

M.V. Sudarsanam Naidu: An Icon Of Selfless Service And Sacrifice

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Abstract

This article delves into the pivotal role and extraordinary journey of M.V.Sudarsanam Naidu, an unsung freedom fighter from Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu, during the historic Salt Satyagraha. Taking place within the larger context of the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Salt Satyagraha aimed to challenge the unjust British salt laws and played a crucial role in India's struggle for independence. This article sheds light on the extraordinary journey of M.V.Sudarsanam Naidu, emphasizing his selfless dedication to nonviolent protest. It explores the hardships endured by M.V.Sudarsanam Naidu and his fellow satyagrahis, who bravely faced police repression, arrests, and even violence. Despite these challenges, Naidu's unwavering determination and unwavering resolve to fight for justice remained unshakable. This article aims to honor his legacy and shed light on his significant contributions to the freedom struggle. It seeks to inspire readers with the spirit of selfless sacrifice, resilience, and determination, urging them to recognize and commemorate the unsung heroes who played vital roles in India's journey towards independence.

Keywords: M.V. Sudarsanam Naidu, Freedom Fighter, Cuddalore, Salt Satyagraha, Civil Disobedience Movement.

Introduction

The struggle for Indian independence bore witness to countless acts of heroism and sacrifice across the length and breadth of the country. Tamil Nadu, a state steeped in a rich cultural and historical heritage, played a crucial role in shaping the course of this remarkable journey towards freedom. Throughout history, the tales of great leaders and iconic figures have often taken center stage, leaving behind the stories of countless unsung heroes who played vital roles in shaping the course of events. In the context of India's struggle for independence, these unsung heroes form an integral part of the narrative, representing the collective spirit of resistance and sacrifice that fueled the movement. These unsung heroes, often overshadowed by more prominent figures, played crucial roles in mobilizing communities, organizing protests, and spreading awareness about the injustices perpetrated under British rule. Among them stands M.V.Sudarsanam Naidu, an unsung hero whose participation in the various freedom movements exemplifies the courage and dedication exhibited by countless individuals during this pivotal period. M.V.Sudarsanam Naidu's story epitomizes the spirit of these unsung heroes.

Birth and Early Life

M. V. Sudarsanam Naidu was born on May 13, 1895, in Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh, as the Eldest son of Varadarajalu Naidu and Pangajaammal.¹ He had a younger brother named Balakrishnan Naidu. The Naidu family belonged to a wealthy background in Chittoor, as his father was involved in the diamond and gem-making business. At the age of five M.V. Sudarsanam began his education (in 1900) through the pial education system in Chittoor. At the age of ten, Sudarsanam went to his paternal grandfather's house in Puducherry. However, due to issues with Sudarsanam's paternal uncle, Varadarajalu Naidu and his family had to move to Manjakuppam village in the Cuddalore district of Tamil Nadu.² The family resided in a tiled house at Fish Market street at Manjakuppam. In Manjakuppam, Varadarajalu Naidu started his diamond and Gems business in the fish market street of the village. After relocating to Manjakuppam, he enrolled at St. Joseph's School in Cuddalore. It was during his time at St. Joseph's School, between 1906 and 1907, that he completed his education up to the first and second forms.³

Marital Life

In the year 1912, at the age of 18, M. V. Sudarsanam Naidu entered into matrimony with Pangajaammal, and their union was blessed with four children, Purushottaman, Komalam, Nachiyar and Nila. Together, they formed a close-knit family, residing under the same roof, sharing their joys and sorrows. After their marriage, Pangajaammal took on the responsibility of caring for the family. She wholeheartedly dedicated herself to nurturing their children and ensuring their well-being. She lovingly tended to their needs, acting as the pillar of support for the family while M. V. Sudarsanam Naidu actively participated in various protests and movements, fighting for social causes. However, due to his involvement in these movements, Sudarsanam Naidu was often away from home, unable to provide the necessary care and support for his family. During his absence, Pangajaammal took on the role of both parents, shouldering the responsibilities of raising their children and managing the household. At a later point in his life, M. V. Sudarsanam Naidu entered into a second marriage with Paunambal. They had three children Rangarajalu, Narayanasamy and

Saraswati. Rangarajulu worked as executive engineer at NLC (Neyveli Lignite Corporation). Narayanasamy took the job of bill collector in Cuddalore. All other descents of Sudarsanam took agriculture.⁴

Occupation

He established a cooperative society that focused on the production of hand-husked rice in 1915, when he was at his early 20s. Along with paddy from his field, the cooperative society purchased paddy from the region and employed women who diligently pounded the rice by hand, transforming it into the final product. The hand-milled rice was then distributed to various institutions, including prisons, corporation schools, and hospitals, within the South Arcot district. In 1916, during the time of Home Rule Movement, Sudarsanam Naidu couldn't continue working on this business, due to his affiliation with freedom movement.⁵ His wife, Pangajaammal, efficiently managed the cooperative's hand-milled rice business. Pangajaammal, along with collective efforts of 15-20 women, secured not only a decent livelihood but also significantly improved their family's financial situation. The cooperative society's success not only benefited their own household and employed women but also contributed to the well-being of the local community by providing a vital stable food source. Through their enterprising spirit and commitment to innovation, M. V. Sudarsanam Naidu and his family found a solution to the challenges they faced in agriculture and food security. Their endeavors not only ensured their economic stability but also had a positive impact on the lives of those they served through their cooperative enterprise.⁶

Inspiration to Enter into Freedom Struggle

M. V. S's decision to enter politics was influenced by various factors and individuals who played significant roles in shaping his motivations and aspirations. His father Varadarajalu Naidu, was against the colonial rule and had anti-British attitude. The exposure of Sudarsanam Naidu to his father's nationalistic fervor, instilled in him a sense of social and political consciousness at the early ages of his life. Additionally, his paternal uncle also supported Swadeshi Movement of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, further fueling his interest in politics. The guidance of his teacher, Joseph Gnanaprakasam, played a pivotal role in shaping Sudarsanam Naidu's political aspirations. He along with his father attended a political meeting at Cuddalore, wherein V.O.C. gave a speech on the plight of menial labourers. This could have also been a factor of inspiration. In May 1917, 23rd Madras Provincial Political Conference was held at Cuddalore. Mrs. Annie Besant speech in the meeting inspired him to take up path of freedom struggle. From 1916, in his early 20s, starting with Home Rule Movement, his struggle for Indian freedom began.⁷

Participation in Indian Freedom Struggle

M.V. Sudarsanam Naidu played an important role in the Indian Freedom Struggle. After getting inspired by attending the meeting addressed by Mrs. Besant in Cuddalore in 1917, which sparked more interest in freedom struggle, he actively started participating in various movements such as the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, Individual Satyagraha, and Quit India Movement in the South Arcot district. Due to his involvement in the Indian national movement, he was arrested multiple times. The Non-Cooperation Movement was a nationwide movement launched by Gandhi in 1920 during British rule. It was a response to the grievances of the Indian people, particularly the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. The movement gained approval from the Congress at its special session in Calcutta and was later endorsed at the Nagpur session in December 1920.⁸

Non-Cooperation Movement

M.V. Sudarsanam Naidu played a crucial role in mobilizing the public in the South Arcot region to participate in the Non-Cooperation Movement. He organized meetings, demonstrations, and other events to raise awareness among the people. In December 1920, he led a procession in Cuddalore town to promote the production of Khaddar, which was hand-spun cloth. Gandhi's visit to Cuddalore further fueled the Congress activities in the region. On Gandhi's birthday, October 2, 1921, Naidu and other Congress leaders and volunteers celebrated it with great enthusiasm. They honored Gandhi's portrait, distributed sweets, and Naidu delivered a speech highlighting Gandhi's inspiring leadership and his principles of non-violence and truth. As a result of his involvement, Naidu was arrested and convicted under Section 147 and 341 IPC. He served a four-month sentence and paid a fine of Rs. 20. He was detained in Bellary, Alipur, and Thanjavur prisons. His conviction number was 6253. He was ultimately released on February 28, 1922. The Non-Cooperation Movement was later suspended on February 12, 1922.⁹

Neil Statue Satyagraha

In 1927, there was a protest in Chennai (formerly Madras) called the Neil Statue Satyagraha. The people of Tamil Nadu wanted to remove a statue of a British military officer named Neil. He was known for his role in suppressing the Indian Mutiny of 1857, during which he treated the mutineers and the public very harshly. The Tamil Nadu Volunteer Corps, along with people from different parts of Tamil Nadu, organized the protest. They believed that Neil's actions were unjustified, but the Madras Presidency government considered his military service to be heroic. M.V. Sudarsanam Naidu, along with other leaders like Anjalai Ammal, Salem Varathan, Panruti Daivanayaga Ayya, and K.V. Ganapathi, played a role in mobilizing support for the protest. Meanwhile, Mahatma Gandhi visited Cuddalore as part of his tour of

South India. Naidu and others were responsible for spreading Gandhi's message during his visit. The protest against the Neil Statue gained momentum in Chennai, while Gandhi's message of nonviolent resistance was being spread by Sudarsanam Naidu and other leaders in Cuddalore.¹⁰

Civil Disobedience Movement, 1930-34

After the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement, the Congress was waiting for the right time to revive its non-violent struggle against British rule. In 1928, the visit of the Simon Commission and the British government's neglect of the Congress demand for Dominion Status to India caused political distress and increased confrontation. This led the Congress to decide to revive its non-violent struggle. At a meeting in Lahore on December 29, 1929, the Congress proposed launching the Civil Disobedience Movement to achieve complete independence, known as Purna Swaraj. The movement included acts of disobeying the salt law, boycotting British goods, and agitating against paying taxes. The Civil Disobedience Movement began on January 26, 1929, which was observed as Purna Swaraj Day.¹¹ In Tamil Nadu, the day was celebrated with great enthusiasm in both towns and villages. In the Cuddalore region, the Civil Disobedience Movement officially started on January 26, 1930, with the celebration of Purna Swaraj Day. The movement continued until its suspension in 1934. The Purna Swaraj Day celebrations in Cuddalore on January 26, 1930, were successful and enthusiastic. Congress leaders M.V.Sudarsanam Naidu and volunteers in Cuddalore mobilized support through meetings, rallies, and door-to-door campaigns. School students and youth were also involved. Funds for the celebrations were collected from local philanthropists. The celebrations took place in front of the old collector's office in Cuddalore. The national flag was hoisted, and the Purna Swaraj Day pledge was taken by the Congress and the public. The pledge affirmed the belief in the Indian people's right to freedom and the need to sever the British connection and achieve complete independence. The celebrations concluded with the distribution of sweets at 7:30 am.¹²

Devanampattinam Salt Satyagraha

Gandhi violated Salt law at Dandi on April, 7, 1930. C.Rajagopalachari violated salt law at Vedaranyam on April, 30, 1930. The violation of Salt law had its repercussion throughout Tamil Nadu.¹³ The letters dated September 1930 by District Superintendent of Police, Cuddalore dated 22.04.1930 states that M.V. Sudarsanam Naidu, and Chidambaram Nainiappa Pillai and others met C.Rajagopalachari on April, 9, 1930 at Mrs. Peterson bungalow, Porto Novo, Chidambaram, and got permission to organize a salt satyagraha at Devanampattinam, a coastal area near Cuddalore. The Devanampattinam Salt Satyagraha took place in April 1930 in a village called Devanampattinam in Cuddalore. The satyagraha was organized under the guidance of Rajaji. The group, led by Nainiappa Pillai, aimed to conduct a salt satyagraha in the village. They traveled from Chidambaram to Devanampattinam, a distance of fifty kilometers, and arrived on April 16. However, their first attempt to make salt was stopped by the salt peons from the public department. Despite facing obstacles, the satyagrahis persisted in their efforts. They tried to manufacture salt almost every day for over three months. The police constantly harassed them, but local landlords and businessmen provided support to the volunteers from the South Arcot district.¹⁴ Nainiappa Pillai also used his own money to help them. The satyagrahis would boil seawater in the morning, hold lectures on the seashore, and have meetings in the evening. On April 17, the satyagrahis gathered at the seashore to make salt, but the salt peons thwarted their efforts. Nainiappa Pillai addressed a meeting later that day, comparing the remedy of salt satyagraha to removing leeches by applying salt. He believed that salt satyagraha was the only way to compel the British to leave India. The satyagrahis continued their salt preparation on April 18 as planned. The salt peons allowed them to make salt but confiscated it afterward. Nainiappa Pillai compared the government to a temple car burdened with taxes and emphasized that by removing these burdens through satyagraha, the government's functioning would come to a halt. On April 19, the leaders and volunteers went to a nearby village called Kandakadu to encourage more people to join the salt satyagraha. They received a positive response from the villagers, especially the fisher folk. The satyagrahis also held meetings where they spoke about the British rule and the need to drive them out of India.

The salt satyagraha gained momentum towards the end of April. Different groups attempted to boil brine and make salt, but they were often stopped by the salt peons. Despite the suppression, people from all walks of life participated in the satyagraha. On April 23, some groups were successful in making salt, and Nainiappa Pillai announced that he would auction the salt on April 27. During this time, clashes occurred between the satyagrahis and salt peons. Some volunteers became hostile towards the peons, but Nainiappa Pillai condemned such behavior. Propaganda meetings were also conducted as part of the satyagraha. Overall, the Devanampattinam Salt Satyagraha aimed to break the Salt Law and challenge British rule. It gained significant attention and participation in the South Arcot district, and by the end of April 1930, the Salt Law was completely broken in the district.¹⁵

On 7 May M.V. Sudarsanam Naidu, was arrested and was awarded six months rigorous imprisonment. Followed by this, Muthu Mudali, Secretary District Congress Committee, Cuddalore was arrested and detained on 17 May for a six months rigorous imprisonment. In July, 4, 1930, collector, South Arcot District ordered prohibiting meetings as well as closing down the local Congress office in Cuddalore Town. Under Secretary's Secret Safe File No. 699 states that under Criminal Law Amendment Act, 31 October 1930, Congress Committee and organizations were declared unlawful across the Madras Presidency. Consequently, the District and Taluk Congress Committees were declared unlawful in South Arcot District. He was released on December 22, 1930. The extract of convict register, Central Jail, Madras No.4325

says that M.V.Sudarsanam Naidu, was imprisoned under Section 183 of Indian Penal Code with convict no. 5178. He was sentenced for 6 months and a fine of Rs. 250 or additional 6 weeks prison by District Magistrate of South Arcot. He did not accept to pay the fine. Consequently, his sentence was extended for another six weeks. He was transferred to Alipuram Central Jail on November 12, 1930. He was released on December 12, 1930. The first phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement ended up with conclusion of Gandhi Irwin Pact of March 1931.¹⁶

Individual Satyagraha, 1940-41

During the Second World War in September 1939, the Government of India joined the war without consulting the National Congress or the elected members. The Congress, sympathetic to the victims of fascist aggression, wanted India to be declared free or have effective power in Indian hands before actively participating in the war. The British government refused this demand and tried to create divisions by pitting religious minorities and princes against the Congress.¹⁷ In response, the Congress asked its ministries to resign. In Cuddalore, M.V. Sudarsanam Naidu played a leading role in converting the Town Congress Committee into the Town Satyagraha Committee. Selected individuals in Cuddalore made speeches against the war, following the rules of the Congress.¹⁸

Quit India Movement, 1942

As the Second World War progressed and India's security was threatened, the Congress decided to revolt openly against British rule in August 1942. This led to the launch of the Quit India Movement, a mass campaign for independence. However, the government anticipated the Congress's plans and swiftly arrested Mahatma Gandhi and other prominent leaders.¹⁹ In response to Gandhi's arrest, M.V. Sudarsanam Naidu organized a protest meeting in Manjakuppam, Cuddalore. They also blocked roads and demanded the release of Gandhi and other leaders. Various acts of civil disobedience, such as pouring acid on a post box and disrupting the railway track, were carried out by Sudarsanam Naidu and his followers. As a result, he was arrested and detained on September 12, 1942. He was initially held at Vellore Central Jail and later transferred to a Special jail in Tanjore on September 18, 1943. On October 8, 1942, M.V. Sudarsanam Naidu was convicted under Section 277 C of the Indian Penal Code while at Central Jail, Vellore. He remained in prison until his release on December 7, 1944. During his time in jail, M.V.S. petitioned the Chief Secretary of the Government of Madras, requesting an increase in the meager family allowance of Rs. 18 per month to support his extended family and cover his son's educational expenses. Additionally, his wife, Pankajam Ammal, submitted a petition to the Under Secretary, Madras, seeking financial assistance for her son's S.S.L.C examination fees. In response, the government swiftly increased the monthly maintenance allowance to Rs. 20, effective from February 1, 1944.²⁰

Independence Day Celebration, 1947

On August 15, 1947, India finally **attained** independence. Thiyagi M.V.S celebrated the day by distributing sweets and hoisting the national flag at the old Collectorate premises in Cuddalore. Tricolor flags were flown on many buildings in both the old and new towns of Cuddalore. M.V. Sudarsanam Naidu had been imprisoned intermittently from 1920 to 1944, totaling nine years. His sacrifices, along with other freedom fighters, played a significant role in India's attainment of freedom.²¹

After Independence

After India gained independence, M.V. Sudarsanam Naidu played important roles in various organizations. He served as the president of the South Arcot District Congress Committee and the President of the South Arcot District Political Sufferers' Relief Committee.²² From 1956 to 1961, he was a member of the Madras Legislative Council.²³ In recognition of his contributions, the Tamil Nadu government granted him land and a pension for his involvement in the freedom struggle.²⁴ To honor his memory, a street in Manjakuppam was named Sudarsanam Street, and a hospital in Siruvanthadu was named Sudarsanam Hospital. He also received the Tamra Patra award in 1972.²⁵ When he passed away in 1978, his body was placed at Manjakuppam ground for the public to pay their respects. Prominent Congress leaders from the state, such as P. Ramachandran, Kakkan, and Ramasamy Padaiyatchi, paid tribute to him. His body was draped with the tricolor flag and taken with government honors to the banks of the Thenpennaiyar river. Following his customs, his body was cremated at the riverbank, and his ashes were immersed in the river. Thus, the life of a great martyr came to an end.²⁶

Conclusion

M.V. Sudarsanam Naidu's remarkable life and contributions exemplify the spirit of dedication and selflessness that characterized India's struggle for independence. As a prominent leader in South Arcot, his influence extended far beyond his time, leaving a lasting impact on the region. Through his unwavering commitment, sacrifices, and active involvement in social and infrastructural initiatives, Sudarsanam Naidu became an emblem of resilience and service. Today, his memory is enshrined in the form of memorials, institutions, and the gratitude of the community he served. His legacy serves as a powerful reminder of the values of sacrifice and determination, inspiring future generations to work towards a more just and equitable society. Sudarsanam Naidu's life stands as a testament to the enduring power of individuals to shape history and make a positive difference in the world.

Endnote:

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