DOI: 10.15613/hijrh/2023/v10i2/45603
ISSN (Print): 2349-4778
***HuSS*: International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences,** *Vol 10(2), 49-53, July-December 2023* *ISSN (Online): 2349-8900*

History Unexplored - SardarVelappanaidu's Role in Freedom Struggle

S. Shenbagavalli[1*] and P. Kalaivani[2]

[1]Associate Professor and Head, Department of History, Sri G.V.G. Visalakshi College for Women (Autonomous), Udumalpet - 642128, Tamilnadu, India; shenbagavalli@gvgvc.ac.in
[2]MA History, Department of History, Sri G.V.G. Visalakshi College for Women (Autonomous), Udumalpet - 642128, Tamilnadu, India; kalaigeetha2k75@gmail.com

Abstract

India is a vast country with a diverse range of customs and cultures. The construction of India's history involves a substantial amount of regional history. Even though India has now celebrated 75 years of independence, Azadi Ka Amit Mahotsav, the younger generation is still unaware of the local freedom fighters who also played a crucial role in setting India free. Therefore, it is essential to review, restore, and document the part played by every Indian region during various stages of the freedom movement, as well as to inspire the next generation with a new zeal and passion and to reconstruct an extensive history. In an attempt to trace the freedom fighters of our region, we the researchers were able to identify the lesser-known freedom fighter Vellapa Naidu of Guruvappanayakkanur, in Udumalpet Taluk. An attempt is made to bring into the limelight the invaluable contribution of Vellapa Naidu towards national Independence. In the present work, a sincere effort has been made to portray the instrumental role of Vellapa Naidu in propagating Gandhian principles and strengthening the freedom struggle from its regional and local perspectives.

Keywords: India, Freedom, Movement, Sardar, Udumalpet

1. Introduction

To free our nation from British rule, there were numerous uprisings and movements. Many nationalists from all around the country took part and sacrificed their lives for Indian independence. Only the frontline leaders' selfless service has been documented and recognized around the country. Numerous local volunteers gave their lives in protest against colonial control, but their histories lacked proper records. So, to examine a lesser-known independence fighter, this article discusses Sardar Velappa Naidu's contribution.

The individual profiled in this article is a native of Tamilnadu State in India's Guruvappanaickanur hamlet in the Udumalpet Taluk of the current Tiruppur District. Udumalpet was a part of Coimbatore, an Inland district of Madras Presidency (laid between10° 15' and 11° 13' N and 76° 39' and 78° 14' E with an area of 7,860 square miles)in the southern portion of the peninsula during the British era. The village Guruvappanaickanur is located 81km from the district headquarters in Tiruppur and 14km from the sub-district headquarters in Udumalpet.

2. Objectives

To chronicle the life and contributions of Sardar Velappa Naidu, a prominent but lesser-known freedom fighter from Guvappananayakkanur village, Udumalpet Taluk and to analyse how Sardar Velappanaidu's activism influenced the local community in Udumalpet, both during and after the independence movement.

**Author for correspondence*

3. Methodology

This study primarily employs a qualitative research design, relying on historical analysis and archival research. Sources explored for the study includes government orders, convict register, fortnightly reports, articles, books, magazines and interviews with descendants.

4. Early Life

Velappa Naidu was born on October 27, 1893, to farmers Entammal and Guruvappa Naidu in Guruvappanaickanur Village[1]. For his official education, Velappa Naidu attended a school in Udumalpet, and he also finished his post-secondary studies. Velappa Naidu's wife Kondammal gave birth to three children. In addition to serving as the Musif, he was also a member of the Taluk Board[2].

5. National Movement and Gandhi

Gandhi took up the position of leader. Under his guidance, India battled for her independence and won it, embracing truth and non-violence as dharma standards and employing Satyagraha and non-cooperation at a level that was unprecedented in human history. Sincerity, spiritual understanding, and political savviness combined to make Gandhi a "Mahatma" who was revered and adored by both Hindus and Muslims. Tamil Nadu was second to no other region in the Indian Independence movement, and in reality, numerous significant strategies and programs were developed as well as several historical occurrences and happenings to free our motherland from foreign tyranny centered here.

6. Non-cooperation Movement

Gandhiji's arrival and his declaration of the Non-cooperation Movement gained popularity very rapidly. During his South Indian campaign, (August, 1920) Gandhiji through his discourses in the districts of Madras Presidency stressed and called for civil disobedience or Non-cooperation. He emphasized non-violence, and in executing the policies framed by Congress such as relinquishment of government posts and titles, abstaining from legislative councils and foreign goods, encouragement of Swadeshi, Khaddar, national education, temperance and labour unions. Acknowledging the clarion call of Gandhi, volunteers nationwide gave up government jobs, and titles and earnestly involved in the movement. In Udumalpet Velappa Naidu, resigned his Taluk Board membership, and Munisf post and returned the licensed gun[3]. He travelled around the Coimbatore district, campaigned Gandhian principles, created the spirit of patriotism and was able to draw the masses towards national movement. Velappa Naidu was greatly impressed by Gandhi and decided to follow him for the rest of his life.

The Non-cooperation movement's action in prohibiting toddy had two aspects, (i) to save the addicts from the harmful effects of drinking habit and (ii) to prevent the government from generating the revenue it received from the sale of liquor. There was a good response, many bidders of the toddy shop did not tender for licenses to run arrack and toddy shops, which greatly hit on the revenue of the government. In many villages of the region, Velappa Naidu successfully prohibited the sale of liquor under the temperance Movement[4].

7. Civil Disobedience Movement

Gandhi's active politics and his Salt Satyagraha march to Dandi in March 1930 added vitality to the national movement. Gandhi decided to start the civil disobedience movement with a march across rural Gujarat that would end in Dandi, where salt is produced. The unlawful production of salt served to emphasize an understandable representation of governmental economic tyranny and to get the populace ready for more resistance. C. Rajagopalachari was able to exert complete control over the Tamil Nadu Provincial Congress Committee in the Madras Presidency. He created a Gandhian-inspired plan for a salt satyagraha march in the Tamil province and intended to hold it between Trichi and Vedaranyam seashore. The march began on April 13th, 1930, and ended on April 28th in Vedaranyam. Rajagopalachari violated the salt prohibition on May 1 at Vedaranyam Beach[5]. After Gandhi was imprisoned at Dandhi during the Salt Satyagraha, many local volunteers rushed into the freedom cause by joining the Congress party right away. Avinashilingam Chettiar led the formation of a Congress committee and eventually assumed leadership of the Coimbatore District Congress Committee. On

July 5th, Avinashilingam worked in Valangulam to produce salt alongside T. Raghavachari, C. P. Subbiah, K. Subri, and many others. They were transported to the Vellore Prison after receiving a six-month sentence of solitary confinement. Several patriots from the region of Coimbatore joined the struggle and worked tirelessly for two decades for the same. N. Subramanian Iyer, C. Subramanian, K. K. Subramaniam, R. S. SrikantaIyer, Sami Gounder, G. S. Lakshmanan from Gobi, M. A. Eswaran, K. S. Ramaswamy Gounder, R. M. Magudapathi, and K. S. Periyaswamy from Erode, R. M. Kumaraswamy from Palladam, Vadivel from Dharapuram, Velappa Naidu from Udumalpet, B. K. Nallaswamy and Rangaswamy Reddiar from Bhavani were among the patriots[6].

Velappa Naidu in Coimbatore district propagated Gandhian policies and incited freedom feelings in the region. In the year 1931, as a commander of the Coimbatore District Congress, he gathered volunteers and effectively conducted picketing of foreign cloth shops, and toddy shops and focused everyone's attention, for which he was imprisoned for a month. Later he was again sentenced for one-year imprisonment in Vellore for preaching ideals against the British[7].

8. The Quit India Movement

Gandhi's final all-India Satyagraha on Indian soil was the Quit India Movement. During the Second World War, the simple yet resolute phrase "Quit India" was used. This movement was unique from the two that came before it in that it was presented in difficult conditions, specifically at a time of war when any government would arm itself with total power. The country's common citizens showed uncommon bravery in the face of the worst repression ever unleashed against a national movement under these circumstances. The movement was genuinely multifaceted, all-encompassing, and broad-based; it broke down barriers of caste, creed, community, religion, and sex and led to a nationwide uprising. The upper and lower classes, the intelligentsia, the elites, the legal profession, women, students, workers, artisans, craftsmen, and peasants[8].

The Quit India movement was launched across India by a resolution passed during the Congress session. In India, the British were urged to depart. But as soon as the movement got underway, the majority of the leaders were imprisoned. The nation as a whole entered a battle for life and death with the British. There was both violence and non-violence during the Quit India Movement agitation. This was the case since all the notable and minor leaders were imprisoned, leaving the masses without leadership to select their methods for completing the task at hand. The people who lacked a leader turned to violent sabotage, arson, and incendiary activities[9].

In Coimbatore, both peaceful and violent methods were employed by the people. People observed hartals and held meetings and processions in defiance of the prohibitory orders of the District Magistrate. Three mills in Udumalpet went on strike, and many were arrested. On the 14th, the situation became grave. A ban on meetings and processions was declared at Tiruppur and Udumalpet[10]. Velappa Naidu was arrested under Sec: 120 B(1) of IPC, (Criminal Conspiracy) and was sentenced to two years of rigorous Imprisonment by Jail special Magistrate Pollachi, C.C.213/42 on January 30, 1943. He was admitted to Allipuram jail on February 8, 1943. But he was allowed remission of 3 months, 11 days and was released on October 18, 1944[11].

9. Participation at Dharapuram and Palladam

Nearby taluks of Dharapuram and Palladam, where Udumalpet is located, saw tremendous public engagement. Four hundred or more pupils from the local Board High School in Dharapuram skipped class on August 18th, 1942, in an apparent protest against the congress leaders. They convened in the nearby Agastiswarar temple where a conference was conducted and a resolution was passed criticizing the responsible actions of the government and asking for the release of the leaders. They marched in a procession from the school while yelling congress chants. A group of students seeking to organize a meeting in the early evening near the Hanuman Temple in Dharapuram on the Amaravathi river bank were dispersed by the local police. Four congress volunteers and three local high school students were detained. Two police constables suffered minor injuries as a result of some people throwing stones at the police. The detained individuals were all freed within an hour with a warning. A prohibitive order was issued on August 19th, 1942, under section 144 of the Indian Penal Code, banning processions and public gatherings inside the municipal borders for

one month starting on that date. The authorities took great care to stifle the movement. When Mr Siddhia, a congressman, arrived from Coimbatore on the Blue Mountain Express that evening was detained at the Erode train station. Mr E. G. Govindasamy was also detained by the police for making related detrimental speeches and was also arrested under Indian defence laws. Mr T. S. Avinashilingam Chettiar, an MLA from Coimbatore, was detained on August 22, 1942, by the local police for printing, disseminating, and publishing a pamphlet titled "Fulfillment of a Prophecy" that criticized the actions of the authorities. The government had difficulties as a result of the pervasive and violent actions in many areas of the district. In Palladam, section 144 of the Indian Panel Code was adopted, outlawing public gatherings and processions. However, Mr. Kuppunaidu, the head of the Palladam Taluk Congress Committee, issued an order, and he disobeyed it, resulting in his arrest at Palladam that evening on August 22, 1942[12].

10. The Title 'Sardar'

Sri Velappa Naidu was awarded the title "Sardar". The title 'Sardar' meaning 'Leader' was conferred by the people to very few personalities. The honour was bestowed on Sri Velappa Naidu by the people of Udumalpet in gratitude for his extraordinary leadership abilities in assembling the volunteers in the national movement.

Avinashilingam Chettiar and Rajaji, two leaders with whom Velappa Naidu was associated, have documented Velappa Naidu's involvement in the freedom fight. He had been close to Rajaji for 35 years, and the two of them participated in a variety of National Movement events. Rajaji, who stressed this in his address, said Velappa Naidu always carried out his responsibilities with a grin on his face and a determined approach. Velappa Naidu's talk, according to Rajajihas, provided the volunteers with greater confidence and passion to participate completely. In honour of this, Rajaji has also stated that even Mahatma Gandhi did not earn the title "Sardar". Three outstanding leaders - Valabhbhai Patel, Vedaranyam, and Velappa Naidu earned it. All three personalities shared the same traits of skill, bravery, and determination in carrying out leadership. Velappa Naidu bravely worked for the national movement with tremendous devotion. He participated in the national movement and adhered to Gandhiji's ideals as a patriot[13]. He had no desire for power or fame. He joined the Rajya Sarkar-appointed Committee to choose volunteers for the Home Defence Force in 1948[14]. The veteran national independence fighter passed away on November 23, 1949[15].

11. Memorial Statue

The Vellappa Naidu Memorial Committee was established to honour the great soul, and they requested permission from the authorities to erect a statue of Thiyagi Sardar Vellappa Naidu inside the grounds of the Udumalpet Panchayat Union office complex. Thiru V. Ramaswamy, the committee's secretary, agreed to give the Panchayat Union 20% of the statue's purchase price in exchange for future upkeep. In resolution No. 102, dated May 24, 1974, the Panchayat Union Council Udumalpet decided to install the monument of Thiyagi Sardar Velappa Naidu in the Panchayat Union office compound and to pay Rs. 1000/- to the Divisional Engineer (Highways and Rural Works). The aforesaid recommendation was made by the Coimbatore collector. The monument erection committee also paid the Panchayat Union Treasury Rs. 1000, or 80% of the capital cost. G.O. Ms. No.1290 dated July 29, 1975, rejected the request of the above. However, an appeal was made to the Government and after reconsidering the matter, as a special case Government permitted to erection of the statue of Sardar Vellappa Naidu, within the Udumalpet Panchayat Union Office compound from out of Public Contribution, subject to the condition on maintenance of the statue. The order issued in G. O. Ms. No. 1290, R. D. and L. A. dated July 29, 1975, was revoked[16].

The statue of Sardar Velappa Naidu was built inside the grounds of the Udumalpet Panchayat Union Office after a government directive. In a ceremony headed by Mr M. Bakthavatchalam, the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, the monument was unveiled on Wednesday, June 23, 1976, at 4 p.m. by Mr K. Rajaram, a member of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Council at the time. The Udumalpet Panchayat Union Chairman, Mr S. M. Balasubramaniam, presided over the event, while Mr P. R. Ramakrishna, Principal, CIT, Coimbatore, offered felicitations[17].

12. Findings and Suggestions

The younger and older generations of the Udumalpet community are ignorant of the great patriot is alarming. He is recognized and honoured on his death anniversary, which occurs just once a year. The Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav has impelled the residents of his village and the political parties to commemorate the veteran freedom warrior, who has gone unnoticed for a long time. The residents of Guruvappanaickanur has proposed the construction of "Mani Mandapam", and the present Madathukulam MLA, Mr C. Mahendran, committed to doing so[18]. If it is accomplished, 'Sardar' Velappa Naidu's renown will be well recognized throughout the country.

In addition to this, contests at schools, colleges and universities must be organized to honour his birthday. Government and public facilities can be named after him in the Udmalpettaluk to honour his contributions. A monument in his hometown can be created. Younger generations can be inspired to pursue research study and by looking through the historical records, many lesser-known volunteers of the freedom movement can be brought into the limelight. The history of local and regional figures who gave their lives for the cause of independence will inspire a sense of patriotism and brotherhood for the development of the nation.

Apart from this, an initiative should be taken to commemorate his birthday by organising competitions at schools and colleges. To highlight his deeds, government/ public centres are to be named after him in and around Udmalpet Taluk. In his native at his residence memorial structure can be erected. The younger generation can be encouraged to take up research and thereby explore the archival data, and many lesser-known freedom fighters can be brought into the limelight. Many volunteers have actively participated in this region. The documentation of local/regional personalities who gave up their life for the cause of independence will infuse the spirit of patriotism and brotherhood for national building.

13. References

1. Who's Who of Freedom Fighters, Vol. 1, August 1973, Silver Jubilee Year, Government of Tamil Nadu, p.132.
2. Kalki, Malar 13, Magazine 25, p. 62.
3. Ibid.
4. Kalki, Malar31, Magazine 35, 26.03. 1972, p. 5.
5. V. Venkatraman. Non–violence: The National Tamil Press on salt Satyagraha at Vedaranyam. Res. J. Humanities and Social Sciences. 2021; 12(1):43-7. https://doi.org/10.5958/2321-5828.2021.00008.5
6. Avinashilingam, T.S. Nan Kanda Mahatma, Sri Rama Krishna Vidyalayam, (Coimbatore, 1971), pp. viii-ix. 7.
7. Kalki, Malar 13, Magazine 25, p. 62.
8. P. N. Chopra, T.K. Ravindran and N. Subramanian, History of South India, Vol. III: Madras Period, (S. Chand and Company Ltd, New Delhi), p. 266.
9. Ibid.
10. Dr B. S. Baliga, Madras District Gazetteers, Coimbatore, Government of Madras, (1966), p. 132.
11. Convict Register (Convict Admission Register), Allipuram Jail, Bellary, Vide Admission Book No. 12, p. 80.
12. Government GOs, Fortnightly Reports; 1940-1942.
13. The Chief Minister of Madras State, Rajagopalachari's speech at Udumalpet in the Congress Volunteers Meeting during the unveiling of the Portrait of Sri G. Velappa Naidu on 10.12.1953.
14. Kalki, Malar 13, Magazine 25, p. 62
15. Who's Who of Freedom Fighters, Vol. 1, August 1973, Silver Jubilee Year, Government of Tamil Nadu, p. 132.
16. G. O. Ms. No.21, Dated 6th January 1976, Rural Development and Local Administration Department.
17. Unveiling the statue of Later Patriot Sardar Velappa Naidu Invitation, 18.6.1976.
18. Personal participation in the event.