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## THE PARTICIPTION OF WOMEN IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN *TAMIL NADU*

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### Abstract

Women exerted a substantial influence in the realm of politics in India. In addition to Indian women, European women also participated in the Indian political arena and established several organizations, offering their services as volunteers. Annie Besant played a significant role in promoting the political empowerment of Indian women. She declared that self-governance was not a form of compensation, but rather a fundamental entitlement. In order to accomplish the objective using techniques that complies with the law and the constitution. In September 1916, she established the Home Rule League. Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay, and Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur collaborated with her in the struggle for independence.<sup>1</sup>Rukmini Lakshmi pathi and Ambujammal were also notable women liberation activists in Tamil Nadu. The names are Janammal and Vai Mu. Kothainayagiammal. Padmavathi Asher and Padmasini Ammal were actively involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement.<sup>1</sup>They actively engaged in the hartals. Student protests and other forms of demonstrations. The significant efforts of the women's movement in Tamil Nadu substantially empowered the women and contributed to India's attainment of freedom.

**Key Words:** Women, Civil Disobedience Movement. Swadeshi Movement

### Introduction

Tamil Nadu played a crucial role in the Khilafat and Non-Co-Operation movement. The Nagpur Congress of December 1920 declared its objective to be the achievement of Swaraj, or self-rule, by the people of India using lawful and nonviolent methods, taking into account the recent advancements. This was a clear deviation from the previous ideology of the Congress. Consequently, the congress was resolute in striving for the achievement of self-governance beyond the jurisdiction of the British Empire.<sup>1</sup> The Nagpur congress, in accordance with its agenda, resolved to take decisive measures to urge parents and guardians of children below the age of sixteen to make stronger endeavors to remove them from schools. Government-affiliated institutions, including national schools, are requesting students aged sixteen and older to promptly withdraw if they have moral objections to being part of a system that the nation has committed to abolishing. These students were recommended to either commit themselves to a specific service or pursue further study at national institutions.

### Women Participation in the Freedom Movement

The purpose of this chapter is to emphasize the involvement of women in the Civil Disobedience Movement, individual Satyagraha, and the Quit India Movement. The women of India made significant contributions to numerous nonviolent campaigns aimed at achieving India's independence.<sup>1</sup> Their non-violent movements can be categorized into three distinct phases: the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922), the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1934), and the Quit India Movement.<sup>2</sup> The Civil Disobedience Movement commenced in 1930 and persisted until 1934, preceding the examination of these large movements. The majority of individuals in our nation, particularly the intellectual elite, were firmly convinced that the approach of persuasion would not yield optimal results. They were inclined to using forceful and provocative language to urge the British Government to heed their requests. The British Government had previously dismissed the Nehru Report of 1928, and the enforcement of repressive measures continued unabated. Consequently, the Congress was compelled to initiate a Civil Disobedience Movement.

### Women in Swadeshi Movement

The anti-Partition agitation was characterized by two main elements: the Swadeshi movement and the boycott. The term "Swadeshi" derives from the Sanskrit words "swa" meaning "own" and "desh" meaning country, with the suffix "i"



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indicating possession. Therefore, "Swadesh" refers to "one's own country" and "Swadeshi" refers to something pertaining to one's own country. The Swadeshi movement aimed to promote the use of domestically produced goods over imported ones, both for economic reasons and to assert Indian control over the administration. The boycott primarily targeted foreign goods, particularly those manufactured in England. The concept of Swadesh and the act of boycotting were two sides of the same coin, with Swadeshi having a broader political objective of achieving self-government or Swaraj, which was not directly related to the use of foreign goods.<sup>3</sup>

The Swadeshi movement, instigated by the British's partition of Bengal in 1905, witnessed the inclusion of women in the movement. The adept strategies employed by numerous female leaders played a significant role in augmenting women's involvement in public affairs. This participation was also aided by efforts to achieve mass mobilization. Bengali pamphlets were authored and extensively disseminated. Among these publications was a pamphlet authored by Ramendra Sundari Trivedi titled "A Vow for Bengali Women". The purpose of this brochure was to elucidate the Swadeshi movement in a manner that would be comprehensible to women residing in rural areas. The booklet urged women to partake in the Rakhi bandhan and arandhan rituals, while abstaining from igniting functional fires, and advocating for the boycott of foreign goods. In Tamil Nadu, greater emphasis was placed on promoting Swadeshi. Meetings were organized in all significant towns and villages to administer the Swadeshi pledge of "Swaraj," and any failure to uphold this pledge would result in excommunication. The Tamizhans were stirred with a fervent sense of patriotism.<sup>4</sup> The revolutionary concepts resonated with the populace, prompting them to protest against the Government. They had zero tolerance for the repression of the movement. The leadership of Tamil Nadu's new agitation politics is predominantly composed of young individuals in their twenties and thirties.

### **Role of Women in the *Khilafat* and Non-cooperation Movement**

The Non Co-Operation Programme included an option for boycotting the council. The congress was deeply polarized about that matter. Consequently, two factions arose inside the Tamil Nadu congress: the Nationalists group and the Gandhian group, led by Kasturiranga Iyengar and C. Rajagopalachari, respectively. The Nationalist faction of the lawmakers aimed to seize control of the councils and advocate for Swaraj through active participation, rather than boycotting the council. The congress sub-committee tasked with examining the Non-Cooperation issue proposed the abstention from attending educational institutions and legal courts as a kind of boycott. Nevertheless, despite Gandhi's insistence on including it in the congress programme, there was no proposal for the council boycott. Even highly powerful individuals such as C.R. Das and B.G. Tilak, who first considered the reforms to be adequate, ultimately chose to participate in the election for the new councils. Prior to this, the Amritsar congress session had granted permission to the congress members to participate in the election. Preparations for contesting elections were underway in many locations, despite opposition from certain congressmen. In order to garner support for their respective programs, advocates of both initiatives organized several gatherings.<sup>5</sup> The factional clashes between the two parties were apparent for the first time at the Tirunelveli provincial conference organized from 21 to 23 June 1920, with S.Srinivasa Iyengar presiding as the president. By that time, he had already resigned from his esteemed post as the Advocate General. During this conference, which has seen a significant increase in attendance compared to previous years. The faction led by Kasturiranga Iyengar has presented its ideas for the upcoming elections.<sup>4</sup> They even adopted a resolution asking the voters to elect exclusively Nationalist Members to the Legislative Council.

They were encouraged to seek assistance from trustees, managers, and teachers of government-affiliated or aided schools, as well as municipalities and local boards, in order to facilitate their nationalization in a timely manner. The active participation of women in Western India notwithstanding, the widespread influence of the Non-Cooperation Khilafat movement across India is seen by its reach into Southern India. Despite being the most renowned female leader from the southern region, Annie Besant maintained a steadfast opposition against Gandhi. Several women from Tamil Nadu actively participated in congress initiatives, such as boycotting foreign garments, promoting Khadi, picketing liquor outlets, and organizing meetings. The press also had a significant role in mobilizing women. A correspondent of the *Desabhimani* suggested that the Non-Cooperation movement should be embraced by women. The message urged women to actively



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contribute to the success of the revolution and ended with the call to "embrace self-governance, achieve independence for India, bring honor to yourselves, prosperity to your children, and shame to our rulers."<sup>6</sup> Additionally, it urged women to assist males in implementing the Swadeshi and boycott movement. The act of picketing liquor businesses was a significant aspect of the Non-Cooperation Movement. Since its inception, the Indian National Congress has expressed significant apprehension with the escalating consumption of intoxicating substances. The resolution voted during the Allahabad congress session called upon the Indian government to implement a more effective system that would discourage the consumption of alcohol. During the ensuing annual sessions of the congress, as well as in the provincial and district conferences, the same issue was deliberated over and resolutions were unanimously voted, condemning its usage. Consequently, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a movement advocating for prohibition emerged.

### **Women Participation in Civil Disobedience Movement**

The women of India have made significant contributions to different nonviolent movements initiated for the freedom of India. Their non-violent movements can be categorized into three distinct phases: the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920 – 1922), the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1934), and the Quit India Moment.<sup>5</sup>The Civil Disobedience Movement commenced in 1930 and persisted until 1934, preceding the examination of these large movements. The majority of individuals in our nation, particularly the intellectual elite, firmly believed that the approach of persuasion would not yield optimal results. They were inclined to using forceful and provocative language in order to compel the British Government to pay attention to their demands.<sup>7</sup> The British Government had previously dismissed the Nehru Report of 1928, and the continuation of repression was ongoing in the normal manner. Hence, the Congress was compelled to initiate a Civil Disobedience Movement.

The Civil Disobedience Movement served as a source of inspiration and motivation for numerous Indian women, prompting their active involvement. At first, Gandhi hesitated to directly incorporate women in the primary activities, and it is worth noting that the group of followers who accompanied him to Dandi consisted entirely of men. Notably, women played a significant role in this regard, as numerous Indian women from respectable backgrounds, possessing high intellect and belonging to the middle and upper classes, actively engaged in various forms of mobilization. They possessed genuinely large dimensions spanning across the subcontinent and witnessed very emotional and unusual scenes in every part of the country. During that period, a significant number of women from various locations and provinces actively engaged in this movement. K. Hurshedbehn, Mirdula Sanuthai, Hansa Metha, Avabtujgavau Gokhale, Shantabai Vengsantan, Durgabai, Lilavathi Munshi, Captain Sish Perinbehn, Goshibein, Avantikabai Gokhale, Jamkidevi, Lukanji, Anajuyabai Kale, were the notable female leaders that spearheaded the Satyagraha movement in their respective regions.<sup>8</sup>

### **Role of women in Tamilnadu**

Efforts to achieve widespread mobilization also facilitated this engagement. Greater impetus was provided to the promotion of Swadeshi movement in Tamil Nadu. Gatherings were convened in all prominent urban and rural areas to undertake the Swadeshi oath of "Swaraj," with non-adherence to this vow leading to expulsion from the community.<sup>9</sup>The Tamils were abruptly awakened by a surge of nationalistic fervor. Individuals were motivated by radical ideologies and raised their hands in opposition to the government. They did not tolerate the suppression of the movement. The leadership of Tamilnadu's new agitational politics was predominantly composed of young individuals in their twenties and thirties.

Protests against the idea took place in Madras, Tanjore, Kumbakonam, Chengalpattu, Kancheepuram, Vellore, North Arcott, Madurai, Thoothukudi, and Tirunelveli. In order to provoke the general population against the British, the native people distributed inflammatory notices and pamphlets.<sup>36</sup>The subversive pieces in the Tamil journal Swadeshmitran, published in Madras, caught the attention of the government. Nilakanda Brahamachari, Sankar Krishan Iyer, Subramania Siva, and Padmanaba Iyer, along with other radical leaders,<sup>10</sup> commenced a lecture tour in South India, advocating for Swadeshi and promoting sedition. Poets such as Subramania Bharati of Ettaiyapuram and A. Shanmugam of Madurai composed patriotic songs, while Pillai A. Saalambigai Ammal of Chidambaram and Agilandammal of Cuddalore wrote Swadeshi songs. The people of Tamil Nadu are influenced by these songs in their choice of attire.<sup>38</sup>Women actively engaged in the Swadeshi



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movement by attending protest gatherings held throughout Bengal, including some specifically designated for women. As an illustration, over 500 women assemble in Jenokand hamlet in the Mushidabad district to demonstrate against the government's choice to divide Bengal and to underscore the importance of utilizing locally produced commodities. Women arranged gatherings in their neighborhoods and communities, and even spinning wheels were brought into the Zenana.<sup>39</sup>The Swadeshi movement led to the establishment of other women's organizations. Stalinathan's wife, an Indian Christian social reformer, established a women's periodical in the Madras Presidency. In 1913, SubbalakshmiAmmal founded a residence for widows of the Brahmin caste and a society for the empowerment of women called Mahila Seva Samaj in Mysore.<sup>11</sup>

## **Khadhi Movement**

The Khadhi movement was initiated by the Indian National Congress as a nationwide liberation movement aimed at expelling British control from India. Gandhi encouraged Indians to support khadi and dedicated time every day to spinning using a hand spinning machine called the Charkha. The suggestion made by him was carried out by a significant number of Indians and served to promote the khadi spinning organization. From September 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, 1927, Mahatma Gandhiji paid a visit to Madurai city in Tamilnadu with the purpose of bolstering the khadi and swadeshi movement. Madame de Manziarly, Mrs. Peramma, and Miss Baria, European women played a significant role in the Khadhi movement in Tamil Nadu. The rural women were educated and instructed on the topic of khadi. A significant number of women received instruction in spinning techniques at the Theosophical society. Out of all of them, Kamalamma was capable of spinning 380 counts. The woman possessed exceptional skill in spinning, surpassing any mill in producing a fine thread count. C. Rajaji, a leader of the Indian National Congress, provided complimentary cotton to a total of 750 women.

## **Unsung Women Freedom Fighters in Madurai**

On May 15, 1931, in Madurai, around 34 women participated in a khadi parade and picketed around 69 foreign establishments, successfully closing them down. In Tuticorin, Sarathambal, along with approximately 36 volunteers, organized a picket outside foreign garment shops. Padmasini Ammal played a crucial role in supporting Khadi in Madurai. She founded the "Sisters Association" and promoted the adoption of Khadi spinning, selling, and the boycott of imported material. Spinning classes were organized for female nationalists in Madurai. She collaborated alongside Thayammal, SubbulakshmiAmmal, Seethalakshmi, and Muniyammal, who actively contributed. During the Deepavali celebration, the Sangam arranged a Chakra parade that had the participation of 200 women. The Sangam established a dedicated women's committee with the purpose of marketing and selling Khadi garments. L.K. Lakshmi, S. ThayarAmmal, and several more women were part of this committee. Notable individuals who actively participated in the boycott of foreign fabric between 1930 and 1932 included Lakshmi, Rajam Bharathi, Lakshmbai, and Kamalashiammal from Madurai, as well as Amirthammal from Ramnad. Masilamani, a diligent laborer, was the catalyst behind the conception of the Swadeshi movement. He and his entire family all wear traditional kadhar clothing. He manufactured spinning wheels, also known as chakra, and distributed them among the people to promote the spirit of Swadeshi. He employed his proficient literary abilities to translate the speeches of Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru from English to Tamil, leaving the audience awestruck during a small gathering in Tamil Nadu's freedom fight. P.S. Kumarasamy Raja, a volunteer of the Congress party, was engaged in picketing a liquor shop and a foreign fabric shop in Melur, located in the Madurai district. On July 20th, 1930, he commenced picketing alongside 50 volunteers. The police dispersed the group of volunteers.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, A.N.V. Muhammad Abdual Khadhar and Meenakshi Sundaram were both engaging in picketing activities in front of a liquor shop located in Melur. Both individuals were apprehended and subsequently sentenced to a month of severe incarceration. Karuppanana and Khadar Mohideen, both local congress volunteers, distributed leaflets containing anti-war slogans during a meeting. As a result, both individuals were apprehended and subsequently sentenced to a four-week term of harsh imprisonment. Subhas Chandra Bose established the Indian National Army. He formally established the Rani of Jhansi Regiment in the INA on October 22, 1943, in Singapore. 'Angammal, hailing from Madurai District, served as a sepoy in the Indian National Army, namely in the Rani of Jhansi Regiment No 8240. Sengamalai Ammal, from Tirunelveli district, and Chinnammal and Kamakshiammal, from Manamadurai Taluk, were also part of the same regiment.'



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## Lakshmiammal

Lakshmiammal is the offspring of the Village Munisiff of Alagaipandiapuram in Tirunelveli Taluk and serves as the second spouse of Dr. C. Sankara Ayyor.<sup>44</sup>He is a renowned medical practitioner in Kallidaikuruchi. Lakshmiammal is the Dictator of the Tamilnadu Congress Committee. In 1919, she became a member of the movement and actively participated in the Salt Satyagraha as well as the picketing of foreign fabric. In 1931, she was apprehended and subsequently convicted, receiving a six-month prison sentence at Vellore jail. The local government has officially deemed this committee, led by its dictator, as an illegal organization under the Criminal Law Amendment Act. This declaration was published in the Fort.St. George Gazette on 9 January 1932.<sup>45</sup>The Tirunelveli District Congress Committee, together with its leader and supporters, has been officially deemed an illegal organization in the Fort.St. George Gazette on January 7, 1932.Lakshmiammal received a one-year sentence of simple imprisonment and was also ordered to pay a fine of Rs.300. In 1944, she was incarcerated once more, this time for a duration of 8 months.<sup>13</sup>

## Sornathammal

Sornathammal is an active member of the Congress party in the Tirunelveli District. Lakshmiammal and Mahadeve Ayyar were properly served with warning notices issued by the District Magistrate. However, on January 29, 1932, about 4 p.m., Lakshmiammal and Sornathammal arranged a conference in Tirunelveli town to advance the goals of the aforementioned illegal associations. Sornathammal actively participated in coordinating the gathering and also attended it while proudly waving a khadar tri-coloured national flag.<sup>47</sup>Sornathammal was sentenced to serve a year of severe imprisonment and pay a fine of Rs.300. On September 20th, the police conducted a search of several ladies, including V. Sundarathammal, Sayammal, and Rakkalammal, who are members of the Karaikudi local Congress Committee. The authorities confiscated a Tamil publication named 'VangaPuratchi' along with other pamphlets.<sup>48</sup>The police seized control of the facilities of the Karaikudi town Congress committee on the 24th of this month. The president and Secretary of the Karaikudi Congress group were served copies of a notice that prohibits the group from utilizing its finances for committee operations.<sup>14</sup>

On September 25<sup>th</sup>, a proclamation was made summoning Sa.Ganesan to appear in court. Subsequently, a copy of the proclamation was posted on the front wall of Ganesan's residence in Karaikudi. Subsequently, the authorities seized and confiscated the majority of the movable assets within the residence.<sup>15</sup>Following the apprehension of the A.I.C.C. leaders, Sa.Ganesan delivered numerous public speeches in Karaikudi.<sup>51</sup>Throughout his talks, he strongly promoted the idea of boycotting schools and courts, refusing to pay taxes, and repeatedly shouting the phrase "Whitemen Quit India". He promoted the idea of businesses and hotels boycotting the police and organizing large gatherings of people outside courts to hinder their operations. Those who were moved by his impassioned and emotive words promptly assaulted and harassed police officials and others who displayed empathy towards government officials. They commenced engaging in acts of sabotage. Sa.Ganesan was attributed with the responsibility for all the disorderliness in Chettinad.Ganesan also highlighted the British Government's ineffectiveness in suppressing the riots in Bombay and questioned the insufficient provision of weapons and ammunition in Karaikudi to suppress any potential uprising there. As a result, a parade of the students took place in Karaikudi on August 12th, 1942.<sup>52</sup>Sa.Ganesan submitted himself to the Commissioner of Police in Madras on September 30th. He was restrained with shackles on his hands and legs and transported to the sub-jail at Triuppathur. He was ordered to undergo Rehabilitation and Incarceration for a period of 2 years. Due to the anticipated large gathering of people from nearby villages during the Vijayadasami festival in Karaikudi, and the potential for a disturbance of peace, the Taluk Magistrate issued an order on October 14th, prohibiting any political or religious meetings or processions within the boundaries of Karaikudi Municipality for a duration of one month.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

Furthermore, she actively engaged in Satyagraha in Karur alongside her spouse. Gopalsamy's husband was apprehended and escorted away. Subsequently, Narayanammal, upon arriving in the hamlet, accompanied her brother Ramachandran to engage in Satyagraha in Chennai. The Satyagraha took place in the Alwarpet ground in Chennai. She was apprehended and detained in Vellore prison for a duration of three months, starting from September 17th, 1941.<sup>56</sup>Following her incarceration,



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she actively participated in the Khadi and Harijan service movements. The Congress leader, Mr. Vaithyanatha Ayyar, sent her to the Madurai district to engage in Harijan service.<sup>57</sup> Subsequently, in 1942, upon her brother's release from Alipuram jail, she actively engaged in the communist struggle with him. He served as a member of the Sattur Taluk Congress committee for an extended period, and thereafter, he became involved in the communist movement. During the Congress rule, she was employed as a "Courier" while the Communist Party was prohibited. Narayanammal maintained her membership in the Communist Party till her latter days, while also adhering to the principles of Gandhian ethics. She divorced her spouse as a result of certain incidents and actively engaged in her younger brother's political endeavors. Later, she dedicated her life to assisting her younger brother's children. She died on January 12, 1989. She dedicated her life to the nation and its citizens.

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