

Salt Satyagraha Movement in Narasapur Taluk

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The Lahore Session of the Indian National Congress passed the momentous resolution of civil disobedience and complete independence. Gandhi was once again empowered to commence the campaign. He resolved to defy the salt laws at Dandi. On the same lines the West Godavari Congress volunteers marched from the Gandhi National College, Eluru, passed through a number of villages and defied the salt laws at Matlapalem on April 11, 1930.

Breaking of Salt Laws - Matlapalem Camp:

Pericharla Subba Raju made all arrangements before hand for satyagrahis to break 'Salt Laws'. He established Vasista Ashram on the bank of Vasista Godavari, six furlongs away from the village. A big pandal was erected in which separate cottages were built for cooking, lodging, satyagrahis and storing a heap of firewood. Having known, arrangements were made to break salt laws, District Collector called on P. Subba Raju at his house and asked him not to play a role of a host to satyagrahis. Subba Raju boldly told him that he was an Indian and it was his sacred duty to entertain guests, failing which he would never be called an Indian. The District Collector warned Subba Raju that he would be arrested in case he would disrespect his advice.¹ Boycott of Government servants was in full swing in Matlapalem as well as in the surrounding villages and even drinking water was not provided to them. P. Subba Raju asked the villagers not to be harsh to government servants. The government made arrangements to keep fifty constables and four sub-inspectors at distance of two furlongs from satyagraha camp. The District Magistrate and District Superintendent of Police camped at Narsapur with fifty reserved police constables and their deputies camped in Palacole.² There has been no police interference for a long time.

At the start of the salt satyagraha movement the district administration did not contemplate drastic action against the satyagrahis. It was in pursuance of the instructions which the Government of Madras issued to it on March 7, 1930. The government stated it did not want "whole-sale arrests should be made or that insignificant people should be arrested. It may in certain circumstances consider the arrest of leaders or other individuals of standing and influence, but the government desire to be consulted before such an arrest is effected".³

At 5.30 A.M. on April 11, more than three hundred satyagrahis in the camp played chorus to the chanting of hymns by A. Govindachari from *Bhagavat Geeta*. They uttered aloud slogans such as *Bharatmata-ki-Jai*, *Mahatma Gandhi-ki-Jai*, and *Dandu Narayana Raju-ki-Jai*. They erected at 6.00 a.m. a flag of victory at satyagraha camp and another at the cottage on the bank of Godavari where salt was to be prepared. Dandu Narayana Raju, the dictator asked in his speech satyagrahis to adhere to non-violence and peace and be prepared to make any amount of sacrifice for the noble cause of the liberation of this motherland. Dandu Narayana Raju first selected 20 influential satyagrahis and divided them into two batches each consisting of 10 members.

I Team			II Team	
1.	Atmakuri Govindachari		1.	Veeramachaneni Venkata Narayana
2.	Datla Atchuta Rama Raju		2.	Gutta Anjaneyulu
3.	Kommareddi Satyanarayana Murty		3.	Vadlapatla Manikyala Rao
4.	Pasala Krishna Murty		4.	Kalidindi Narayana Raju
5.	Basavaraju Srirangasai		5.	Bhogaraju Perraju
6.	Kolla Venkataramayya		6.	Kosuru Venkata Narasimha Raju
7.	Maganti Sitaramadas (Seetayya)		7.	Mudumbi Narasimhacharyulu
8.	Bhupatiraju Lakshmi Narasimha Raju		8.	Paidipati Venkata Narayana
9.	Bhupatiraju Peda Subba Raju		9.	Kalidindi Sundara Rama Raju
10.	Pachipala Chittiyya		10.	Dodla Suryanarayana

The two batches of satyagrahis started at 2.00 p.m. and reached satyagraha cottage singing patriotic songs. The first batch of satyagrahis carried with them five big earthen hollowed vessels and a few bundles of firewood while the second batch of satyagrahis accompanied them singing songs adoring Lord Rama. A band of government officials consisting one salt inspector, one police inspector, and C.I.D. short-hand reporter and some constables observed the operations in mufti. They neither interfered nor attempted to arrest the satyagrahis.

The first batch filled the five vessels with salt water taken from river Godavari. They placed the vessels on the ovens erected there and boiled the water to make contraband salt. They were assisted by three women in their work of breaching Salt Laws. The second batch of volunteers sat surrounding the first batch engaged in making salt. Meanwhile people in large number poured in to see the satyagrahis breaching the 'Salt Laws'. Konda Venkatappaiah, dictator of whole Andhra Province to carry out the salt satyagraha movement, came there from Razole to observe the breaching of 'salt laws' at Matlapalem. He

informed the satyagrahis how the satyagraha movement was progressing in other parts of Andhra Province.⁴ Kovvali Gopala Rao and Poduri Perraju engaged themselves in explaining to the people the objective and the importance of the movement. The police felt that satyagrahis would never succeed in their effort to make contraband salt as the water of Godavari was not so saltish as to yield contraband salt despite its boil for hours together. However, after boiling for one and a half-hour salt powder was found in the vessels at 3.30 p.m. It weighed 6 Tulas (66 grams). The joy of the people knew no bounds. They rushed forward to the vessels to see the salt in them with their own eyes. D. Narayana Raju and A. Govindachari managed to send them back to their places. A huge public meeting was held at Satyagraha camp in which D. Narayana Raju, A. Govindachari and Mangipudi Purushottama Sarma spoke. The salt that was prepared was arranged into ten packets out of which three packets were auctioned then and there in the public meeting. The first packet for Rs.16/-, the second for Rs.6/-, and the third for Rs.20/- were sold.⁵ However, the breaching of salt laws in West Godavari District on April 11, was a great success.

On the morning of April 12, the satyagrahis began their work of preparing salt, the army of peace was divided into 14 batches with each containing ten satyagrahis. Batch after batch were sent at every two hours from 6.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m. to disobey the salt law as Godavari was in a flow and its water would not yield quite good quantity of salt except few grams a day but it did not slacken the enthusiasm of satyagrahis. They were overjoyed at the sight of *Swaraj Salt* whatever be its quantity and forget all their hard work and suffering to prepare it. Some local women on their own accord used to prepare salt in places very near the satyagraha camp.⁶ Police and salt officers present as usual made no interference. The breach of the Salt Law in the form of producing contraband salt by boiling saltish water was repeated at Lakshmipuram where salt was produced in huge quantity.⁷ By the evening of 12th April, 70 satyagrahis breached the salt law at Matlapalem camp.

Arrest of the District Leaders:

As the movement was gathering momentum day-by-day, the officials of the district administration grew intolerant at it. The Collector and the District Magistrate of West Godavari sent a confidential report to C.W.E. Cotton, Chief Secretary to the Government, Madras, in which it was stated, "I have decided to take action under Section 108 Criminal Procedure Code against Atmakuri Govindachari, and Dandu Narayana Raju. The charge sheets are practically complete. I have arranged for the cases to be put up for trial on Wednesday the 23rd. These two men have from the start been the leaders of the Salt Satyagraha in this district and I am given to understand that if they are removed there is a reasonably good chance of the movement collapsing very soon".⁸

On the basis of the report Atmakuri Govindachari was arrested on the evening of April 22, and Dandu Narayana Raju on the morning of 23rd at Matlapalem and they were presented before the District Magistrate camping at Narsapur traveller's bungalow. Both were charge-sheeted for making most provoking and objectionable speeches against the government between March 3 and April 17, 1930 at different places in the district. In his speech, A. Govindachari described the government as wicked and tyrannous and devilish, and attributed to the government all the evils from which the country was suffering. He instigated the government servants to resign their offices and the public to break laws in order to paralyse the government. The speeches of Dandu Narayana Raju had not been quite so vitriolic in character but the plain intention of their speeches over a period of six weeks in the same strain was to bring the government into hatred and contempt and excite disaffection of the people against it. Since both of them refused to execute bonds of security of good behaviour, the District Magistrate ordered and committed both of them to Central Jail for a period of one year each.⁹

Dandu Narayana Raju and A. Govindachari requested the people to carry out the struggle with zeal and steadfastness of purpose. They were taken in a car to Tadepalligudem and from there they were sent by train to Rajahmundry Central Jail. People in large number greeted and wished them well at every railway station on the way to Rajahmundry.¹⁰

When the news of the arrests was known, a hartal was observed peacefully in all the towns in the district. Volunteers marched triumphantly in the streets holding tri-coloured flags. Public meetings were held at Eluru, Tanuku, Bhimavaram, Narsapur, Palacole and Nidadavolu in which leaders spoke condemning their arrests. Foreign cloth in large scale was collected and burnt. Contraband salt was auctioned. Women in large number came forward and spoke in the meetings and condemned the arrests of these dynamic leaders of the district and gave call to increase the tempo of the movement without being afraid of arrests.

The Collector sent another confidential report to the Secretary, Government of Madras, in which he wrote, "It remains to be seen what the effect of this action will be. Probably two or three more 'leaders' will step to the fore, and if they begin making themselves objectionable, I propose to run them in next week. But I think the salt campaign here is collapsing. The public has lost what little interest it had in it; and it was only the energy of Govindachari and Dandu Narayana Raju that kept it going".

"I am also beginning to apply that Tyler called "Economic Pressure: This is the time when the ryot likes to get water for his seed bed tanks: I am arranging that the Rajus who have been the chief supporters of the satyagrahis in Bhimavaram Taluk shall not receive any supply; and I have asked the P.W.D. to see that no favours are shown to anyone who have actively identified himself with the agitation; Revenue Divisional Officers and the police are to give the P.W.D. the names. I further propose

to cancel several gun licences. My impression is that as soon as people generally realise that the government are not going to tolerate this open defiance of authority, the agitation will collapse. Up till now the inactive policy laid down by the government has encouraged the disaffected and bewildered the friendly".¹¹

After the arrest of Dandu Narayana Raju and Atmakuri Govindachari the District Congress 'War Council' met at Mulaparru on April 25 to nominate another dictator in the place of Dandu Narayana Raju to conduct satyagraha movement in the district. Kommareddi Anjaneyulu was nominated dictator and Musti Lakshmi Narayana and Chekuri Achuta Rama Raju were to assist the dictator. The preparation of contraband salt was begun on a large scale at two centres Mulaparru and Toorputallu and its adjoining villages. It attracted hundreds of satyagrahis there. The arrest of Dandu Narayana Raju was a strategic folly; it was nothing but opening of a Pandora box on the part of the Collector as he had to face innumerable problems.

On April 29, the Municipal Council met with the Chairman of the Council in the chair and passed the following resolutions.

"The Council considers that the threatened action against Mahatma Gandhi is fraught with dangerous consequences as regards peace and order in India and the future relations between India and England".

"This council resolves that the date and palmyra trees in the Municipal sites should not be rented out for tapping".¹²

Spread of the Movement in Narsapur Taluk:

After the arrest of Dandu Narayana Raju and Atmakuri. Govindachari, Kommareddi Anjaneyulu became the dictator. Under his direction the preparation of contraband salt on a huge scale commenced. Tanks and ponds were dug to store salt water to prepare salt in Toorputallu and Mulaparru. The local professionals in salt preparation assisted the satyagrahis in preparing contraband salt. On April 28, under the leadership of Sistla Vijayalakshmi Narsimham, fifty volunteers singing national songs, sold 'Swaraj Salt' in the public meeting held at Mogalturu which was attended by roughly about 1,000 people.¹³ Kommareddy Anjaneyulu held a volunteer conference at Toorputallu on May 2 in which 10,000 people and 600 volunteers participated from different parts of the district. Advocates like Vempati Brahmayya Sastri, Nori Narayana Murty, C. Venkateswarlu, Yanamandra Subrahmanyam from Narsapur, leaders like Maganti Bapineedu, H.V. Jogayya Sarma, Banda Viyyanna Pantulu, Musti. Lakshminarayana, Changalvala. Chitti Pantulu, Josyula. Appalarama Murty, Mangipudi. Purushottama

Sarma, Nidadavolu. Venkata Rao, Sanivarapu. Subba Rao, Kovvala. Gopala Rao and many others of the district attended the conference. Many speakers including Pulagurta Kanakamma spoke in the conference. All the speakers bitterly condemned the government repression. They said that in the place of every leader under arrest hundred more come forward and never rest until the Swaraj was attained. The salt ponds and the salt prepared in Toorputallu were shown to the members of the conference. Leaders advised the people to use the contraband salt without any fear.¹⁴

Toorputallu camp was handed over to Tallapragada Narasimha Sarma on May 3. Kommareddy Anjaneyulu conducted virulent propaganda in favour of the satyagraha movement in Narsapur, Palacole, Tanuku and Nidadavolu and reached Eluru. Under the leadership of Tallapragada Narasimha Sarma, Mulaparru and Toorputallu camp carried its work of preparing salt as usual without a break. Some satyagrahis including 35 kshatriya stalwarts gave a call to the people of surrounding villages to commit similar breaches of salt laws. Sixty ryots came forward to prepare salt. One person by name Sadasivudu, a native of Lingamboinacherla village, dug a pit near satyagraha camp to prepare contraband salt. He refused to respond to the notice of the Sub-Collector questioning his action. Challa Dasayya of Perupalem broke the salt law and prepared salt in his ponds. Emboldened by similar breach of salt laws some ryots engaged themselves in digging ponds and preparing salt in Kummara Purugupalem, Veemuladeevi and Lakshmipuram.

Some satyagrahis opened a small shop in Mogalturu fair to sell the contraband salt supplied by the satyagrahis of Minavanilanka a board was displayed at the shop on which it was inscribed "Swaraj Salt is for Sale" and another board was displayed on which was described "purchasing contraband salt is illegal, those who come forward to purchase it become heroes". The whole quantity of contraband salt was sold to the public within 15 minutes that too in the presence of police. In a meeting held in the fair at Lingamboinacherla Kambhampati Satyanarayana and Sagi Narayana Raju delivered speeches instigating the people to break salt laws. Meanwhile the commencement of the rainy season and down pour of rains compelled T. Narasimha Sarma to halt the work at Mulaparru and Toorputallu camps and send the satyagrahis there to Bhimavaram and informed the people of neighbouring villages by a circular that the work at the camp would recommence after fifteen days.¹⁵

On May 11th, 1930, thirty satyagrahis and some students under the leadership of Pulugurta Kanakamma resorted openly to prepare contraband salt at 8.00 a.m., in the 'Gaddi Bazar' of Narsapur by boiling pots of salt water brought from the Godavari. To protect the manufacturers of salt some volunteers stood hand in hand forming a human chain around them. It was the policy of the government not to interfere in the attempts to manufacture salt unless appreciable quantity of salt was produced. However, the officials of law and order felt that the manufacture of salt openly in the Gaddi Bazar demanded interference. The Sub-Collector followed by one Sub-Inspector of Police, one Head Constable

and four constables approached the scene of action and found no difficulty in breaking their pots as the strength of the volunteers was limited in number.¹⁶ However, the Sub-Collector beat on the hands of Palagurta Kanakamma when she refused and struggled hard to give up the pot in her hand. Later the police left the scene. Pulagurta Kanakamma again resumed her work of preparing salt. By this time a large crowd had been attracted by the news of earlier police interference. With the lack of discretion the police again entered the crowd to take action against the manufacturers of salt but finding it was too dense to admit approach to the pots without the use of force, the police withdrew and constables were sent off to the police station. Kanakamma and her volunteers successfully manufactured contraband salt.¹⁷

Anti-Drink Campaign:

The Anti-Drink Association held its meeting on March 23, 1930, at Yalamanchili in Narsapur taluk. It was presided by Naralasetti Devendrudu, the President of the Association. Other leaders like Pastula Sagaram, Rayudu Gangayya, Badugu Nadamuni, Jakkamseeti Venkata Swami, P. Sundara Raju, R. Surayya, Luther Paar, Veeravalli Chandrasekhar and Gottumukkala Venkanna attended the meeting. The virulent canvassing carried out by Gottumukkala Venkanna succeeded in a gathering of about 1,500 people of both sexes, from 35 villages at the meeting held in the village.

In his address the President declared that for all-round development of the depressed classes they should give up the evil habit of taking toddy and liquor have to cut down their expenses in all types of functions good or bad they hold and have to resist to be called with mean names and give up using foul language in their talk and speech. Other leaders also gave their messages. At the instance of some ladies that they were to be advised for their development a meeting was held on the same day at Ramalayam which was attended by 1000 women and 200 men. The President of the meeting, Rayudu Gangayya and many leaders spoke and Naralasetti Devendrudu gave many a advice for the development of depressed classes. He emphasised the need for their giving up drink which would ruin their health, wealth and social rank. Some requested the leaders to get the toddy and liquor shops closed in their villages. Some swore in the public meeting that they would give up mutton eating and the evil habit of drink.¹⁸

During the days of Salt Satyagraha at Matlapalem a meeting was held at Perupalem in Narsapur taluk under the presidentship of Naralasetti Devendrudu on April 28, which was attended by 2,000 people consisting of all sections of the people. Satyagrahis sang melodious songs enlightening the people on the evils of drink, Neelam Venkayya through his *Harikatha* named *Jayaprada*, and Parvataneni Narayana Rao Chowdari, the Secretary of the Association, through his magic lamp conveyed the same to

the people. N. Devendrudu vehemently declared in his closing speech that prohibition was the only means for the economic and moral advancement of our country.¹⁹ In response to the propaganda carried out by Anti-Drink Association, Eluru Municipal Council resolved on April 29, 1930, the date and palmyra trees in the municipal sites should not be rented out for tapping.²⁰

Matlapalem won the admiration of the people and for its heroic fight against the government for the cause of freedom and successfully breaking salt laws in the days of the Civil Disobedience Movement. A sibiram was opened at Palacole on May 12 for the volunteers to carry out picketing toddy and liquor shops as one of the important measures of anti-drink campaign in the Narsapur taluk. Unlike in the other taluks Satyagrahis had faced severe and violent resistance on the part of the toddy and liquor contractors in the taluk. The satyagrahis suffered vituperation, humiliation and blows at the hands of the toddy and liquor renters. About 35 volunteers carried anti-drink campaign from May 31 in the villages around Palacole. They picketed vigorously the toddy and liquor shops. Some volunteers indulged in chopping off of spathes and bunches of date and palmyra trees. On June 3, eight volunteers picketed toddy shops, and four volunteers liquor shops at Palacole. While some volunteers were going on a canal bund and approach toddy and liquor shops for the purpose of picketing, a toddy and liquor renter and his followers got them forcibly thrown out on the pretext that they paid rent for the canal bund for their sole use. They poured toddy on satyagrahis. In that context one satyagrahi named Kalidini Narayana Raju was subjected to blows. In spite of an assault on them, the satyagrahis stood unmoved chanting the names of Lord Rama,²¹ showing their firm faith in the non-violent principles of Gandhi. The heroic self-suffering (Satyagraha) volunteers won the appreciation of the people around. They sympathised with the volunteers and bitterly hated the renters and voluntarily gave up the practice of purchasing liquor in the shops of the renters.

On the night of the very day Poduri Perraju and Kolla Venkataramayya held a public meeting in Ramaraopeta, Palacole, in which they spoke enlightening the people on the evils of drink, the selfless services of satyagrahis to the cause of Indian freedom, their duty to protect satyagrahis against any type of harrassment and our need to make arrangement for their safety and the need to treat any harm done to them as a harm done to us.²² Satyagrahis used to go in batches to picket toddy and liquor shops in villages around Palacole and Narsapur towns. The non-violent approach of satyagrahis, their righteous behaviour and their firm conviction in the Gandhian principles of love and peace won the people to their side. Consequently the sales of toddy and liquor fell down considerably.

Under the leadership of Cherukuvada Narasimha Raju seven volunteers drawn from different villages, picketed the toddy shops in a fair held at Narsapur on June 14, for which they were arrested and punished under law. Of them, three minor boys were sent to the Borstal School at Tanjore and the rest sent to prison for a period of 13 months. During the trial a boy cried *Gandhi ki Jai* in the court for which

he was reprimanded and acquitted by the judge on taking into consideration his tender age and innocence.²³

Such activities of chopping spathes and bunches of date and palmyra trees, breaking pots of toddy besides picketing toddy and liquor shops were carried on by volunteers in almost all the villages in the taluk. Penumatcha Bheemaraju, Penumatcha Lakshmi pathi Raju, Cherukuvada Narasimha Raju and Chekuri China Narasimha Raju were charged for chopping off bunches of three palmyra trees and breaking toddy pots of seven palmyra trees at Palacole, brought to Magistrate Court at Narsapur and were sentenced to 3 months R.I. The convicted boldly declared that it was their earnest wish to break the laws of the British Government and joyfully accepted the conviction shouting aloud *Gandhi Ki Jai*.²⁴

Picketing by volunteers at the toddy selling shops was progressing day after day in Narsapur and Palacole areas. The satyagrahis made many a drunkard take a pledge that they would not touch toddy or liquor thereafter. Many volunteers day after day were arrested and sentenced to rigorous imprisonment. Five volunteers at Palacole, four at Poduru, and five at Narsapur were arrested on charges of picketing, chopping off spathes and bunches of date and palmyra trees, cutting date and palmyra trees and breaking toddy pots²⁵ and were sentenced to R.I. The anti-drink campaign in Narsapur taluk gradually weakened because of the arrest of volunteers and their imprisonment.

On August 5, abkari sales were conducted in the presence of the Sub-Collector in Narsapur taluk office. On that occasion there was no picketing for want of volunteers. One homoeo doctor named Hari Dakshina Murty and some other responsible elders of the town entreated the renters of the toddy and liquor shops not to participate in the abkari sales, police took immediately Dakshina Murty into custody and after the completion of abkari sales, the police released Dakshina Murty and left him four miles away from Narsapur town.²⁶ However, the government managed to conduct abkari sales in Narsapur taluk without any resistance on the part of the satyagrahis. When compared to previous years abkari sales there was 16 per cent fall in sales.

Khadi Movement:

When Gandhi was about to visit Andhra for the second time in 1929, he declared that his visit was intended only to promote the spreading of khadi movement in Andhra, which would help the people to conquer poverty and achieve the freedom of their country. During his tour between April 23 and 28 in the West Godavari District, he advocated the burning of foreign clothes, propagated the importance of the use of khadi and collected money to Khaddar Fund to a tune of Rs.41,436/-, higher than what he expected. When Gandhi started Salt Satyagraha people of the villages situated far from the coast could hardly promote implementation of Congress constructive programme which included boycott of foreign cloth, pro-khadi movement and anti-drink campaign.

Ch. Satyanarayana Dhavaji, J. Satyanarayana, P.V. Somayajulu and C. Venkateswarlu carried out vigorous pro-khadi propaganda in Narsapur taluk. The Bar Association of Narsapur in a meeting held in the premises of the court resolved to use khaddar clothes after the opening of courts after summer vacation and lawyers not to help those lawyers who defy the resolution.²⁷ A complete hartal was observed at Palacole protesting the arrest of Gandhi. In a meeting that followed, keeping the picture of Gandhi in the presidential chair, Vanka Suri Sastri, Josyula Appalarama Murty and many other volunteers spoke encouraging the people to break laws. In the very meeting one Bondada Venkataramayya, a cloth merchant, declared that he would not sell foreign cloth for a period of three months and insisted other cloth merchants in Palacole to follow his example and became devoted users of khadi. The meeting was followed by the burning of a heap of foreign clothes.²⁸ On June 7, when Josyula Appala Rama Murty was arrested for carrying out extensive propaganda supporting the use of khadi in Narsapur taluk, he asked his followers “to take message of charka in every home wherein lay the salvation of India”.²⁹ Bhaskara Iswarudu, H. Dakshina Murty, Tatanki Narasimha Rao and sixteen students from Bhimavaram carried out extensive propaganda in favour of khadi through out the taluk.

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