

## ROLE OF KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT IN QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT- A STUDY

R.SURESH\*

### INTRODUCTION:

The Second World War broke out in September 1939, Indian political parties like the National Liberal Federation and the Justice Party offered unconditional support to the British government. In this critical Juncture, Sir Stafford Cripps mission and his came to India in March. 1942. But the congress rejected it and mission failed to meet the demand for immediate independence. The Muslim league also rejected it because it did not immediately concert for Pakistan. Gandhi described the Cripps mission offers as a 'Post dated cheque'<sup>1</sup>. Thus the Cripps mission proved to be a failure and Sir Stafford Cripps returned empty handed. The Congress did not agitate against the British Government. The All Indian Congress Committee met at Bombay on 8<sup>th</sup> August, 1942 passed the quit India Resolution.<sup>2</sup>

The people all over India gathered against the arrest of the leaders, such as Gandhi and Nehru which culminated into the Quit India movement of 1942. Kanyakumari region rendered spontaneous support to the Quit India Movement. On hearing the arrest of Gandhi and other leaders. People of the district became furious. They organized speeches and marches public offices were picketed in some places public buildings and bridges were damaged. Telephone and telegram wires were cut off and these all rendered for total paralyzing of government activities during August-December 1942.<sup>3</sup>

The Travancore congress Committee at once started to organize protest meetings by August 1942 onwards. But they were frequently subjected to Police interruption. Following the arrest of Gandhi and other leaders a number of protest meetings were held all throughout Kanyakumari region. The students Ramapillai and Sree Kumar extended their support to the

---

\* Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of History, Annamalai University, Annamalainagar-608002, Tamilnadu, India

congress cause. In a student meeting held at the premises of the University colleges, Trivandrum was resourced to render their support to congress not minding repression.<sup>4</sup>

On 11 August 1942 the Town Congress Committee Nagercoil convened its meeting to decide over the future plane of their action against the British Government and also passed resolution condemning the aggressive policy of the Government.

The Committee of Travancore State Congress met in August to arrange for The Annual Conference of the Congress which was not be held since the out break of war. The conference was organized on August 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> at which the question of supporting the Quit India campaign of the Indian National Congress was discussed. At the time Akkamma Cheriyan and N. Narayana Pillai were elected as president and secretary respectively.<sup>5</sup>

On 12<sup>th</sup> August in their Union Meeting they students of University College, Trivandrum passed a resolution that the students of Trivandrum should protest against the arrest of congress leaders and that all educational institution should be boycott until the congress and the British Government come to an agreement. Followed by this student agitators attended all sorts of anti British protest including processions meetings, door to door propaganda, wearing black badge etc. Meanwhile in an attempt to prevent the spread of the movement the Government banned public meetings and processions and the like for a particular period and instructed the district magistrate to prevent the observance of hotels and the closing of shops. Even the Government ordered prohibiting newspapers from printing and publishing news related to the movement and banning Kerala Provincial Congress Committee and its branches. However defying these orders anti-British demonstrations were organized all over the district.<sup>6</sup>

On 12.08.1942 a complete hartal was observed in Nagercoil. The local business community rendered their spontaneous support by shutting down their shops. They proceeded by distributing anti-British pamphlets.

From 13<sup>th</sup> August, 1942 in almost all these days the students of Carmal High School, Kottar abstained from their classes and took out processions and organized meetings. On 14<sup>th</sup> August 1942 the students of Scott Christian School let out a procession carrying tricolor Flags and bearing placards depicting the words 'we need freedom' down with imperialism etc. The processionists passed through the main streets of Nagercoil town which ended up with a meeting

at the premises of the school. While the deliberation of meeting was going on a band of police personal and resorted to lathi charge on the students.

On 15<sup>th</sup> August 1942 the students on Carmal High School, Kottar marched towards SLP High School, Nagercoil and participated in a protested demonstration organized by the latter. They also attempted to demolish a public building in the town. In Nagercoil, a complete hartal was observed on 15 August by the local congressmen. All the business concerns were kept closed on that day. The same day there was a huge procession organized by the students of SLP High School and Thesigavinayakar High School Kottar. The police dispersed the students by inflicting lathicharge on them. However the students incessantly protested by shouting the National Government for India and Responsible Government for Travancore. The police not left the students unhinged made a few arrests and some were admitted in hospital.<sup>8</sup> In Trivandrum the students of the University College their classes. A student's activity made inflammatory speech which earned him arrest and a sentence of two and a half years or rigorous imprisonment. But he was let out after a month of promise of good behaviour. Mean while the students on the University College organized a demonstration demanding that all educational institutions should remain closed until the British grant India is complete independence. Most of them were taken by the police and handed over to their guardians. The Government issued a warning to parents of the consequence of indisipline on the part of the students.

On 16<sup>th</sup> August Vedakkan an agriculturist and member of town Congress Committee convened a meeting at Kuzhithurai to politicize the local people on the next day. He and others held a meeting defying the prohibitory orders. This resulted in police firing in more than 10 were injured, one was killed and more than twenty were arrested.<sup>9</sup>

On 17<sup>th</sup> August Nagalingam of Ramakarmapuram attempted to assault of police constable on duty. He was arrested and sent to Trivandrum Central Jail, where he was treated cruelty. He suffered more at the savage beatings of the jail authorities.

On 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> August meetings and processions were organized in different places in the district. In connection with 12 congressmen were arrested and imprisoned under section 56 of Trvancore Defense Act for varying terms from 6 months to 2 years each.<sup>10</sup>

The political situation was very furious and violent in Nagercoil, Kottar, Kuzhithurai, Agastheeswaram, Thakalay and other places. On 20<sup>th</sup> August onwards non payment of Tax and

picketing of public offices were started. Ponniah and Gopalakrishnan of Kuzhithurai set to fire a post office building. In Vadasseri a post box was removed and thrown into a pond. In Thakalay telegraph wires were cut off.<sup>11</sup>

A salt factory at muttam was attacked by a band on Congressmen headed by a Ponnumuthu of Arumanai and Subramaniam of Agastheeswaram. In connection a few Congressmen were arrested and imprisoned at Trivandrum Central Jail and Kuzhithurai Jail Under section 135 and 144 of Indian penal code.<sup>12</sup>

In the Third week of August, 1942 Congress volunteers more than two hundred assembled at Nagercoil municipal ground to attend a public meeting even though it was banned. The congress leaders such as Sivamuthukaruppan pillai, K.M. Boothalingam and T.M. Sundaram addressed the audience highlighting the atrocities of the British Government in Ozhuginasseri. About fifteen congressmen were arrested for indulging in violent activities there.<sup>13</sup>

The Travancore State Congress Committee convened its meeting on 18 August 1942 and endorsed the Quit India Resolution of the all India Congress Committee and made it a public pronouncement. The organizers of the meeting, E. John philipose personally announced to take intention of defying ban orders of the Government. In September 1942 the State Congress arranged a private meeting in the congress office with Pattamthanu Pillai in the chair and G. Ramachandran as Chief Speaker. They were arrested and sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment. They each issued a press statement protesting against the Government action and Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya issued a statement and they had been arrested under a misapprehension.

They met fellow men and discussed over the on going course of the Quit India movement. They appealed against their sentence in the Travancore High Court and they were released. After their release they resumed their anti-British agitations and participated in a number of protests. However they were immediately arrested again and detained under the defense rules of India.

On September 1942 T.M. Sundaram of Thoivalai with support of local congress volunteers organized protest demonstrations at Agastheeswaram. Similar protests were organized at Kottar, Ethamozhi, Thoivalai, Thakalay, Nagercoil and Marthandam. An Anti-British propaganda meeting was organized at Thoivalai out of the initiative of Saminadar of Kuruntheru.

In connection with, he was arrested and imprisoned at Trivandrum jail for one year. The jail authorities resorted to the charge and scolded him. T.M. Sundaram of Thovalai and his men set fire to a public building at Nagercoil. Telephone and telegraph wires were disconnected in many places in the Nagercoil town. A number of Congressmen including Boothalingam of Thovalai, Subramanian of Agastheeswaram, Narayana perumal of Ethamozhi and E.M. Naidu of Nagercoil. They were arrested and imprisoned as they had involved in different anti-British protests.<sup>14</sup>

In October, 1942 Kunjan Nadar of Neyattinkarai organized a road blocked which disturbed the traffic. Hence he was arrested. An Anti-British procession was organized at Thakalay under the leadership of Sivanpillai. He was arrested and convicted. Similar protests were organized by Nagalingam of Nagercoil. Subramaniam of Agatheeswaram, Padmanaban of Nagercoil, Amirdayya of Pudukkagai. They were arrested and convicted at Kuzhithurai and Trivandram jail for varying terms.<sup>15</sup>

Anne Mascagene a pro-British white lady spoke against Quit India Resolution in May 1942. It was a speech in support of the war effort. She told that the Travancore Government that should enlist support of the Government was not the immediate issue and the immediate grant of responsible Government would not lead to harmonious co-operations between rulers and ruled. Besides in a resolution she called upon the people to cultivate every inch of arable land and to achieve self-sufficiency and to take up hand spinning and hand weaving in that time of cloth shortage.

At the same time there were continued rumblings on the labour front. In view of economic distress, rising prices, unemployment and growing food shortage industrial peace could hardly be expected and there were demand of higher wages and shorter hours and sporadic strikes. The Government of Travancore with some truth blamed the labor unrest on the increasing of subversive and communistic elements into industrial life, though that was by no means the whole story.

On 2 October to protest against the arrest of the local political leaders an attempt to blow up bridge was attempted. In the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> August 1942, Kunjan Nadar was arrested to condemning the police repression and conducting few public meetings. The resident of Travancore reported to Delhi that about a hundred had been arrested in these fashion under the defense Rules by August 1942.

Mean while the Travancore Magistrate issued an order under section 144 of Criminal Procedure Code prohibiting holding of meetings, processions and the like. But defying the order the congress volunteers picketed the district magistrate's court which resulted in a few arrests.<sup>16</sup>

By the second week of November the members of the congress youth wing at Ethamozhi, Nagercoil, Arumani, Kottar, Mailady, Kattukadai, Echantimangalam, Kuzhithurai and other places distributed pointed pro-congress pamphlets among the government officials and solicited their support. At marthandam and Karungal post boxes were tarred which resulted which resulted in the arrest of a few congressmen including Amerthiya, Amsy Narayan, Elango, Gaberial and Gopalakrishnan.

On 20<sup>th</sup> November telephone and telegraph wires were cut off at Nagercoil, Marthandam and other towns in the district. Those who involved in the Anti-British activities were arrested. They include Kumbalingam of Agastheeswaram, Krishnanpillai of Krishnankovil, Jeevanadam of Boothapandy and George of Eraniel.

Towards the end of November, in some places in Kanyakumari district congressmen organized meetings and processions. In turn the police resorted to suppression and seized congress office of Pajanai Madam. Police beating became orders of the day. During August - December 1942 in connection with the Quit India Movement 103 congressman were arrested and imprisoned. The native government worked against the movement and they support the British government.

### **Note and Reference:**

- Panigrahi, D.N. Quit India and Struggle for foredoom .
- Gopalakrishnan, M., Kannyakumari District, Gazetter, P. 96.
- Travancore Government Gazette Extraordinary Vol: I, Travandrum, 1942.
- G.O. No. 12. Political Department, Government of Madras, August 1942.
- Report of the Government of the Travancore. Fortnightly Report, May 1942.
- G.O. No. 462. Political Department, Travancore. August 1942.

- Gazi, H.K., who's who of freedom fighters of Tamil Nadu. Vol. I P. 220.
- Daniel, D., Struggle for Responsible Government in Travancore, 1938-1942.
- News paper Report of the All India State People's Conference, August 1942.
- Report of the All India Congress Committee proceedings, 9-9, August 1942, Bombay, p. 238.
- Baliga, B.S., Madras in the Struggle for freedom
- The Hindu August 1942.
- Bakshi, S.R. Congress and Quit India Movement, New Delhi -1986.
- David Arnold: The Congress in Tamil Nadu, Nationalist Politic in South Indian, New Delhi – 1977.
- Nagam Aiya: The Travancore State Manual, Vol: I, Travandarum, 1906.
- Prof. K. Rajayan: Tamil Nadu, A Real History, Trivandarum.

