salt Act. The British authorities aimed to defeat the movement before the Vaisagam tide which covers the swamp for.⁵⁰

As Santhanam admitted custody of the salt he was charged on 3rd May, 1930 before the Sub- Divisional Magistrate under Section 74 of the Salt Act and sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 200/-, in default six weeks additional simple imprisonment. Vedharathnam Pillai was also charged on the same day under Section 117 I.P.C. read

with Section 74 of the Salt Act for a speech made by him at Vedaranyam on 1st May, 1930⁵¹. At Vedaranyam K. Santanam and Vedaratnam Pillai have been sentenced to 6 months simple imprisonment and a fine of rupees 200, in default six weeks more.⁵²

On May 5th, fifty more volunteers arrived from Madras. Mrs. Lakshmipathi was visiting the salt lines at Agastyampalli. A new kind of tactics used by her by distributing pamphlets designed to undermine the loyalty of Constables and Salt Peons. As a result of this Satyagrahis received some local support. Volunteers from the neighbourhood joined the party bringing its numbers upto 200. On 6th May, 1930, the Sub-Divisional Magistrate published a notice under section 144 forbidding the public to attend Satyagraha meetings.⁵³

On May 14th Mrs. Lakshmipathi was arrested at the camp and sentenced to one year's simple imprisonment. Her activities were significant in changing conditions in India. Among 200 men she was the only woman who lived with them and had become their leader. She was the first woman to be arrested in India in the civil disobedience campaign.⁵⁴

X.PREVENTIVE ORDERS OF BRITISH GOVERNMENT

On 15th May, 1930, the Govt authorized District Magistrates to take such actions as in their own discretion the situation in their district demands to combat the civil disobedience movement.⁵⁵ From this time the District Superintendent of Police began to consider the rounding up of the party and destruction of the camp, and they wished to strike at the root of the organization as well as to cut off the Vedaranyam branch. At Trichinopoly Dr. Rajan was in charge of affairs, and kept the Vedaranyam camp well supplied with money, rations & recruits. He visited the camp occasionally but kept away as soon as he learnt he might be arrested.⁵⁶

The Government desired that any attempt to raid salt factories should be repelled at once, and the sooner the better, by force. In connection with the Civil Disobedience movement generally, that section 108 and 144 of the Criminal Procedure code should be used more freely provided that in the case of section 144 any order passed under the section can be enforced

should need arise. This was sent to the District Magistrates of North Arcot, South Arcot, chingelpet, Coimbatore, Madura, Ramnad, Salem, Tanjore, Trichirapalli, Tirunelvely.⁵⁷

On May 29th, the District Superintendent of Police arrested Dr. T.S.S. Rajan at Vedaranyam. Dr. Rajan was charged under sections 117, 150 and 157 I.P.C. read with section 74 of the Salt Act⁵⁸. The policy of preventing meeting and demonstrations regarding the release of persons convicted in connection with Civil Disobedience Movement were issued by order under 144 and dispersing by force any people assembled in defiance of the orders has been most effective. The policy of the application of the Criminal Law Amendment Act was equally potent in several districts, enabling as it did the rounding up of the volunteers⁵⁹.

XI.CONCLUSION

In Tamil Nadu, the Salt Satyagraha demonstrated the people's strength and unity and was crucial to the freedom struggle. The Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha came to represent political autonomy. The Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha strengthened Tamil Nadu's freedom movement spirit and raised public awareness and involvement. C. Rajagopalachari and his volunteers effectively defied the salt law. During the march, the Satyagrahis exhibited strict discipline and steadfast obedience. After C. Rajagopalachari's arrest, the accompanying leaders endeavored to continue the Satyagraha. Each day, groups of volunteers violated the Salt Law which showed the spirit of nationalism. Mrs. Lakshmi pathi's contribution was outstanding and greatly influenced the movement's progress. Despite the British Government's efforts to curb the movement through various measures, the campaign was carried out successfully.

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