



Quit India Movement in Sivagangai Region

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Abstract

Sivagangai, in ancient and Medieval periods “Sev: vengai” and in the Colonial period. “Sivaganga”, became part and parcel of the History of Ramnad. When Ramnad became merged with the adjoining Madras presidency, Sivagangai also followed suit. “Tiruchirapalli proclamation” was the seed sown by Marudhu brothers for the formation of Confederation of Secular forces and that was united when the Indian National Congress was established in 1885. After the entry of Mahatma Gandhi into the National Movement, Non-violence became the watchword of the Congress. The spirit of Nationalism fired the people of Sivaganga region who vigorously participated in the August revolution of 1942 such as the revolutionary movement at Devakottai, riots at Poolankurichi, setting of fire to the Railway Station at Panankudi. Prominent Congress volunteers led the processions and raised “Quit India” slogan. *Hartals* were held, They induced the spirit of nationalism in the minds of the people in the micro regional level.

Keywords

Sivagangai – Proclamation of Marudhu Brothers – Gandhian phase – Quit India Movement – August Revolution – Reflections of August Revolution - Mass movement - Sivagangai – Devakottai – Tiruvadanaai – Poolankuruchi – Panankudi – British reactions – arrests and punishment – dissemination of nationalistic and patriotic sentiments in rural pockets.

The Sivagangai and Indian Freedom Movement are inseparable entities. This brave land remembers the valourous Rani Velunachiyar (1780) and brave tigers, Maruthu brothers. From the very birth of Congress, Sivagangai region was under the influence of the Congress. When the Britishers camped here to recruit soldiers for the First World War, the Indian National Congress commanded them to boycott the same. The people agitated in front of the recruiting office. The Home Rule Movement, led by Dr. Annie Besant, made further impact. In 1897, when Swami Vivekanantha successfully returned from America, he entered India through Rameswaram via Manamadurai. His speech at Manamadurai about national integration and his American visit being sponsored by Ramnad Raja, were testimony to the proud record of this people. Mahatma Gandhi's visit to this region in 1921 and subsequent visits made the Non-Cooperation Movement popular here and youth started shouting, “Whites Quit India”

The spirit of nationalism fired the people of Sivagangai region also. The people of Sivagangai region vigorously participated in the August Revolution of 1942. The violence activates the crowd, in utter disregard of the order issued under 144 CPC, resulted in police firing in which many persons were injured. Arson became a common occurrence. In Sivagangai freedom fighters like Thiyagi M.Manickam, Thiyagi C.Nataraja, R.Ramanujam Iyyengar, Thiyagi Gopalakrishnan Iyyer, Thiyagi Ibrahim, Thiyagi Subramaniaaam, Thiyagi A.Sadhasivam, Thiyagi Subaraman, Madugappati Velayutham Chettiyar, Pachari Sivasami Servai, Panankudi Kannuchamy Ambalam, organized the Revolution of 1942. In August 1942, a

procession of thousand people was organized to mark their protest against the arrest of national leaders. Attempts were made to sabotage railway lines in Sivaganga and Nattarasankottai.¹

On August 16, 1942 at 10 A.M., volunteers of the revolutionary movement organized secret meetings at Devakottai park. They cut off the telephone and telegraph lines. They broke the roadside trees in order to disturb the traffic to prevent police activities. But they were arrested and this news was spread to Devakottai. The people of Devakottai raised a storm of indignation throughout the town. On August 17th 1942, police inspectors, Gurusamy Naidu and Sankaran were arrested by the people and confined in the radio room. The volunteers of the revolutionary movement organized picketing in front of the court at Devakottai. The police found it difficult to restore order because of the proclivity of the mob for violent actions. On 17th August 1943, at 10 A.M, the magistrate ordered firing. In the police firing, 21 year old Dharmarajan, 18year old Krishnan, and one old lady lost their lives. After the death of these three persons, the people joined together and entered the Devakottai court building and set fire to court premises. All the documents were destroyed.²

The police sought the help of military forces from Chettinadu where they were stationed. On 18th August 1942, the military forces entered Devakottai and fired at the people.³ In this firing, sixty-four people lost their lives. This news spread to Thiruvadanai also. At Thiruvadanai, a crowd of 1000 gathered and robbed the police station of its guns and ammunition. The Sub-Treasury was also broken open and the treasury was emptied. Mail buses were waylaid and destroyed. At various places such as Natarajapuram, Poolankurichi, Vadivampatti, Pallathur, Rajapalayam, and Aruppukottai, there were riots, telegraphic wire cutting and other such acts of sabotage.⁴

At Poolankurichi near Sivaganga, Kumarappa Thevar, a freedom fighter kindled the spirit of nationalism in the minds of the people of Poolankurichi. On 19.08.1942, riot broke out at Poolankurichi. The Congress volunteers led a procession and Poolankurichi came under the control of the Congress volunteers. They disconnected the telegraph lines and set fire to the records in the post office at Poolankurichi. Buses were waylaid and mails were destroyed. The Special Malabar Police seized Poolankurichi.⁵ Quarrels broke out between the people and the Malabar Police. Malabar Police fired at the people. In this firing, three volunteers were heavily injured. Freedom fighters carried the three injured persons to the nearby village for treatment. At that time, Malabar Police occupied the house owned by Valliappa Chettiyar, and from the top of the house, they fired at the people with the machine gun.⁶

In the firing, Karuppan was heavily injured. The Malabar Police looted the houses, petty shops and tea shops. They tortured one Subbaiah Thevar and his wife also. Police registered a case against P.Subbaiah Thevar, N.K.Ramasamy Thevar, Azha.Kumarappan Thevar, Rama.Kumarappa Thevar, S.Azhagappa Thevar, M.Karuppaiah, K.Azhagappan, A.C.Periya Thevar, and Muthazhagu Aasari, Thevar Manickkam Chettiyar, Vellaiyan Ambalam, Karuppaiah Pillai, M.Palaniappa Thevar, P.Chinnathevar, Pazha.Pazhaniappa Thevar, and A.Mathuvanthi Thevar.⁷ They were arrested and sentenced to three years imprisonment.⁸ A cash award of Rs.5,000 was announced by the Police for those who brought M.K.Ramsamy Thevar alive or dead who vigorously participated in the August Revolution at Poolankurichi. The Police demolished his residence at Poolankurichi. Meenakshi Ammal, wife of M.K.Ramasamy Thevar, was arrested by the police and at the time, she was nine months pregnant. Due to the harassment of the police, Meenakshi Ammal delivered a child at the jail. Due to the intervention of Valliappa Chettiyar of Poolankurichi, Meenakshi Ammal and her new born child were released.⁹

At Panankudi, 18 kms from Sivaganga, on 24.08.1942, the Congress volunteers set fire the railway station. All the records and tickets in railway station were destroyed in the fire¹⁰ and the Congress volunteers raised the slogan of "Quit India" and "Jai Hind". Congress volunteers like M.Kannuchamy Ambalam, M.Adaikkappan, R.Arulandh, A.Muthaiah, S.Velu, M.Chinnaiah, V.Solaimalai, A.Chinnakaruppan, S.Chinnappan, and P.Velu were arrested for revolutionary activities, and cases were registered under code of 436, Indian Defence Rules 4th ordinance of 1942 and they were sent to Alipore Jail.¹¹

In Sivagangai, K.R.Ramaiah Ambalam, Palswami Ambalam, S.Arumugam Konar, S.Aruputha Swam, S.Ayothi Servai, Kalayappa Aasari, P.P.S.Ayyadurai, K.Chandrasekaran, M.S.M.Manickam Chettiyar, Ramanathan Chettiyar, P.S.Krishnaswami Iyyengar, Hussain Rauther, E.Ibrahim S.Mukuntha Raja Iyyengar, S.Manickam Pillar, Sethu Ramachandran, S.C.Ramaswami Iyyer, S.Vishwanatha Iyyer and other congress volunteers took part in the August Revolution of 1942.¹² They led the processions and raised "Quit India" slogan. Hartals were held. Vigorous propaganda was conducted in the villages. Congress volunteers of Sivagangai and nearby villages kindled the spirit of nationalism in the minds of people by conducting processions and delivering inflammatory speeches and thousands of people took part in it.

On August 16, 1942, Congress volunteers like K.S.Ramaiah Ambalam, S.Ayothi Servai, Palswami Ambalam, Sethu Ramachandran Servai, etc. were arrested by the police. This news spread like wild fire into Sivagangai, Karaikudi, Devakottai and other villages.¹³ The police registered a case against Ramanathan, K.Ramaiah Ambalam, and other volunteers for violating the Prohibitory Order of 144 under Indian Security Act 38(5) and sentenced them to 15 days rigorous imprisonment. In the meantime, angry crowd besieged the police station; and another section of the crowd pelted stones on the bus and thereby disturbed the traffic. Police lathi charged and dispersed the crowd. Prominent Leaders of Sivaganga were rounded up by the Police at 12 A.M. on August 16th and they were kept at Madurai.

Quit India Movement, being spread as a common people movement, earned the support of ordinary public from all sections of the society and it had a strong backup of the rural names. The one point agenda of driving out the Britishers from India, the co-ordination of the local leaders of the Congress, the ultimate slogan of “do or die” and violent mood of the participants of the August Revolution gained a great impact among the local nationalists, public in Sivagangai region and they staged a great show which really created a concern of worry and despair to the British administration. The Quit India Movement in Sivagangai region is unique as it exhibited freedom as the ‘pressing need’ of the nation in micro zones in southern Tamil Nadu.

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