

Role Of Chennai City Students In The Indian Freedom Struggle

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Abstract

This research paper delves into the unwavering dedication of Indian students and youngsters to the country's struggle for freedom. It highlights their active involvement in various movements, including Swadeshi, Home Rule, Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India, as well as their participation in significant satyagrahas such as the Madras Salt Satyagraha, Neil Statue Satyagraha, and Individual Satyagraha. The paper emphasizes the substantial contribution of students from Tamil Nadu, particularly those from Pachaiyappa's College, Presidency College, and Queen Mary's College, in the Indian Freedom Struggle. It underscores that while the concept of nationalism has ancient roots, it emerged as a pivotal force in human history during this period.

Key Words: Non-Cooperation Movement, Quit India Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, Chennai city.

Introduction

Every segment in India bore unmistakable signs of discontentment with the British colonial administration, although this sentiment was predominantly prevalent among the educated elite. Tamil Nadu, in particular, played a significant and noteworthy role in India's struggle for independence against British colonial rule. In Chennai, students actively engaged in the struggle for Liberation and

did not merely remain as passive spectators. Student organizations emerged as early as 1848, and they vociferously protested against the restrictions imposed on those attempting the I.C.S examinations. Hence, the primary objective of this research paper is to illuminate the roles and responsibilities undertaken by the younger generations in the Indian Freedom struggle, with a specific focus on the remarkable participation of students from Chennai (formerly known as New Madras). The commitment and dedication displayed by the students of Chennai in their pursuit of independence were truly commendable. They willingly sacrificed promising careers to immerse themselves in the Indian Freedom Struggle. This effort is mainly based on Primary sources, though to an extent, secondary sources were also availed the primary sources were mostly collected from Tamil Nadu Archives, Madras, and covers the period from 1905 – 1947. A series of works have come up examining the history of the freedom struggle movement in a geographical area of the composite Chennai district.

In Tamil Nadu, the composite Chennai city contains the southernmost portion of the erstwhile Madras Presidency. Chennai city places like Vyasarpadi, Royapuram, Tondiarpet, Perambur, Georgetown, Vepery, Pursewalkam, Egmore, Kilpauk, Chetput, Nungambakkam, Triplicane, Teynampet, Mylapore, Adyar, Guindy will be considered as Composite Chennai city according to the Atlas. As the beginning commenced a war of liberty every man and woman above the age of eighteen should march to the forefront of bearing the arms of truth, non-violence, and self-denial. The Madras Government provided its consent by the Madras Act No. 1 of 1928 which was duly signed by Lord Irwin, the then Viceroy of India dated 11.12.1928. Thus the student community came to the forefront of agitation in Madras.

PARTICIPATION OF CHENNAI CITY STUDENTS IN SWADESHI MOVEMENT (1905 – 1911)

In 1903, a group of enthusiastic persons started the Madras Hindu Association. Besides other objects, it aimed at raising marriage, discouraging dowry, advocating single marriage, and educating windows. With that, in 1908 a Women's

Congress was held at Madras attended by women from all over South India, where nineteen women presented their papers in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Marathi, and English. Through which many of the Women Candidates got involved themselves in the Indian freedom struggle. During 1905, the Schools and Colleges of Tamilnadu became centers where infant Nationalism grew. The Victoria Hostel in Madras, which housed students from Law College, Presidency College, and Christian College was raided. To oppose the decision of the Madras University authorities the students all over Tamil Nadu resorted to different agitations defying such University Laws. The students of Madras University gave wider Publicity to Khadi and mobilized mass support throughout the city. For instance, in a meeting held in Madras in October 1907, more than 3,000 pamphlets were distributed. The Student hostels were also active centers of Nationalism during the Swadeshi Movement. The Government traced such hostels and punished those students, who were involved in anti-British activities.

The Madras University at a special meeting of the Senate held on 2nd August 1907, decided to punish the students for misconduct in any Government College Hostel by their exclusion from any University Examination, either permanently or for a specified period, or by desperation of any university scholarship of endowment held by such person or by both. The Students stoned the windows, then moved to the Police Station and attacked the same. For this Nataswaran Pillai, a student was Convicted and Penalized Rs. 25. Besides all these kinds of punishments students were involved vigorously in the mission.

CONTRIBUTION OF CHENNAI CITY STUDENTS IN THE HOME RULE MOVEMENT (1916 – 1917)

Dr. Besant landed in India, she began strenuously to work for the regeneration of the Country with the Home Rule Movement in 1916. Mrs. Besant began her campaign for National Education at a Great Meeting in the Pachaiyappa's College, Madras, where she pleaded for the reformation of the Indian Education System.

Dr. Besant believed in the spirit of young students and predicted that they would act as mobilizing proxies to gear up the Home Rule spirit among the Conventional

Public. She started to popularize ideologies like National Education, Labor welfare, gender equality, self-rule, and poverty eradication and also encouraged young women to enter Politics.

The Newspapers played a vital role in articulating the demand of the Home Rule Movement among the Youngsters and students community. It was a prominent achievement of the Swadesamitran to articulate the demand for the Home Rule among the literates of smaller towns and villages. Students Convention was held at Madras in July 1917, under the chairmanship of S. Subramania Iyer, The Honorary president of the Home Rule League. He exhorted the student audience numbering more than 500 to take part in the Home Rule Movement and save their Motherland. Desabaktan aimed at increasing patriotism among the common people. Dr. Besant's articles in New India and Common Weal were read by students. Besides, her Pamphlets were in wide circulation among the students. Provoking Journalistic activities on Mrs. Besant and the issue of the pamphlet had an immediate effect on the traveling Public. Clashes in suburban trains between Indian and Anglo- Indian students climaxed on 27th July 1916, in a scuffle at the fort station, Madras. From 1908 Dr. Besant proceeded to enlarge the Theosophical Society Headquarters estate at Adyar. To link Adyar more intimately with the rest of the Theosophical world, she started The Adyar Bulletin, which continued until 1929. Presently the Adyar Newsletter fulfils a Similar Function.

The government viewed the political participation of the Students as a dangerous step. It declared illegal student Organizations such as the Madras student's convention, North Arcot student's conventions Associations, and the like as illegal. These Organizations continued despite the Governmental repression. The Madras students conducted a meeting on 17th November 1916 under the presidency of Madras. On 14th November 1916, the corps was formed at Madras with Seventy-five members of the student's majority. Around 73 students from Pachaiyappa's College, Madras were participated as the Home Rule Volunteers

INVOLVEMENT OF CHENNAI CITY STUDENTS IN THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT (1920-1922)

The response to the Non-Cooperation Movement from the students of Tamil Nadu was both spontaneous and intensive. The student populace readily embraced and actively participated in the Non-Cooperation Programs. The Movement's agenda encompassed various methods, including hartals, fasting, prayer, non-cooperation, withholding tax payments, picketing, and even migration to state borders, where they were willing to sacrifice all personal interests, going so far as to fast unto death if necessary. Furthermore, in addition to these acts of resistance, students in Tamil Nadu also committed to boycotting foreign cloth, engaging in temperance agitation, promoting swadeshi (indigenous) products, and organizing rallies and meetings. They embarked on door-to-door propaganda efforts, spreading the message of non-cooperation and self-reliance. Additionally, they demonstrated their commitment to the cause by abstaining from classes, effectively suspending their educational pursuits in pursuit of their ideals.

The students of Tamil Nadu displayed extraordinary commitment to the Non-Cooperation Movement, employing a diverse array of strategies to champion the cause and defy British colonial dominance. Their collective endeavors stood as a testament to their unwavering resolve and profound dedication to the tenets of non-cooperation and self-reliance. On the 20th of August, students from Queen Mary's College in Madras took to the streets, marching to a nearby toddy shop and engaging in picketing. Additionally, they fervently urged habitual drinkers to renounce their drinking habits. Madras distinguished itself as the first legislature in British India to endorse the Women's Suffrage resolution in 1921, securing a substantial majority. This groundbreaking decision granted women the right to vote on equal terms with men. Bombay swiftly followed suit in emulating Madras. Following the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement in February 1922, Gandhi redirected his focus towards constructive initiatives such as the promotion of temperance and khadi, while also elucidating the perils of Untouchability.

SUPPORT OF CHENNAI CITY STUDENTS IN THE NEIL STATUE SATYAGRAHA (1927)

The Madras provincial committee which is part of the Indian National Congress and Madras Mahajana Sabha passed a resolution, demanding the removal of the statue. They demonstrated agitation across Madras's Presidency. The agitator all over Madras Presidency was led by S.N.Somayajulu. Several agitations were imprisoned for a few weeks to rigorous imprisonment for years. Also, S.N.Somayajulu and Swaminatha Mudaliar were arrested. Then after their arrest, K. Kamaraj led the agitation during September 1927. Mahatma Gandhi gave his support to Neil's statue Satyagraha during his visit to Madras.

The Madras Legislature also passed the resolution demanding the statue's removal. The agitation was lost in fire due to the Simon Commission boycott. Another important personality who participated in Neil's statue Satyagraha in 1927 is **Ammapon alias Leelavathi** who was 11 years old when she took part in it. She was later arrested and kept in a children's home. Agitation for Removal of Neill Statue (1927) James Neill of the Madras Fusiliers (infantrymen with firearms) was brutal in wreaking vengeance at Kanpur ('the Cawnpore massacre', as it was called) in which many English women and children were killed in the Great Rebellion of 1857. Neill was later killed by an Indian sepoy.

A statue was erected for him at Mount Road, Madras. Nationalists saw this as an insult to Indian sentiments and organized a series of demonstrations in Madras. Protesters came from all over the Madras Presidency and were led by S. N. Somayajulu of Tirunelveli. Many were arrested and sentenced to prison. Gandhi, who visited Madras during the same time, gave his support to the agitation. The statue was finally moved to the Madras Museum when the Congress Ministry, led by C. Rajaji, formed the government in 1937

ENGROSSMENT OF CHENNAI CITY STUDENTS IN THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT (1930 – 1934)

The Purna Swaraj Day celebration was colorful at Stanley Medical College, Madras. Though the authorities did not permit the celebration, the students numbering 50, under

the lead of one of their professors, wearing Khadar dress and Gandhi Cap, sang National songs of Subramania Bharathi, and Namakkal Ramalingam Pillai. A Student disguised as Gandhi delivered a speech on Gandhi's Satyagraha and winning of Purna Swaraj. The Celebration of Purna Swaraj Day was successful and it acted as a catalyst agent for the furtherance of political involvement of the students in the forthcoming political protest. These types of Celebration were observed by Wesley College Madras; National Theosophical College, Adayar. The Purna Swaraj Day was celebrated in the city colleges in Madras, including Stanley Medical College, Presidency College, Christian College, and Pachaiyappa's College. On that day some senior students of Pachaiyappa's College wanted their fellow students to wear Gandhi Cap as a mark of celebrating the day. The attendance of the Madras Christian College was not fair and the students were found participating in a mass prayer as a part of celebrating the Purna Swaraj day.

PREFERENCE GIVEN BY CHENNAI CITY STUDENTS FOR MADRAS SALT SATYAGRAHA (1930 – 1934)

Madras, the Capital of Madras presidency had been an epicenter of political activities during the Indian Freedom movement. New Madras is called Chennai. The masses of the city belonged to many linguistic and religious sections as Tamils, Teluguans, Muslims, and Christians who came to the forefront and projected Anti-British surge patriotism during Salt Satyagraha in 1930. The teachers and students from these linguistics and religious sections participated in the Salt Satyagraha. This form of Violating Salt Laws by the students continued till April – May 1930. Thereafter the students continued to concentrate on preparing for the University Examinations as well as carrying on propagation in support of Swadeshi, boycott, etc., till 1934.

INCLINATION OF CHENNAI CITY STUDENTS IN THE INDIVIDUAL SATYAGRAHA (1940 - 1941)

This Movement was not only aimed at seeking independence but also insisting on the right to free speech. The primary objective of individual Satyagraha was to demonstrate that nationalist patience should not be mistaken for weakness. In Madras City, right-wing Congress

members organized flag-hoisting ceremonies in the morning and gatherings in the evenings, during which the new Pledge was administered. These meetings garnered substantial attendance and support. Furthermore, the student community held a separate gathering during which they adopted their pledge and symbolically burned an effigy representing British imperialism. The students' pledges resonated with their fervent desire for freedom and their commitment to the cause of independence. This collective effort underscored the unity and determination of those involved in the struggle for India's self-rule. According to the statement No.58 for 2nd Fortnight of November 1940, the action taken under the Defense of India Act Rules thereunder, etc., on M.R. Venkataraman, Advocate of Madras DE tenue, Vellore C.J. violated conditions of Parole under 26(6) of the Defense of India Rules he was Convicted and sentenced to Simple Imprisonment for six months.

CAPTIVATION OF CHENNAI CITY STUDENTS IN THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT (1942)

When Gandhiji gave the 'Quit India' Call There are few works about student's participation in the freedom movement in Madras Presidency. The Indian National Congress planned to launch a mass agitation against the British's dragging of India into the war. On 15th August the students of Annamalai University cut off telephone wire between Chidambaram and Bhuvanagiri. The police were not able to trace all the students but arrested three students. They were convicted at Madras, Coimbatore, and Trichinopoly Jails. To suppress the political activities of the students the government of Madras acted on several clauses under the defense of Indian rules the Indian Penal Code, The Criminal Law Amendment Act, The Madras Children Act, The Public Security Act, and the Nuisance Act.

The District Magistrates and Police authorities were given more powers to implement the above-set Acts. However, the active part played by the teachers and students in the Quit India Movement and the Closer of education institutions in large numbers in the Madras presidency became a Major issue tackled by the government. The people's participation including the literate community ranged from organized sabotage and

other serious breaches of the peace down to protests of Non-Violent character. The patriotic fervor of the students reached its zenith in 1942.

CONCLUSION

The Students of the Presidency College, Madras indulged in the road blockage and attempted to assault government Officials. With the intervention of H.C. Paperworth the principal the students agreed to carry on their demonstrations in a peaceful manner Paperworth appreciated the quietly held hartal and other demonstrations. But he expressed doubts that the effect and purpose of the hartal would gradually and inevitably be lost if it were not called off in time as it was done in other places. He called upon his students to realize the effectiveness of the gesture. Which no one would interpret as a “surrender of deep feelings”. The Students along with the teachers decorated the college buildings with green Leaves and festoons, hoisted a national flag, and took the Independence Day pledge. The students of Pachaiyappa’s College took out a procession shouting anti-British Slogans.

In Madras, on 9th August some of the students of Madras City Colleges organized a procession and at the end, a meeting was organized wherein Masilamani Pillai, a teacher of the University of Madras addressed the evil effects of the Second World War. The students of Presidency College Madras on 10th August organized a rally condemning the British action of arresting leaders like Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. They even tried to damage Public Properties. The August Revolution of 1942 lost its grip after a short period due to cruel measures inflicted on the revolting Indian masses by the British rule in India. Though the mass revolution was crushed, it left an impression that the Indians could not allow the British to rule India thereafter. Meanwhile, the political parties demanded the British for the transfer of power by constitutional measures. However, the youth of India still believed the agitation was the weapon for obtaining India’s freedom. Under this scenario, the young students intensified their agitations. This dismantled student organization sprang up in most of the educational centers in India.

In 1946, the signals for freedom became certain, which led the students to turn towards their studies. When India won Independence on August 15, 1947, the students celebrated the day with joy and éclat. This article serves as a tribute to the unwavering commitment and societal conscientiousness exhibited by today's youth, thereby upholding a parallel mantle of duty within the contemporary generation. This narrative, in turn, has the potential to nurture the roots of liberty within the minds of students and imbue them with greater motivation. Moreover, it can instill leadership qualities within each of them, underscoring the altruistic contributions made by preceding generations of students to their homeland.

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