Role of Women's and the Quit India Movement With Special Reference to Tamil Nadu-A Study

Dr. R. Suresh, Department of History, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Tamilnadu, India

Abstract
The present work is an attempt to analyze the role of women's and the Quit India Movement with special reference to Tamilnadu. Women from time immemorial had her political, social and cultural existence. They as a force played a crucial role in the struggle for Indian independence. The Quit India Movement of 1942, which was a spontaneous mass uprising witnesses women in the forefront. The 1942 women activists challenged the norms of respectability that obsessed an earlier generation of women leaders. Women during the movement led processions, picketed liquor shops, boldly faced government repressions, indulged in terrorist activities and even sacrificed lives.

Keywords: Women's, People Participation, Violence, Non-Violence, Extremism

Introduction
In the context of the rise of modern western feminist movements of the early nineteenth and twentieth century and the status of women in the Indian societies, the participation of women in the Indian freedom struggle generally and more particularly the women's participation in the Quit India Movement can be analyzed. Women's participation in the Indian freedom struggle added to the legitimacy of the Indian freedom struggle. Their active participation not only changed their goals but also organized the activities. The political participation of women were equally approved and appreciated by men who otherwise want them to be perfect wives at home.

Methodology:
The present work follows descriptive and analytical method from a gender perspective. It also uses sociological approach for wider understanding of the subject matter. The present article involves a critical use of both primary and secondary sources based on external and internal criticism. The paper is basically compiled with various sources like books, journals and newspapers.

Discussions:
Women in the Quit India Movement formed a prominent part of the agitating crowds. Congress aided British in the World War II, since, September of 1939. Congress acted according to the agreement, which stated, that in exchange for their service, the Government would function along the lines of righteousness, justice, and dutifulness to the colonized nation. It was also promised, that with the termination of war, British would grant India her much coveted independence. However, the British showed no keenness to respond to these clauses. In November, Congress withdrew from the ministry and embarked on a campaign of agitation. During, this time, many Indian women had already entered the arena of politics. While, some women had become members, others had even turned out to be leaders of student associations, peasant movements, and labour unions. Women, had in fact, attained the right to election to legislative seats and their appointment to positions of power and authority.

When the Gandhian movements had started, people had great expectations. Mahatma Gandhi began with anti-war lectures along with the Satyagrahi (peaceful protesters, following Gandhian ideology). They exhibited non-cooperation to the wartime emergency conditions imposed by British. 400 Congressmen and women were arrested and jailed in 1940. By June of 1941 almost 20,000 were thrown into prisons. But the movement, being weak in character, faded away soon.

On August 8, 1942, the All-India Congress Committee met in Mumbai and passed a resolution calling for British withdrawal from India. Thus the Quit India Movement was launched. The Quit India resolution spoke directly to women "as disciplined soldiers of Indian freedom" and attracted them to the movement. Women participated whole-heartedly in the movement and took part in the various protests that were taking place at the time. The techniques were the same as Gandhi's previous methods- salt-making, boycotts of courts and schools, picketing cloth and liquor shops, and non-payment of taxes. The movement began in the cities with strikes, demonstrations, and clashes with the police and moved to the countryside where peasants rebelled against landowners and the agents of British authority. Women participated in the initial strikes and demonstrations in cities, were among the radical students who organized peasant movements, and, when protest was suppressed, joined the secret underground activities.

By 9th August 1942 the leading women leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Meera Ben and Sushila Nayar were confined along with Gandhi at the Aga Khan's palace Poona. The
arrests of the national and local leaders caused tremendous uproar among the people. The masses were invigorated with a new spirit employed their full strength and energy for the cause of the freedom. The Quit India Movement being leaderless deflected in one and many ways from the Gandhian policy of non-violence. The Quit India Movement was characterized by extremists’ activities like attacking the government buildings, damaged railway tracks and sabotaged military supply lines. The increasing government atrocities contributed to the increase of violent activities among the masses.

At the time of Tamilnadu when the women leaders were arrested Rukmani Lakshmi pathi became the acting president of Tamilnadu Congress Committee and took the initiative to keep the organisation alive. She continued to play a remarkable role in the congress political till the end. She kept the movement alive by giving direction to the Satyagraha after the arrest of main leaders. She also went from place to place appealing people to participate in the movement. Like Rukmani Lakshmi pathi, Dhamayanthi, Ignatius Ammal, Janaki Ammal, Kahalakshmi, Padma Singh, Suravathi Ammal, Solai Bagiyalakshmi Ammal and other also seriously entered in the mass revolution of 1942 and they were also arrested the Voluntary Crops of Madras. It played a very important role in helping the refugees with food and shelter.

In Madras City the students both from Schools and Colleges played a spirited role in accelerating the national struggle. Students from Queen Mar’s College, Women Christian College, Madras Presidency College, Law College, and Pachaiyappa’s College abstained from classes and organised, hartal, processions and picketing. The national flag were also hoisted in some colleges and many Quit India Badges were distributed on the birthday of Gandhiji. The women Students of the Stanley Medical College also abstained from classes in protest of the Government Policies.

On 10th August, about 100 Union workers assembled at Ondiputhur Garden and held a secret meeting. In that they discussed secret programmes including the one given by C.Subramaniyam, treasurer, Coimbatore District Congress Committee. Finally, they formed themselves in to different groups to accomplish certain acts like destroying war ammunition, setting fire to liquor shops, cutting of telegraph wires, disrupting transports services etc.

On 13th August 1942, Dr. Maheswara Arya and his wife Mrs. Kamaladevi Arya, members of the Madras Andhra District Congress Committee, went in a procession in the Washermanpet and distributed leaflets in Hindi to the Indian troops in the area, exhorting them to resign their jobs. They were arrested. Besides these in Madras city, Ammu Swaminathan, Anushya, M.S.Balamall, Devaki Ammal, Maya Joseph, Manjubhashini, G.Janaki, P. Shihla, Thangamma, Thayarammal, Thirupura Sundari, Vasugiammal and other vigorously participated in the mass agitation so that the government punished them by imprisonment. At the same time the breaking of railway lines at Singanallur, Kuttiammal, an illiterate woman of Coimbatore was the leader of the group of labourers.

On 14th August, a meeting was convened under the auspices of the All-India Students Federation at which Miss Parvathi Kumaramangalam, a Communist, urged the futility of strikes. The meeting ended in confusion. On 15th August, at Karur taluk, Miss Parvathi Kumaramangalam, presiding over a student’s meeting urged the releases of Congress leaders.

On 19th August, in the early morning, at a point three miles south of Trichinopoly, the engine tender and 16 wagons of a goods train were derailed due to the removal of fish-plates. Nine wagons were smashed, teleshopped and capsized. The permanent way was damaged. The loss caused to the railway was estimated at Rs. 45,000. Regarding this F.M. Bajohn, S.N.Rahiman, Karur Piya ribibi, Jagadamall, Kupammall, Karuppazhai and others were very vigorously carrying on their derailment incident.

In Madras Women’s Indian Association of Mylapore passed a resolution strongly protesting against the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi and his colleagues. When he got seriously ill in jail, Ammu Swaminathan and Manjubhashini, members of the women’s Indian Association organised prayer meetings in different parts of Madras. In one of the meetings the Police Commissioner intervened and ordered them that nobody should enter the maiden for the meeting. But Ammu Swamiathan and Manjubhasini refused to obey the order and tried to enter in the maiden. The whole of the country joined and actively participated in it. In the first phase of movement about 65 thousands demonstrators were arrested.

After that date there was only one serious case of sabotage near Coimbatore. The workers in a number of mills had struck work at Singanallur near Coimbatore. On 22nd August a number of mills in the district there was agitation among the labours in the industrial areas. There was a stay-in strike at the Pankaja Textile Mills for payment of three months bonus instead of the one month’s bonus offered to them. At noon the men refused to go out of the mills without getting the bonus paid. The Antony Ammal, Petchi Ammal, Alamelu, Amaravalli Ammal, Kuttiammal, Maruthai Ammal, Savithiri Ammal and other labourer in Pankaja Textile Mill joined the strike called by the Mill workers and were arrested. The Police arrived on the scene. As the mediation of the Deputy Superintendent of Police was of no avail the workers were ordered to clear out of the mills. But they
persisted in remaining inside and some attempted to throw loose parts of machinery at the Police party. A lathi charge was then ordered and the labourers were cleared out of the mills outside the main gate. But they assembled on the field opposite to the mills, and threw stones at the Police. They refused to disperse. The Police were forced to open fire. In all 19 rounds were fired. Two persons were killed and several injured by a lathi charge. A few of the Police officers were wounded. The car of as Inspector of Police was badly damaged.

In the Southern districts the disturbance took a more serious turn. Public offices as well as public servants were attacked and many patriots were killed in police firing at Rajapalayam, Karikudi, Devakotai, Tiruvadanai and Poolankurichi.

During that period Madurai District board under the Chairmanship of N.M.R. Subburaman passed a resolution on 1st September 1942, condemning the repressive firing at Rajapalayam, Karikudi, Devakotai, Tiruvadanai and Poolankurichi.

Viswanathan Nair was serving as the Circle Inspector of Police at Madurai during the 1942 August movement. He took a prominent part with other police officers in quelling the August revolt in Madurai. Even peaceful non-violent demonstrations were met with severe lathi-blow. The lathi-blow on A.N. Rajan and M. Ramalingam were mute examples of the violent, repressive and inhuman policy followed by the police authorities in Madurai. Some of the common methods of torture practised by the police in Madurai were “to take the arrested persons far into the jungle, beat them mercilessly, burn all their clothes and then release them.” It was reported that on October 2, 1942, two women who took part in the procession held in connection with the birth-day celebrations of Gandhiji (Gandhi Jeyanthi) were arrested and taken in a police lorry to a place in Natham road about 12 miles away from Madurai, stripped naked and were left on the road alone in the late night. T.T. Krishnamachari, a member elected from Tanjore-cum-Trichy Non-Moham-Median Rural Constituency, while speaking about (this event in the Central Legislative Assembly on February 12, 1943, said “In the town of Madura I have heard of a well-authenticated report of bad handling of two women. Two women were taken away by the police, stripped off their clothes, dressed in rags and then left in an open road 12 miles away from the city.” It was alleged that Viswanathan Nair was responsible for the ill-treatment meted out to the two women satyagrahis in Madurai. It was for these atrocious acts that a group of young men in Madurai, chief among them being Krishnamoorthy, Neelakantan, B. K. Rajagopal, A.N. Viswanathan, D. Ramakrishnan, Obla B. Sundar Rao, wanted to teach a lesson to Viswanathan Nair.

On October 23rd Viswanathan Nair went to the Minakshi temple for worship. It was a Friday and he usually went to the temple on Friday evenings Kumara Menon, the Circle Inspector’s friend and Palaniappan, a Police constable in mufti, accompanied the Circle Inspector to the temple on that day. After worshipping at the shrines of Sri Minakshi and other shrines in the temple, all the three men came near the gateway to the southern tower of the temple. It was about 8.30 p.m. and while they were emerging from the southern gateway, a few of the conspirators, Lakshmanan, Ganapathy, M.D. Neelakantan, Gomathi and Gurunathan, who were standing at the entrance to the southern tower of the temple, executed the conspiracy. It is probable that the acid might have been thrown by Gurunathan, then residing at Talayari Gurunathan Temple, South Masi Street, Madurai. Some corrosive acid was thrown and it injured all the three. Loud explosions were made by the conspirators by firing the crackers. The men escaped after achieving their goal.
All the three injured had burns in the face and neck. There were extensive burns on Viswanathan Nair and several injuries on the other two. After being given first aid at a dispensary nearby, Viswanathan Nair was rushed to the Government Hospital. The other two men reported the matter to the police and then went to the hospital for treatment. Palaniappan, the constable, was an in-patient in the hospital till November 20 and Kunara Menon, the Circle Inspector's friend, was an in-patient till December. The Circle Inspector was in the hospital even after January 9, 1943.

The throwing of acid on the Circle Inspector and two others thrilled the entire town of Madurai. In connection with this incident, the police arrested 16 young men in Madurai during October-November. The trial of the 16 young men began in the Court of the Special Judge of Madurai on December 7. The case for prosecution was that the sixteen accused entered into a conspiracy to cause injuries to Viswanathan Nair, and in pursuance of that conspiracy, injuries were caused to him with sulphuric acid and nitric acid on October 23. “Though it was no part of the conspiracy to cause injuries to Kumara Menon (Circle Inspector's friend) and Palaniappan (Police Constable), they were also injured as they happened to be in the company of the Circle Inspector when the acid was thrown on him”. The story of the alleged conspiracy and the occurrence on October 23rd had been set out by A. Krishnamoorthy, a student of about 18 years, who accepted pardon and turned approver.

The trial went on for about two months and the Special Judge (Rajagopalan) pronounced the judgment on February 11, 1943. The following were the convictions. B.K. Rajagopal and D. Ramakrishnan who were considered by the Special Judge as “the ring leaders of the conspiracy” were sentenced to 7 years; R.I. M.D. Neelakantan, M. Lakshmanan and Gomathi were sentenced to five years and R.I. Kayambu Thevar was sentenced to 3 years. R.I. The other accused were acquitted, but some of them were rearrested immediately under Defence of India Rules and were kept in detention.

The Quit India Movement was active in the Madras Presidency only for a few months, roughly from August to December 1942. Thereafter, the enthusiasm warmed considerably. The political atmosphere in the whole country, however, continued to remain dark and sullen with the detention of Congress leaders in jail. News about Mahatma Gandhi’s fast in February 1943 excited public interest to a considerable extent and newspapers continued to devote much attention to it. Hartals were reported from various districts.

A period of quit followed in many districts after the rebel movement had been quelled, but this did not last long; pamphlets inciting Government servants to resign and inducing the public to revive the rebel activities came into circulation. A number of volunteers from Madras, Ramnad, Madurai and Thanjavur districts were frequently staging demonstrations. Many demonstrators at Madurai were sent to jail. These activities were traced to Madurai, Ramnad Satyagraha Council, and an underground organisation working surreptitiously for the revival of the August Movement in many districts. Eventually, in November 1943, this organisation was unearthed and the leading organisers were sent to jail.

When Gandhiji was released May 1944, meetings were held in a number of places. Congressmen were now actively engaged in raising money for the Kasturirai National Memorial fund. In many districts, big funds were collected, with the result that people of all shades of opinions had joined these committees. The Gandhi-Jinnah talks had begun in September, and Congressmen held meetings in Tamilnadu District canvassing support for such an agreement and communists were participating with the congressmen at those meetings. The Communists also took out processions and held meetings. They further obtained signatures in some districts for a mass petition to the Government to release the Congress leaders.

To conclude, the freedom struggle continued in Tamilnadu district vigorously till the dawn of Independence. Secret societies were, however, formed in some places of the district and revolutionary activities were carried on for some time but with little success. Muthuramalinga Thevar indulged in violent attacks upon the Government and held them responsible for the atrocities of 1942. Then the leadership in Tamilnadu passed into the hands of Kamaraj, the president of the T.N.C.C. India became independent on 15th August 1947 and the dawn of freedom was greeted with great rejoicings in Tamilnadu.

Conclusion

The movement refracted the rural areas as well. In several places people declared themselves free courts and offices were seized police stations were occupied. Flags were hoisted on secretarial buildings courts and other Government offices. The government machinery was paralysed in several districts mainly in Madras, South Arcot, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Trichey, Coimbatore, Ramathapuram and Kanyakumari. Leaders were arrested in the first round up and in their absences women carried on the movement and bore the brunt of the British wrath. After a some years of revolutions, struggle, blood shedding, Sathyagrahas and sacrifices, India finally achieved Independence on August 15,1947. The Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs, the Christians and all the other
brave sons and daughters of India fought shoulder to shoulder to throw out the British.

References:
[12.] Chopra, P.N., Quit India Movement; Inter Print Publications, New Delhi, 1986.