



## **CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT IN TRICHINOPOLY AND TANJORE DISTRICTS AND THE TAMIL NEWSPAPERS**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The study focuses on Mahatma Gandhi's strategic initiation of the movement to challenge Salt Laws peacefully. Under his call, Rajaji, the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, shifted its headquarters to Trichinopoly, where T.S.S. Rajan played a key role. The research analyses the planning, financial management, and execution of the movement, highlighting Rajan's leadership during Rajaji's conviction. The movement's incidents unfold, documenting the march from Trichinopoly to Vedaranyam, the symbolic salt collection, and subsequent arrests and convictions. The research scrutinizes the evolving tactics of Satyagrahis, including meetings, propaganda, and salt collection, amidst police interventions and convictions. The narrative extends to the aftermath, covering the release of leaders, continued activism, and the government's stringent actions against movement leaders in various districts. The study also assesses the impact on local publications, press restrictions, and the government's response to the Civil Disobedience Movement.

**KEYWORDS:** Salt Satyagraha, Madras Presidency, Civil Disobedience Movement, Rajaji, T.S.S. Rajan, Nonviolent Resistance, Indian Independence.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The study explores the role of Tamil newspapers in Trichinopoly and Tanjore districts during the Civil Disobedience Movement, with a specific focus on the Salt Satyagraha orchestrated by Mahatma Gandhi. The movement, initiated to challenge Salt Laws without defying authority, witnessed active participation from leaders like Rajaji and T.S.S. Rajan. The study delves into the financial and organizational aspects of the movement, shedding light on Rajan's pivotal role as the de facto President after Rajaji's conviction. It further examines the propaganda efforts, symbolic salt collection, and subsequent arrests, offering insights into the challenges faced by Satyagrahis in garnering local support. The study also touches on the broader context of the Civil Disobedience Movement, discussing the arrests of key leaders and the government's response, providing a comprehensive view of the socio-political landscape during this historic period.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the involvement and impact of Tamil newspapers in Trichinopoly and Tanjore districts during the Civil Disobedience Movement, particularly focusing on the Salt Satyagraha. The study aims to unravel the financial and organizational dynamics of the movement, emphasizing the crucial role played by leaders like Rajaji and T.S.S. Rajan. Additionally, it seeks to provide insights into the challenges faced by Satyagrahis, the local support garnered, and the broader implications of the Civil Disobedience Movement in the Tamil context.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research employs a historical analysis approach, getting into primary sources such as newspaper articles, official documents, and letters to unravel the intricate details of the Civil Disobedience Movement in Trichinopoly and Tanjore districts. The study extensively examines the speeches and activities of key leaders, particularly Rajaji and T.S.S. Rajan, during the Salt Satyagraha. Financial records and correspondence between leaders and districts are scrutinized to understand the organizational aspects. The methodology also involves exploration of the narratives presented in Tamil newspapers, providing a nuanced perspective on the movement's socio-political impact.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Gandhi orchestrated the Salt Satyagraha Movement as the inaugural and impactful initiative in the Civil Disobedience Movement. The explicit aim was to challenge the Salt Laws alone, without defying authority.<sup>1</sup> Responding to his call, Rajaji, the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, relocated its headquarters from Madras to Trichinopoly in March 1930. The committee's activities came under the direct control of its Secretary, T.S.S. Rajan of Trichinopoly. Rajaji, accompanied by his followers, toured various parts of Tamil Districts, collecting subscriptions and disseminating Mahatma Gandhi's doctrines. Following Gandhi's march to Dandi on March 12, 1930, to break the Salt Laws, the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee concentrated its efforts in Trichinopoly. Rajaji and Dr. T.S.S. Rajan delivered vigorous speeches, and the movement gained momentum, receiving appreciable responses from different districts. T.S.S. Rajan managed the finances, corresponding with various districts.<sup>2</sup> A meeting on April 3, 1930, in Trichinopoly, with Rajaji as the President, selected Vedaranyam Campaign in Tanjore District as the focal point for the Salt Satyagraha Movement.

T.S.S. Rajan offered his clinic in Trichinopoly to Tamil Nadu Congress Committee volunteers from different districts. Due to their effective propaganda, approximately 1,000 applications were received for enlistment as 'Satyagraha Volunteers' for C. Rajagopalachari's planned march. The first batch, led by Rajagopalachari, left Trichinopoly on April 13, 1930, reaching Vedaranyam on April 28, 1930. This march was reported as spectacular, with volunteers greeted by the public en route. Rajaji was later convicted at Vedaranyam, making T.S.S. Rajan the de facto President of the Movement.<sup>3</sup> In a letter, T.S.S. Rajan expressed his ambition to make Vedaranyam the "Kurushetra of South India." His clinic controlled finances and dispatched volunteers, making him the brain behind the movement. Evidence suggests he contemplated forming a regular army of volunteers for training in the Salt Satyagraha Movement across all Tamil Districts. Local figures like Halasyam Ayyar and V. Balasubrahmaniam assisted him. The funds collected amounted to Rs.20,000 at the start of the Satyagraha March.

From April 12, 1930, propaganda efforts increased, with Dr. T.S.S. Rajan and others addressing public meetings. On April 26, earthenware containing salt water was brought from Kolakanatham in Perambalur Taluk, and an attempt was made to make salt in front of the Town Hall in Trichinopoly.<sup>4</sup> The police seized and destroyed it, leading to the serious consideration of prosecuting Dr. T.S.S. Rajan. Meanwhile, he visited Vedaranyam, where he

was arrested on May 29, 1930, convicted under sections 117 I.P.C and 150, read with section 143 I.P.C. in C. C. No. 55 of 1930, and sentenced to one year and six months of simple imprisonment. Subsequently, the central camp at Vedaranyam disbanded, and the entire batch of volunteers was rounded up and convicted. Venkatarama Ayyar received a six-month rigorous imprisonment for offenses under sections 143 I.P.C. and 117 I.P.C. in C. C. No. 68/30, with concurrent sentences.<sup>5</sup>

On April 13, 1930, the march commenced from Trichinopoly, comprising 99 members instead of the initially planned 50 due to an increased number of volunteers registering for the campaign. A total of 523 individuals enlisted as Tamil Nadu volunteers for the Salt Satyagraha Movement.<sup>6</sup> The party entered Tanjore District at the Grand Anicut on the morning of April 14, 1930, receiving warm welcomes from Tiruvarur and Tanjore. Pantulu Ayyar, who arranged their reception, was later convicted for supporting the movement. Ramachandra Naidu, a prosperous Mirasdar, offered his accommodation in Trichinopoly for Satyagrahis. Arrested while presiding at Rajaji's meeting, he paid a fine of Rs. 300/-. On the evening of April 28, 1930, the party reached Vedaranyam, where the next day was observed as a day of fasting and prayer.<sup>7</sup> On April 30, 1930, Rajaji led a contingent into the swamp for a symbolic salt collection, resulting in his arrest, immediate trial, a fine of Rs. 200/-, and a six-month imprisonment. Referring to Rajaji's conviction, the 'Sutandira Sangu' expressed that arresting him would not quell the people's rage in the southern districts.

Over the next few days, Satyagrahis collected salt in the swamp. On May 3, 1930, they were allowed to collect as much salt as they wished, followed by a surprise raid.<sup>8</sup> A struggle ensued, resulting in several volunteers fainting. K. Santanam, a dedicated follower of Rajaji, was arrested and sentenced to six months of simple imprisonment, with a fine of Rs. 200/-, or an additional six weeks in default. Vedaratnam Pillai, a local cloth shop owner and salt pans owner, faced the same sentence. For a brief period, Satyagrahis garnered local sympathy and support, increasing their numbers to 200.<sup>9</sup> An attempt to boycott officials camping at Vedaranyam and Agastyampalli was made. However, a severe storm in early May shifted their focus to holding meetings. On May 6, 1930, the Sub-divisional Magistrate issued a notice under section 144, prohibiting the public from attending Satyagraha meetings. Police used force to disperse those defying the order, with the District Superintendent of Police reportedly attacking the camp, resulting in injuries. Volunteers involved in salt-making were arrested daily.<sup>10</sup>

In Tanjore, Venkatakrishna Pillai, an active volunteer, was arrested and sentenced to one year of rigorous imprisonment. M.G. Nataraja Pillai, a Mannargudi Municipality Councillor, faced charges under section 117 I.P.C. in connection with the Salt Satyagraha Movement, leading to an eighteen-month rigorous imprisonment. P.V. Muthukrishna Ayyar received a six-month rigorous imprisonment and a Rs. 200/- fine, and C. Rajagopalachari of Vellore was convicted under sections 150 and 117 I.P.C., sentenced to six months and one year of rigorous imprisonment consecutively.<sup>11</sup> In Trichinopoly, Rajan managed affairs, ensuring the Vedaranyam camp had adequate supplies and recruits. He visited the camp on May 14, 1930. Mrs. Lakshmi pathi, the only woman among the 200 men, was arrested at the camp, sentenced to one year of simple imprisonment, and considered a significant example of changing conditions in India.<sup>12</sup>

S.K. Mahalingam Pillai faced six months of rigorous imprisonment and a Rs. 200/- fine, with R. Chakravarthi Iyenger, Secretary of the Congress Committee of Kumbakonam, receiving a six-month rigorous imprisonment. N.S. Varadachari and A. Vaidyanatha Iyer each faced six months of simple imprisonment and a Rs. 200/- fine, in default of which they would undergo six weeks of further imprisonment. In mid-May 1930, Satyagrahis shifted tactics to organizing meetings and propaganda after the act of salt collecting. Police attacks, arrests, and convictions continued. By the end of May, the high tide in the swamp receded, leaving a substantial salt supply.<sup>13</sup> A police raid on the Agastyampalli Salt Factory was planned. On May 21, 1930, Swaminatha Chetti of Sirkali was arrested at Kumbakonam, receiving an 18-month rigorous imprisonment for activities in the South Arcot District. On May 29,

1930, the camp was surrounded by police, resulting in the conviction of 135 volunteers under section 145 I.P.C.<sup>14</sup> Ninety-seven of them were sentenced to one year of rigorous imprisonment each. P. Rajagopal Ayyar of Palaiyur faced conviction under section 117 I.P.C., receiving an eighteen-month rigorous imprisonment. S. Ganesa Ayyar, the proprietor of the Current Thought Press, was sentenced to one year of rigorous imprisonment.

Rajaji, the prominent figure leading the Salt Satyagraha in the Tamil Districts, was released from jail on October 10, 1930. Following his release, he engaged in meetings to elucidate the populace on the philosophy of the Salt Satyagraha movement and the broader struggle for freedom.<sup>15</sup> Pantulu Ayer was released from jail on May 31, 1931, with an anonymous benefactor settling his fine. Continuing his involvement in 'Khadar' preaching, he persisted in his efforts within the freedom movement. S. Elayalwar faced conviction and was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for one year, while Somasundara Thevar received an 18-month rigorous imprisonment for participating in the Salt Satyagraha Campaign under section 117, I.P.C.

In response to the escalating civil disobedience movement, government authorities decided to take stringent actions against leaders in various districts. Between April 19 and 30, Rajaji and Konda Venkatappaya from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Desa, along with T. Prakasam, the chief organizer of the Salt Satyagraha in Madras, were arrested. The arrest of Konda Venkatappaya occurred on April 29 in Guntur. Overall, other districts, both Tamil and Telugu, remained relatively quiet or unaffected.<sup>16</sup> A total of 547 individuals were convicted for offences related to the Civil Disobedience Movement, and several newspapers, including Sudantira Sangu, Navasakthi, Kalinga, and Satyagrahi, ceased publication due to press restrictions. The total number of convictions during the fortnight reached 233, with 54 related to Madura and 52 to Trichinopoly.<sup>17</sup> Regarding the government's extension of the Act by one year, the Viceroy's actions were deemed significant. There was speculation that the Viceroy feared the Assembly might reject provisions in the Bill related to press restrictions. According to the journal Saraswathi, the war of independence had commenced, urging Tamilians to recognise their duty and stand up for liberty. The journal emphasized that participation in Gandhi's non-violent struggle required sacrifice and determination, reinforcing the righteousness of the cause.

Pandiya Nesan reported that the government was willing to offer certain privileges and benefits as steps towards complete self-government. However, leaders sought complete self-government by a specific date, leading to the initiation of Civil Disobedience under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership.<sup>18</sup> The report highlighted motions such as no-confidence, vote of censure, and cut motions passed on various heads of Municipalities and local boards, raising questions about India's readiness for self-government. The publication expressed confidence that self-government would be granted when India demonstrated the ability to govern itself.

Regarding the conviction of C. Rajagopalachari, the Vimochanam asserted that there was no need to lament Achariyar's imprisonment, as jail was the rightful place for true patriots in contemporary times.<sup>19</sup> Tamil Nadu featured a cartoon depicting the Government of India dancing to cymbals, a harmonium, and a drum in the context of the Royal Commission drama, with the audience shouting expressions like 'shame' and 'we do not want this.'<sup>20</sup> The accompanying note beneath the cartoon expressed skepticism about public support for the Round Table Conference, regardless of the government's attempts to make it appealing.<sup>21</sup> In its English columns, the Desabhimani remarked that respect for law and constituted authority had been a source of pride for Indians. However, the ongoing movement, if prolonged, was deemed to undermine the foundations of an ordered society. The publication highlighted incidents in various regions, including Sholapur, Chittagong, Peshawar, and Madras, emphasizing the need for discipline and calling for the movement's cessation for constitutional efforts at nation-building.<sup>22</sup>

The Ooliyan questioned the existing system of administration, pondering whether figures like Sarojini Naidu and Mahatma Gandhi, despite their purity, were treated as culprits by the government.<sup>23</sup> The publication

applauded modern women like Mrs. Sarojini, Mrs. Lakshmi pati, and Mrs. Kamaladevi, recognizing their role in reshaping India and advocating for India's freedom. Under the headlines "A splendid speech by Mrs. Gandhi" and "Do not pay the tax! Impose social boycott on government servants," the Thalai Nadu summarized Mrs. Gandhi's speech at Navasari on June 8.<sup>24</sup> It also reproduced reports of alleged police tortures against Satyagrahis from Young India on June 5, 1930. Referring to a petition from prominent persons in Mangalore regarding police treatment of Professor Rama Rao and the son of a wealthy gentleman engaged in peaceful picketing, the Desabhaktan questioned the statements of the Viceroy, the Secretary of State for India, and the Home Member of the Government of Madras, challenging the veracity of their assurances regarding the non-use of excessive force.

## CONCLUSION

The Salt Satyagraha Movement in the Madras Presidency emerges as a critical chapter in India's quest for independence during the Civil Disobedience Movement. Mahatma Gandhi's strategic approach to peacefully challenge the oppressive Salt Laws ignited a wave of activism, with Rajaji and T.S.S. Rajan demonstrating remarkable leadership. The movement's success lay in meticulous planning, effective organization, and widespread participation, showcasing the strength of nonviolent resistance. As the narrative unfolds, the research sheds light on the incidents, arrests, and convictions that marked the journey from Trichinopoly to Vedaranyam. The evolving tactics of Satyagrahis, ranging from symbolic salt collection to strategic propaganda, underscore the resilience of the movement amid government interventions. The aftermath reveals the enduring impact of the Salt Satyagraha Movement. Despite leaders' arrests and convictions, their release marked a continued engagement in activism, elucidating the philosophy behind the movement. Government actions against movement leaders in various districts further underscored the movement's broader implications. The study emphasizes the movement's profound influence on local publications, press restrictions, and the government's response to the Civil Disobedience Movement. It concludes that the sacrifices made by thousands of volunteers, orchestrated by Congress leaders like Rajaji and T.S.S. Rajan, significantly contributed to India's ongoing struggle for freedom, fostering a sense of nationalism and determination in the hearts of its participants. The Salt Satyagraha Movement, with its meticulous planning and enduring impact, remains an indelible mark on India's historical journey toward independence.

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