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## RAJAJI AND PROHIBITION MEASURES IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY

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### Abstract:

*Among the reforms introduced in Madras Presidency, none has more vitally affected the moral, social as well as the economic welfare of the people than temperance and prohibition. The British introduced a series of measures in the Nineteenth Century the habit of drinking and the use of other intoxicants. The Indian National Congress in 1885 wanted to bring about a moral regeneration of the Indian masses. The law pertaining to Prohibition was introduced on 1st October 1937 during the administration of Rajaji in Madras Presidency, then it implemented in Salem and other Districts. It has its sweets as well as its bitters, its healthy as well as unhealthy aspects. The aim of this paper is to reveal both of them.*

### KEYWORDS :

Prohibition, ex-addicts, toddy, picketing.

### THE ANTI DRINK CAMPAIGN IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY

In 1918, Bepin Chandra Pal on a visit to Madurai gave a call to the Congress workers to fight against the social menace of drinking. 1 On 15th March 1919, Yakub Hassan, a Congress leader summoned a meeting in Madras to discuss the various aspects of Prohibition. He pointed out that drinking habit was a serious problem in the Country. 2 29th March 1919 was a red letter day in the history of Prohibition. On that day Gandhiji visited Madurai to persuade the people to boycott foreign goods and drinking. 3 In 1920 the anti-drink campaign became one of the constructive programmes of the Congress. During the Non-Co-operation Movement the aim was to picketing the liquor shops.

Then the movement began in Madurai on 17th July 1921 and spread to Periyakulam, Melur, Dindugal and other parts of districts. 4 In Coimbatore District E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker and other members of his family preached against the evils of drinking 5. The Non-Co-operation Movement gave a fillip to the anti-drink campaign in Tamil Nadu. On 21st September 1927, in a public meeting held at Pudukottai, Mahatma Gandhi gave a speech, emphasizing the need for total prohibition, thus the anti-drink campaign laid foundation for future movement like Civil Disobedience Movement. 6 On 5th April 1929, Gandhi led a batch of volunteers to Dandi in order to break salt laws. 7 The Congress volunteers from Madurai, Thanjavur, Madras involved in picketing the liquor shops. 8 On 11th August 1930, picketing took place in Tuticorin, Sankarankoil and Kovilpatti. In 1931, the Pollachi Taluk Board ordered to close all toddy and arrack shops.

In June 1937, General Election was held in Madras Presidency. The Congress Party under Rajaji secured Majority seats in the Legislative Assembly. The Congress Government introduced Prohibition Bill on 1st October 1937. The provision of the Bill became applicable to Salem District only. Thereafter it

extended to other Districts in Madras Presidency. 9  
Prohibition Policy, 1937-1939

The Freedom Struggle in India under the leadership of Gandhi not only aimed to attain political struggle but it also aimed to social economic regeneration of the Country. In 1931, at the Congress Committee Rajaji issued a pamphlet on Indian Prohibition, and it was accepted by all in July 1937. That the scheme of Prohibition succeeded even in the first legislature meeting on 1st October 1937. Prohibition of intoxication drinking and drugs was a vital importance to the well being of thousands of poor families. Prohibition caused loss of revenue to the Governments. In Salem District alone there was a loss of the amount of twenty six lakhs. The Government did not consider the loss of revenue instead it wanted to bring cheer and happiness to thousands of poor families. 10

#### MADRAS PROHIBITION BILL

On 27th September 1937, the Prohibition Bill was passed by the Madras Legislature. The Prohibition Bill was introduced. The prohibition of manufacture, sale, consumption of intoxicating liquors and drugs in the Madras Province was made. 11

In the Legislative Assembly some of them supported it and few opposed it. One among them was A.Appadurai Pillai opposed and criticized the Prohibition Policy of Rajaji. He also cited the example of America which tried the Prohibition Act and it was failed. The members who supported the Prohibition Policy, N.Ranga Reddi, Member of Legislative Assembly, Abdul Hameed Khan, V.I.Muniswami Pillai, Rajaji did not pay and attention to the critics and successfully introduced the prohibition in Madras Presidency. 12

#### IMPLEMENTATION OF PROHIBITION IN SALEM

The Congress Party which formed the Ministry on 14th July 1937, decided to implement Prohibition in Salem District from 1st October 1937. The main aim of the Government was to put an end to liquor in and around the Salem District. All opium shops were closed in Salem from 1st October 1937. 13

The implementation of Prohibition in Salem District brought about certain changes. The Government prohibited the sale of bottle liquor, rectified spirit, methyl alcohol. It also placed to ban perfumes and toilet preparations which contained alcoholic contents. 14 Special permits were allotted for domestic consumption of bottle foreign liquor but they have to get permit from the District Collector. The sale of medicated wine by chemists was permitted. Transport of liquor from one District to another through Salem in vehicles was prohibited. Due to the implementation of prohibition in Salem District, 726 toddy shops and 370 shops dealing in ganja, opium and beer were closed. 15

The Congress Volunteers and social reformer gave their support to the Prohibition Policy. In Salem, there were 200 members in Prohibition Committee who conducted games to divert the addicts. For ex-toddy tappers, the Government made tapping of the palmery and neera which were used for manufacturing Jaggery. To promote the Jaggery, Co-operative Sales Societies were started in Salem. 16 The enforcement of prohibition in Salem led to loss of revenue to the Government. To compensate the loss, the Government implemented new tax. It levied sales tax on mill-made cloth in India as well as import ones. Motor spirit and electrical goods were brought under a separate scheme of taxation. 17

To enforce prohibition in Salem District, a District Superintendent of policy, Prohibition Police, District Intelligence Bureau and Taluk Prohibition Committees were created. 18 On 4th July 1938, Rajaji visited Attur in Salem District to monitor the working of prohibition. The Government then decided to extent the policy to other districts.

There are many factors responsible for the extension of prohibition. Due to this policy, many changes expected to occur in socio-economic life of the people. To assess the working of prohibition in Salem District, the Government appointed the Members of Madras University, Annamalai University to submit a report on prohibition. The Report viewed that the prohibition measure increased much the health and economic condition of the workers. It also viewed thus: "The workers spent their earning in an essential way. There was an improvement in the condition of women and children. In Salem District, the standard of living of the people increased. The quarrel between the drunken husband and wife was decreased. Thefts and crimes were decreased. The ex-addicts and tappers cultivated the lands and lived a better life. These are the most beneficial results of Prohibition. 19 Rajaji's First Congress Ministry functioned well between 14th July 1937 to 26th October 1939. During this two year period, he introduced many social measures. Prohibition Policy was the most important one. 20

### SUSPENSION OF PROHIBITION POLICY

Due to the Second World War which broke out in 1939, the prohibition policy was suspended. As a result, an act was enacted in 1943 suspending the Prohibition Act of 1937. Due to that, again toddy and ganja shops were opened in the Districts of Salem, Chittoor and North Arcot from 1st October 1945. Prohibition measure was vanished. (21)

### SECOND RAJAJI MINISTRY

In 1949 P.S.Kumaraswamy Raja became Chief Minister for Madras. Due to his short period in power, he did not concentrate in prohibition. Then Rajaji became the Chief Minister for the second time in 1954. He took steps for prohibition. On assuming power, he introduced prohibition throughout the Madras State. The licences were given under rules and regulations. To make prohibition policy effective, more officials like a District Advisory Council, District Superintendent of Police, Members of Legislature were appointed. They carried an effective work and were asked to meet monthly. The Taluk Prohibition Committees were formed in the District consisting of Revenue Divisional Officer, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Tahsildars and they were asked to meet periodically and submit the report to District Advisory Council. 22

### RECREATION ACTIVITIES

Progress continued in connection with the land colonization schemes for toddy tappers in the Salem District. The hundi-box savings system and the collections were encouraged. The Co-operative Societies for the manufactures of Jaggery from sweet juice was formed in Salem. The organization of amusements in the village continued to be progress very satisfactorily in Salem District and also in other Districts. 23

### CONCLUSION

The popular Congress Ministry under Rajaji endeavored to implement Prohibition policy successfully. The poor people wasted their hard earned money in drinking. This made Rajaji for the implementation of prohibition in Madras Presidency. In 1937 Rajaji became the Chief Minister of Madras Presidency and made experiment of introducing prohibition in Salem District and he also faced many opposition from other parties and also resulted in the loss of revenue. He extended the policy to few more Districts. Due to this prohibition, the life of common man improved and a number of toddy tappers, addicts gave up their bad activities and make interest in constructive activities.

Through Co-operative Society the addicts were prepared to take part in agriculture activities. This activity increased more production of agricultural products and also the health and wealth of the ex-addicts was improved. During the Second World War especially in 1943 the British Government suspended the Prohibition Policy. Opium shops were opened and started selling items. The prohibition Policy was reintroduced in 1946 and it was followed by K.Kamaraj. Thus genuine efforts were made for eradication of drinking.

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