

## **ROLE OF SUDANTIRA SANGU JOURNAL IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY – A STUDY**

Dr. P. Loganathan

Assistant Professor, Department of History,  
Annamalai University, Annamalai nagar, Tamilnadu.

### **ABSTRACT**

The term "Journal" means a daily record, as of occurrences or observations. It includes a newspaper especially a daily one, a periodical or magazine especially published for a learned society. The journals reflected the emotions of the people and their feelings of national urge and grievances. The first book printed in Tamil was '*the Holy Bible*' in 1573. Richard Johnston, a Government servant started *Madras Courier*, the first English paper in the Madras Presidency in 1785. The Madras Religious Tract Society published the First Tamil periodical namely the *Tamil Magazine* in 1831. *Sudantira Sangu* was started as a bi-weekly on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930 by S.Ganesan and S.Subramanian. The term *Sudantira Sangu* literally means voice of Freedom.. It shaped the public opinion in favour of salt satyagraha and shortly became a legend in the history of the press and the nationalist movement in the Madras presidency. The enthusiasm of the public was kindled and maintained by this Journal and displayed in bold headlines the arrests of the leaders and published pictures of the huge protest processions organised.

**Keywords:** Sudantira Sangu Journal, Voice of Freedom, Civil Disobedience Movement, Madras presidency.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Man from time immemorial has been curious to know about what, why and how events have occurred. He tried to overcome the lack of information, knowledge and communication gap in various ways. Finally by his continuous striving and experimentation the Journals, New Papers and Press came to the forefront. In the words of the American journalist G.F. Mott, "The press is a full-fledged institution in our modern world and the various media utilized by the press are generally called by and now professionally united under the common name of journalism".<sup>1</sup>

The term "Journal" means a daily record, as of occurrences or observations. It includes a newspaper especially a daily one, a periodical or magazine especially published for a learned

society. The Journals inform the public about the policies and programs of the government and provide opportunity for them to express their reaction to the governmental measures. The Journals are really the eyes of the nation through which it should see, where it stand, as and what exactly its position. The journals reflected the emotions of the people and their feelings of national urge and grievances. The editors and the Journalists of India gave publicity to the concepts of representative government, independence and civil liberty. They were in fact combatants in a national struggle were main in subject and got independent from the British.

Journals and Press is generally considered as the most significant mass media being an opinion leader of the people. It occupies the position of the “fourth estate” besides legislature, executive and judiciary. It also acts as a mediator between the government and the masses. The Journals informs the public about the policies and programs of the government and provides opportunities for them to express their reaction to the governmental measures. The expression freedom of the Journals denotes the absence of any official restraint on the generally of books. Newspapers or other printed matter and it is generally regressed as one of the most important constitutional rights. The genesis of the press in Madras Presidency can be traced to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, The Christian Missionaries took the initiative in the direction and introduced printing press in Madras Presidency. The first book printed in Tamil was ‘*the Holy Bible*’ in 1573. Richard Johnston, a Government servant started *Madras Courier*, the first English paper in the Madras Presidency in 1785<sup>2</sup>. *The Government Gazette and Madras Gazette* was started in 1795.

The vernacular journalism has been coined by Britishers to publish journals in the native languages of the people, during the early part of 19<sup>th</sup> century a number of journals in vernacular languages began to grow. The Governor General William Bentick’s role in developing the vernacular press was in marvellous. He firmly believed that the ‘Liberty of the press’ one of the most useful engines for promoting good administrated in the country. Press played a vital role to reflect the opinion of the people on various subjects. It was a powerful and popular media, fought against a number of socio-economic and political atrocities throughout the world.

Journals played a valiant part in the struggle for freedom from 1806 onwards, the Tamil Journals played a prominent part in the various stages of Indian National Movement. Journals played a definite role in infusing the common people into bitter aversion of the British rulers. Journals took up the propagation of the revolutionary ideals of freedom in the country as its them.

## **ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF TAMIL JOURNALS**

Tamilnadu, a compact linguistic region forming part of the erstwhile British Presidency of Madras, had generally been a 'political backwater' throughout the nineteenth century in contrast to Bengal and Bombay presidency. Only in the present century did this region experience

significant political change of local and national importance. Nationalism is the sense of unity that exists among the people. This may emerge due to a common religion, race, language, history etc. A nation is a group of people with a feeling of solidarity among themselves or a sense of unity that exists in a group of men for some common purpose. It can also be said to be a sense of separation from other people<sup>3</sup> i.e. Foreigners. Nationalism demands political independence, If political independence is not present, it tends to develop a new sovereign state. Nationalism demands a nation-state strengthens nationalism. Nationalism, as a form of group consciousness, is one of the most powerful emotions of all civilized people.

The Protestant missionaries who arrived in South India in early eighteenth century for the purpose of converting Indians to Christianity felt the necessity and importance of translation and publication of the gospel into Tamil. Ziegenbalg, a pioneer missionary at the Danish settlement of Tranquebar on the eastern coast of the peninsula, translated the New Testament, acquired a press and paper in 1712 from the Society for promoting the Christian knowledge based in London, got Tamil types cut from Halle in Germany and completed the printing in 1715<sup>4</sup>. With this began a series of successful efforts in translation, revision and printing of Christian religious works in Tamil by the missionaries. Although books in Tamil had been printed by the Catholics in the latter half of the sixteenth century, it was the protestant print output which paved the way for the origin and development of modern. Tamil prose form with prose as medium and printing as a technique, the protestant missionaries were able to reach a wide audience in the Tamil region.

Rev. J. Anderson of the Free Church Mission of Scotland admitted three 'low caste' Pariah boys in his school at Madras. The 'high caste' Hindus protested and demanded their expulsion; and when Anderson refused to yield, they withdrew their expulsion. In 1841, three high caste Hindus were converted to Christianity against the opposition of their parents which caused the first "major breach between the missionaries and articulate section of the Hindu community in Madras. Two years later, Rev. Anderson baptized a high caste Brahman Boy which created much excitement throughout the presidency.

One of effective methods of propaganda that the missionaries adopted for conversion was the distribution of 'tracts' in vernaculars. For systematic production and distribution of tracts they established 'Tract Societies' at Neyyoor in 1830. These Societies published a number of tracts and distributed them among the Hindus as well as to the new converts to Christianity. Two of this Tamil tract's 'The Hindu Triad' by Vedhanayaga Sastri and rev. Winslow, published in 1832 and 1833 respectively 'excited much feeling' among the Hindus and ran into numerous subsequent editions enjoying wide circulation<sup>5</sup>. It was through these tracts that a large number of

Tamils were exposed to the print media. The wonder of print was called as 'Clutha Clutha' or 'letter unwritten' denoting the break from manual to mechanical impression.

The Madras Religious Tract Society published the First Tamil periodical namely the *Tamil Magazine* in 1831<sup>6</sup>. Frequent changes in its editorship and excessive religious sermons in its columns affected the circulation and led to its decline. Subsequently, many prodigals were published from busy Christian centres such as Madras, Palayamkottah and Nagercoil. The publication of tracts and journals accompanied by few conversions created religious tensions. The Hindus reacted to these Christian activities in various ways. They started schools to educate their children, founded the Sacred Ashes Society which employed agents to ridicule the missionaries and published several books and pamphlets abusing Christianity. In addition, they also published journals in English, Tamil and talcum. The Native interpreter of C. Naryanaswamy Naidu and the Crescent of Gajulu Lakshmiarasu Chetty were prominent English journals in the 1840's. Of all these, the Tamil press played a major role, it brought to the fold of the Nationalist Movement a large number of Vernacular literates because of its distinct advantage of regularity and continuity which other media like public speeches, books, pamphlets, bhajans and theatrical performance lacked. It is difficult to conceive Swadeshi movement (1905-1908) in Tamilnadu without the *Swadesmitran* of G.Subramania Iyer, The father of public opinion in Madras, and the *India* of the great poet Subramania Bharathi, the Home Rule movement (1916 -18) and the Rowlatt Satyagraha (1919) without the *Desabakthan* of the renowned Tamil scholar Thiru. Vi. Ka. The Civil Disobedience movement (1930-33) history cannot write and explain without the 'twin thunders' the *Sutandira Sangu* and the *Gandhi*, and the election Campaign (1934 - 1937) without the *Dinamani* of T.S.Chokkalingam, the doyen of Tamil journalism<sup>7</sup>.

The Swadeshi movement in Madras Presidency was not as intense as in a few other regions of India. Similarly the Non Co - operation movement also was not successful here. The Civil Disobedience movement was not conducted in a large scale as in a few other provinces. However compared to the Non Co - operation experience, the Civil Disobedience movement was successful in Madras Presidency. Further the support, the Tamils gave the Congress in the elections that followed, was over - whelming. These ups and downs in the fortunes of the Congress programmers in Madras Presidency were determined obviously by complex political, social and economic factors. The Tamil Journals and Presses also a product of these factors, were one of the determining forces in Madras Presidency participation in the Nationalist Movement.

### **ROLE OF SUDANTIRA SANGU JOURNAL IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT**

The struggle to win, Indian Freedom Continued in spite of the British checks and atrocities. With much disappointment the Indian National congress met at Lahore on 29<sup>th</sup> December, 1929, and

took important decision of far reaching consequences. A resolution was passed for interpreting the word 'Swaraj' to mean "Complete Independence". The Lahore session authorized Gandhi to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement in India on 1930. The programme of Civil Disobedience Movement included (i) The violation of salt-law, (ii) boycott of the educational institution by the students and offices by the Government employees<sup>8</sup>, (iii) Picketing of shops dealing with liquor opium and foreign goods and (iv) Bonfire of foreign cloth and Non-Payment of Taxes.

On 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1930 Gandhi started his historic Dandi March to break the Salt-tax law. The violation of the Salt Act was the first aim of Civil Disobedience as it would involve the entire population of the country. C.Rajagopaachari started a plan for Salt Satyagraha in Madras Presidency on the Gandhian model and successfully organized it at Vedaranyam on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1930. The Vedaranyam Salt March drew the attention of entire Madras Presidency. The enthusiasm shown by the people during the march to vedaranyam, and display of violence in Madras market the rising spirit of nationalism among the Tamils. On the same model the Swarajists led by T. Prakasam organized Salt Satyagraha Violence has Started because the police beaten the women volunteers. The Tamil Journal *Sudantira Sangu* highlighted the atrocities of the police beating women Satyagrahis in Madras.

The founder of the *Sutandira Sangu* was S. Ganesan (born-1896), the son of a Brahmin constable of Tanjore district. After matriculation, he came to Madras and began his career in 1918 as an apprentice in Ganesan and Co., a book publishing company. He attended the Congress session at Amritsar in 1919. Thereafter, he took part in Congress activities which gave him a living as a publicist. In the nationalist politics, he joined Rajagopalachari's faction in 1920 and supported the Non-co-operation resolution at the Madras Provincial Congress Committee. In 1925, S. Ganesan established the Current Thought Press, and published an English monthly of the same name under the editorship of Dr.B.Pattabhi Sitaramayya, the future historian of the Congress. This journal was incorporated later with a weekly *Janmabhumi* also under pattabi's editorship. Besides, S. Ganesan resuscitated the Triplicane Congress Sabha. He and his friends hawked Khaddar in streets singing Bharathi's songs. As a staunch Gandhian, S. Ganesan was always opposed to Satymurthi and the Swarajists, and made efforts to oust them from local leadership.

*Sudantira Sangu* was started as a bi-weekly on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1930. S.Ganesan and S. Subramanian were the editors of the *Sudantira Sangu*. The term *Sudantira Sangu* literally means voice of Freedom. *Sudantira Sangu* became a tri-weekly, and later a daily. It shaped the public opinion in favour of salt satyagraha and shortly became a legend in the history of the press and the nationalist movement in the Madras presidency. *Sudantira Sangu* was largely instrumental in

spreading the picketing programmes to many parts of the country<sup>9</sup>. *Sudantira Sangu* indulged a vigorous propaganda against the British and was popular among the congressmen in Tamil Nadu.

After the Lahore session of the Congress, S. Ganesan, in association with and on instruction from Rajagopalachari set out to popularise the Congress resolution on 'Complete Independence' and 'Civil Disobedience'. When the Congress committees all over India celebrated 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930, as the 'Independence Day', S. Ganesan and his friend K. Sadagopan brought to the public meeting held at the Madras beach, for free distribution, two thousand copies of a Tamil pamphlet bearing the title, '*Sutandira Sangu*' (Clarion of Independence). The rush to grab a copy of the pamphlet was so much that they stopped free distribution and fixed a meagre quarter anna as its price. S. Ganesan and his colleagues continued to publish a series of pamphlets of the same name for few more weeks. After the Lahore session of the congress, Ganesan with the instruction from Rajagopalachari jointly worked to popularise the congress resolution on 'Complete Independence' and 'Civil Disobedience' on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930, Independence Day was celebrate throughout India, Rajaji appealed to all people to celebrate the day not only in every town and village but in every home<sup>10</sup>.

In the first issue of *Sudantira Sangu* on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930 breathed revolutionary fervour. The people could hear the beatings of the Kettledrum: "The clamour for liberty should reach the ears of English people beyond the seas and strike terror in their hearts.... cut the chain of bondage. We will do away the foreign domination... we will dig a pit and the fruitless system of administration: we will tear up the deceptive snare of the strangers and fling it away... we will wipe the tears of the mothers. We will erect the temple of Swaraj or die after displaying heroism".

After Salt Satyagraha, the congress party sought other avenues to continue the Civil Disobedience Movement in Madras presidency was affected. The congress party attributed the import of cloth as the reason of unemployment and preached the boycott of foreign cloth. Accordingly it was decided to give encouragement to Khaddar manufacture and this attracted many handloom weavers to join in the struggle. During the Satyagraha Movement the congress women volunteers started to picket foreign cloth shops in Madras. The congress party next propagated for the boycott of liquor shops, the congress party under the leadership of C.Rajagopalachari carried on the agitation and sacked many liquor shops in Madras, when the *Sudantira sangu* Tamil Journal played a vital role to create the awareness among the people about the Civil Disobedience Campaign, the writings in *Sudantira Sangu* were certainly one of the major factors. Its appeal was expressed in seditious tone quite often.

*Sudantira Sangu* stopped the publication on 12<sup>th</sup> May, 1930 due to restrictions imposed on it. On 11<sup>th</sup> April, 1931, *Sudantira Sangu* was revived It triumphant carrier in the freedom Movement

had encouraged journalist and patriots to launch several low priced papers. When Gandhi began his heroic March to Dandi, *Sudantira Sangu* painted a gloomy picture of the condition of India under British rule as follows:

“There is tax for the salt we eat:  
For the water we drink...  
Modesty left our women;  
Bravery left our men;  
Unnatural deaths have multiplied;  
Liquor shops have increased;  
The evil habit of smoking has spread;  
Vernaculars declined;  
Temples and tanks begin to disappear”.

*Sudantira Sangu* encouraged the people to participate in the Vedaranyam Salt March by its call through the articles published its issue.

Another article on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 1931, depicted India as jail and accused the government of applying brute force against the heroes of Non-violence. In the mean time S.Subramaniam, a congressman with extreme views and convicted for Civil Disobedience, became the new editor of the *Sudantira Sangu*. He paid the security of rupees five hundred. As he advocated violence in paper the government asked him to deposit a security of rs.1000<sup>11</sup>. The Journals were made possible the symbolic sharing of human experience, providing common understanding and a common basis for collective action. “To the consummation of Indian Freedom the press had made no mean contribution over more than half a century of the nation’s struggle for liberation”.

## CONCLUSION

The Tamil Journals played a crucial part in the development of nationalism. The services of the *Sudantira Sangu* Journal to the nation were commendable, and beyond description. The Journals acted as the best recorders of events educated of the people about freedom movement. They reflected the public opinion with regard to the vital issues of the country. *Sudantira Sangu* Journal infused patriotic feelings into the hearts of the Tamils and awakened their political consciousness. *Sudantira Sangu* Journal played a very important part in this campaign of “Salt

Satyagraha". The enthusiasm of the public was kindled and maintained by the vigorous writings in these Journals. The Journals displayed in bold headlines the arrests of the leaders and published pictures of the huge protest processions organised. It also published the photos of the congress volunteers who were injured in the lathi charge made by the police.

## REFERENCES

1. Nadigkrishna Murthy, *Indian Journalism*, Prasuam publication, Mysore, 1952, P. 1.
2. Tarachand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India, Vol II*, S Chand and Co, Faridabad, 1967, P. 212.
3. *Ibid.*, P.212.
4. Chopra G.S., *Advanced study in the History of modern India Vol II*, Mac Million Company, New Delhi, 1971, P. 429.
5. C.J. Nirmal, *19<sup>th</sup> century press and the Development of Indian Nationalism*, Journal of the Madras university, Vol XIII, Madras, 1970, P. 83.
6. D. Sadasivam, *The growth of public opinion in the madras presidency*, Vasumathi Publishers, Madras, 1974, P.60.
7. Margarita Barns, *The Indian press*, Oxford Press, London, 1940, P.261.
8. Nadigkrishna Murthy, *Indian Journalism*, Prasuam publication, Mysore, 1952, P. 219.
9. Papers Relating to Infant *Marriage and Enforced Widowhood in India*, Government of India, Calcutta, 1886, P. 1.
10. Interview with S. Ganesan, the founder of the *Sutandira Sangu*, Public confdl. G.O. 316, 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1930, Under Secretary Safe-secret disposal No.703, 25<sup>th</sup> August, 1930.
11. S. Venkatraman, also a prominent Congress activist, claimed that he and his colleagues were the real founders of the *Sutandira Sangu*, See padamanabhan, R.A., *Kumari Malar*, August 1979. But the Government records testify to the involvement of S. Ganesan and K. Sadagopan only. The latter severed his connections with the paper after issues, when the Government gave a warning to the paper. There is no substantial evidence to prove that S. Venkataraman was the founder of the paper.