



## HIGHLIGHTS OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT IN ANDHRA PRADESH

**Dr. M. Ramesh**

*Lecturer in History, Govt. College For Men Kadapa(A), Kadapa (Dt), A.P.*

In the interval between the Non-Cooperation Movement and Salt Satyagraha the people of Andhra devoted themselves to constructive work-especially the development of Khaddar, and the uplift of the Harijans. The Salt Satyagraha movement led by Mahatma Gandhi was another important phase of the Indian National Movement. During the Civil Disobedience Movement, the people of Andhra showed the highest forms of heroism and self sacrifice. The movement therefore shook the whole Andhra province. Its ordinary features consisted of progressive, mass meetings, *hartals*, singing of national songs and defiance of prohibitory orders.<sup>1</sup> Deshabhakta Konda Venkatappayya was appointed the Dictator for the entire Andhra province to carry on Salt Satyagraha Movement. A *shibiram* (platform) was also established in each district in Andhra. The Civil Disobedience Movement started with the defiance of salt tax laws at various places where people gathered to manufacture contraband salt. *Shibirams* were located at different centres of coastal districts like, Sitanagaram Ashram ( East Godavari), Eluru National College ( West Godavari), Vijayawada , Machilipatnam ( Krishna), Guntur, Pallipadu Ashram( Nellore), Vizianagaram, Bellary, and ‘Vedavanam’ the residence of Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu in Madras.<sup>2</sup> The people manufactured contraband salt braving the lathi-charge of the police and the other forms of brutality perpetrated on them. The Andhras especially women raided on salt depots, and led the message of Swaraj from village to village.

*Spathe-cutting* was the most dangerous phase of the movement as it brought the ordinary riot into active opposition to Government. *Sathe-cutting* is a technique to extract juice from the top tender port of palm tree in the process of making an indigenous intoxicant called *spathe* after subjecting the extracted juice to a certain degree of fermentation. Simultaneously with picketing of foreign cloth and toddy shops in West Godavari district, there was an outbreak of *spathe* and tree-cutting which became a common feature particularly in June 1930 and continued upto July and spasmodically thereafter. At first the *Spathe-cutters* courted publicity and there was no difficulty in detecting the cases and getting evidence. Later, the damage was done furtively and detection became difficult or impossible and there were cases in which it was clear that the cutting was the work of renters. Altogether 116 persons were prosecuted for *Spathe-cutting*.<sup>3</sup> In Guntur district; the *Spathe-cutters* in Nidubrolu and Chebrolu were very promptly prosecuted and punished with substantial fines and terms of imprisonment, which must have acted as a deterrent in many villages. Most of the other cases for unlawful assembly and mischief were disposed of in May 1930. The palmyra tapping finished by the end May, so the loss to renters was not so great as was expected. They were immediately allowed to apply to the excise officers for fresh trees, free of tree-tax and if the trees belonged to government, free of moturpha. They were not encouraged to expect remission of rents and none was actually given. This activity spread quickly not only in Guntur district but also in the Nellore and Krishna districts.<sup>4</sup>

Commenting on this *Spathe-cutting*, the collector of Guntur district in his confidential report to the Chief Secretary to Government of Madras wrote, “The most effective leader of the movement in Guntur was Gollapudi Sitarama Sastri. He had organized the first cutting of the *spathes* of the toddy trees which became one of the most prominent new forms of activity. The speciality of this was that it can be represented as a measure of social reform and more than anything else, it brought the ryots directly into conflict with the Government”.<sup>5</sup> Towards the end of May 1930, picketing of liquor shops began to make in a rather half-hearted and at first non-violent fashion in East Godavari district of Andhra. Later on in June it was carried on persistently at Eluru and Palakollu with occasional demonstrations elsewhere. Instances of forcible picketing of liquor shops now began to occur at Eluru and elsewhere. In such cases the picketers were arrested and prosecuted. Altogether there were 18 cases involving 97 persons in which violence or breach of peace arose out of picketing and all these were prosecuted immediately. Altogether there were 28 cases involving 129 persons prosecuted for picketing. Some of the liquor shops at Eluru lost their revenue considerably and had to be given remission.<sup>6</sup> Boycott of liquor and the consequent picketing of shops and that of the Andhra Christian College at Guntur were small manifestations which gave some trouble to the Government.<sup>7</sup>

Another feature of the Civil Disobedience Movement was the cutting of telegraph wires. The telegraph line was cut for some on the Peravali-Tanuku road on the night of 24 May in West Godavari district. For a short time there was considerable fear of the railway line or other telegraph lines on railway or canals being cut. Therefore special arrangements were made for police patrols at eight centres on the railway line<sup>8</sup>. Besides, several village officers resigned. The first among them was Ponangi Rao, the karnam of Eluru in Godavari district, followed by the karnams of Challapalli, Koniki, Veerabhadrapuram, Yalamanchipadu, Shrotriam and many others.<sup>9</sup> In Andhra, some of the local bodies like the Municipal Councils of Guntur, Chirala, Peddapuram, Tenali, Nellore, Kakinada and Rajahmundry and some of the Local Boards like the East Godavari district Board, Anantapur district Board and Ramachandrapuram Taluk Board expressed their sympathy towards the movement. Some of them



hoisted over their buildings the national flag; some issued instructions to their employees to wear khaddar and conduct propaganda in favour of its use; some prescribed the singing of national songs as a part of daily programme of work in their schools; some organized processions of students carrying national flags; some passed resolutions condemning the arrest of political leaders and the repressive measures of British Government. Thus in every way they openly supported the Civil Disobedience Movement.<sup>10</sup>

Since Rayalaseema does not have the facility of a coast or perennial rivers, there was a token or symbolic form of salt satyagraha. Kalluri Subbarao played a leading role in the Salt Satyagraha in the Rayalaseema.<sup>11</sup> The activists used to smuggle salt water from the neighboring coastal districts of Nellore and Guntur (which had the area of the Krishna district also in it), mix it with water of some of the wells, boil such water and have certain quantities of salt. There was a little activity, though, in Rayalaseema during the Salt Satyagraha with the moderate manufacturing of salt and selling it clandestinely, sometimes braving the arrest by the police of the day whenever caught by the latter.<sup>12</sup> The Rayalaseema Political Conference was held at Vontimitta in Cuddapah district under the presidentship of Kalluri Subbarao on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 1930 and it passed a resolution forming a sub-committee with Parasurama Rao of Nandaluru (Cuddapah district), Kalluri Subbarao of Hindupur, K.Subramanyam (Cuddapah), C. Subramanyam (Nandyal) and M. Sreenivasacharyulu (Tirupati) to encourage Salt Satyagraha, picketing liquor shops, foreign goods shops and promotion of Khaddar and swadeshi goods.<sup>13</sup>

The arrest of Mahatma Gandhi in connection with Salt Satyagraha intensified the movement throughout Rayalaseema, *hartals* and protest meetings were organized all over the region. There was one attempt to break the forest law in Cuddapah District under the leadership of K.Subramanyam from 16 August 1930. Rajus joined the movement but the conviction of the first batch of offenders under the ordinary law discouraged any further attempt. There were also threats of forest Satyagraha in Guntur and Ganjam, but in neither district did they materialize.<sup>14</sup> One of the main features of the Salt Satyagraha was the participation of women in their thousands. Many women were sent to jail, prominent among them being Smt. Bharati Devi Ranga, Vallabhaneni Sitamahalakshamma, Digumurti Janakamma and Khambampati Manikyamba. Manikyamba went to jail with her six –month-old baby.<sup>15</sup>

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