
HISTORY OF GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES AND SALT SATYAGRAHA MOVEMENT IN SOUTH TAMIL NADU

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Historical Background of South Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu is diverse with each District having its own culture to it, What is Common Among all the districts is that there are loads of Temples with its own history to it and coming to Tamil itself Southern sound more fruity and enjoy the joy of speaking in the their native tongue (as far as I have seen), Food and Hospitality there is no divide in this one all the Tamils are known for this but the tone southern tone might be more respectful.

The two terms refer to the districts. Northern districts mean those who are towards the direction of Andhra Pradesh; Southern districts bordering only or towards the direction of Kerala and Bay of Bengal. The other districts which border Karnataka or towards it are not taken into account here.

South Tamil Nadu (Major Districts)

The Five Major District of North Tamil Nadu Salem, Erode, Kanchipuram, Chidambaram (Cuddalore District) and Vellore. The Four Major District of South Tamil Nadu Madurai, Tuticorin, Dindugal, Kanyakumari. First of all I have to mention, I believe Tamil identity is bigger than religion and caste identity. Many leaders used the Tamil language as a tool to unite people from different section to bring social unity and brotherhood. I like to differentiate Tamil Nadu into three different region North Tamil Nadu (Chennai), West Tamil Nadu (Kongu Belt) and South Tamil Nadu (Madurai) based on Tamil dialects and Dominant Social groups in the region.¹

Geographical Divisions

Geographical Divisions, North Tamil Nadu in the past was largely a zone which changed hands between the different kingdoms. There were Nayakars, Vijayanagar, Chaulukyas, etc. Therefore there is a larger mix of Telugu, Kannadiga, Brahmin population. Since the population is a mix of Tamil, Telugu and Kannadiga (depending on the regions) the language, the culture and the people have a slightly difference nature compared to the south. This intermixing of cultures made the people here open towards trade, development and commerce. Compared to the north, the south was largely ruled by the Tamil Kingdoms – Cholas, Pandiyas. They are less influenced by the other cultures or languages and largely still have Tamil practices and Traditions. Most of these areas are comparatively more closed than Northern Tamil Nadu, due to their past history and rigid culture. Though there are these differences, they add a uniqueness to each region be it Kongu, Vengai, Nellai and Madurai.

In 1801 British East India Company Government Suppress in the South Indian Rebellion. After the Administrative purpose Arcot District was divided in two district North Arcot and South Arcot.

After the Indian Independence in August 1947, the former British province of Madras Presidency was renamed Madras State. Following states reorganizations in 1953 and 1956, the present state boundaries emerged. It was officially renamed Tamil Nadu in 1967. In 1956, Madras State was made up of 13 districts: Chengelpet, Coimbatore, Kanyakumari, Madras, Madurai, Nilgiris, North Arcot, Ramanathapuram, Salem, South Arcot, Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli, and Tirunelveli.

- 1986: Thoothukudi split from Tirunelveli district.
- 1996: Theni district split from Madurai district.²

Today the state of Tamil Nadu, in southern India is divided into 38 districts. Villupuram is the largest district by area whereas Chennai is the smallest but also the most populated and densely populated.

Northern District

Chennai, Cuddalore, Kanchipuram, Tiruvallur, Tiruvannamalai, Vellore, Villupuram.

Central District

Ariyalur, Nagapattinam, Perambalur, Pudukkottai, Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli, Karur, Tiruvarur.

Western District

Dharmapuri, Krishnagiri, Namakkal, Salem, Erode, Tiruppur, Coimbatore, Nilgiris.

South District (or) South Tamil Nadu

Madurai, Dindigul, Sivagangai, Virudhunagar, Ramanathapuram, Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi, Kanyakumari.

S.No.	District	Code	Head Quarters	Established	Formed From	Area (km ²)	Population (2011 Census)	Population density (2011 Census/km ²)	Taluks
1.	Kanyakumari	KK	Nagercoil	1, November 1956	One of the original 13 districts (annexed from Kerala)	1,672	1,870,374	1119	Agastheeswaram Kalkulam Vilavancode Thovalai

2.	Ramanathapuram	RA	Ramanathapuram	1, November 1956	One of the original 13 districts	4,089,57	1,353,445	331	Kadaladi Kamuthi Manamelnkudi Mudukulathur Paramakudi Ramanathapuram Rameswaram Tiruvadanai
3.	Sivagangai	SI	Sivagangai	15, March 1985	Madurai district and Ramanathapuram district	4,086	1,339,101	328	Devakottai Ilayangudi Karaikudi Manamadurai Sivaganga Tirupathur Tiruppuvanam
4.	Thoothukudi	TK	Thoothukudai	20, October 1986	Tirunelveli District	4,621	1,750,176	379	Ettayapuram Kovilpatti Ottapidaram Sathankulam Srivaiakuntam Thiruchendur Thoothukudi Vilathikulam
5.	Tirunelveli	TI	Tirunelveli	1, November 1956	One of the original 13 districts	6,810	3,077,233	452	Alangulam Ambasamudram Nanguneri Sattur Sivakasi Srivilliputhur Tiruchuli Shenkottai Radhapuram Sivagiri Tirunelveli Veerakeralmputhur
6.	Virudhunagar	VR	Virudhunagar	15, March 1985	Madurai District and Ramanathapuram district	4,288	2,105,930	453	Aruppukkottai Kariapatti Rajapalayam Sattur Sivakasi Srivilliputhur Tiruchuli Virudhunagar Vembakottai ³

Kanniyakumari

Most wonderful district in Tamil Nadu. Only district to have more number of educated peoples in Tamil Nadu. High literacy rate, greenish towns, good lifestyle makes the district differ from the others in Tamil Nadu. If one belong to that district, definitely they do not

like to live in other districts in Tamil Nadu. If anyone from other districts come to Kanyakumari, they can enjoy a lot and realize the good nature and also they will not have wish to leave the Kanyakumari district. It is the only place to see both the sunrise and sunset. It is one of the well developing city in Tamil Nadu. It is the southernmost place in India.

Total 38 District only 12 Municipal Corporation of Tamil Nadu

No.	Corporation of Tamil Nadu	Date of Formation	Date of Upgrading to City corporation	Administrative Zones	Number of Wards	Zone	Number of wards in Zone
1.	Tirunelveli	1, November 1866	1994	4	55	Thatchanallur Palayamkottai Melapalayam Tirunelveli	8 15 17 15
2.	Thoothukudi	1, November 1866	5, August 2008	4	60	East West North South	18 14 15 13 ⁴

Tirunelveli District

The Archaeological Studies have shown that Tirunelveli is a “Cultural old city”. The Tirunelveli district takes its name from the city of Tirunelveli, which was known in the past as Thenpandyanagaram. In the antiquity, the town was a bamboo forest and hence it was known in those days as *Venuvanam*⁵. The name Tirunelveli is derived from the combination of Tiru (beautiful) Nel (paddy) and Veli (hedge). According to the Sthalapurana (history of the sacred places) *Venuvanam* came to be called Tirunelveli (sacred paddy hedge) on account of a miracle performed by Lord Siva by protecting the paddy of a devotee from rains by himself forming a hedge around it (Nelveli). With the addition of an honorific adjunct “Tiru” to “Nelveli” the town came to be known as Tirunelveli.⁶ In the common parlance of English, it was called Tinnevely and was used as such by the colonial Governments in their records and documents.

Literature

There is a reference about Tirunelveli in the Sangam literature.⁷ In the Devaram hymns generally ascribed to 7th century A.D., there are references about Tirunelveli. Thirugnanasambandar’s versification of the presiding deity of the town could be seen in....

Boundaries

The erstwhile Tirunelveli district lies in the north eastern extremity of the Indian Peninsula.⁸ It is roughly triangular in shape.⁹ The district is surrounded by the Gulf of Mannar on the east and south, by the Kerala State. It is situated between 8.45° and 9.45° of the northern latitude, and 77.20° and 78.20° of the eastern longitude.¹⁰ It is 120 miles long from north to south and 75 miles wide from east to west near the Madurai frontier.¹¹ The

word “Tiru-Nel-Veli” (the sacred paddy hedge) therefore appropriately refers to the paddy fields which surround this district. The climate may be said to be equable. The temperature ranges between a maximum of 108°F and minimum of 80°F.

Rivers

The river Tambraparani the precious jewel of Tinnevely, rises from the Agastiar hills in the Pothigai ranges in the Western ghats and passes like a green winding ribbon through Ambasamudram, Tirunelveli, Srivaikuntam and Tiruchendur taluks irrigating the fertile lands all along. Chittar, Manimuthar and Vaippar are some of the other important streams of the district.

Ramanathapuram District

Regional history like National history has gained momentum in recent times. The detailed study of history at regional level without losing the sight of the impact of the National events at work would to a large extent help in harnessing the real motivating forces and the resulting factors, besides sorting out and putting the past in the right perspective. The study of origin and growth of Freedom Movement is gaining importance. The multi-faceted aspects of the theme, Freedom Movement receives difference approaches. The erstwhile Ramanathapuram District in Tamil Nadu played a significant role in the Freedom Movement. The rulers of Ramanathapuram District were the first in resisting the growing influence and interference of the English. The people entertained a high spirit of Martial Tradition and Independent spirit as well. The second half of the Nineteenth Century witnessed the growth of organized National Movement in Ramanathapuram District. Nationalists in Ramanathapuram stood not only for the National liberation but also for the social reforms. An attempt is made to trace the emergence of Freedom Movement in the erstwhile Ramanathapuram District while took in the forms of early revolts and rebellions and discuss how the Nationalistic forces and factors emerged in Ramanathapuram District.

Physical Features

Situated in the South East corner of Tamil Nadu, Ramanathapuram District is highly drought prone and most backward in economic development. It is surrounded by Pudukkottai district on the North, Sivaganga on the North West, Virudhunagar district on the west, Tuticorin district and Gulf of Mannar on the South and the palk strait on the east. This district in the present form came into existence from 15, March 1985 after the trifurcation of the composite Ramanathapuram District.¹²

Thoothukudi District

Thoothukudi (formerly Tuticorin), is a port city, a municipal corporation and an industrial city in Thoothukudi district in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The city lies in the

Coromandel Coast of Bay of Bengal. Thoothukudi is the capital and headquarters of Thoothukudi district.¹³

Thoothukudi is an “Emerging Energy and Industrial hub of South India. Thoothukudi is known as “Pearl City” due to the pearl fishing carried out in the town. It is a commercial seaport which serves the inland cities of Southern India and is one of the sea gateways of Tamil Nadu. V.O.Chidambaranar Port Trust is one of the fastest growing major ports in India.

The 21 Islands between Thoothukudi and Rameswaram shores in the Gulf of Mannar are noted as the first Marine Biosphere Reserve of India, and have around 36,000 species of flora and fauna. This protected area is called Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park.

The ancient town of Korkai near present day Thoothukudi has been a centre for maritime trade and pearl fishery for more than 2000 years. Ptolemy’s geography refers to Korkai as a centre of pearl fishery while describing commercial relations between western India and Alexandria, the chief eastern emporium of the Roman Empire. The Periplus says that the Pandyan kingdom extended from Comari towards the north, including Korkai, where the pearl fisheries were.

Municipal administration and politics

Thoothukudi municipality was established in 1866 during British times. It was promoted to a municipal corporation in 2008, bringing an area of 90.663 km² (35.005 sq ml) within the city limits. The municipal corporation has four zones namely North, East, West and South.

On 20 October 1986, a new district, carved out of the erstwhile Tirunelveli district was born in Tamil Nadu and named after V.O. Chidambaranar, a prominent national leader hailing from Ottapidaram who led the Swadeshi Movement in the South. Since 1997, as is the case in other districts of Tamil Nadu, this district has been named after its headarters town, Thoothukudi.¹⁴

The salt industry is one of the oldest industries in India. It was a cottage industry for ages along the cost of *Bengal, Bombay, Madras* and the Rann of Cutch. The salt tax was levied by British in India. The salt policy of the British was an important factor for their administration. Salt may appear an insignificant factor in South Indian Economy but its nationalism be ignored.¹⁵

Salt Satyagraha Movement in Thiruchendur

Thiruchendur is now a town at the southern tip of India. The district from Madras is about 56 kms. The Thiruchendur Town Congress Committee met at their office on 9 April, 1930. They decided to start a salt compaign at Tiruchendur on 13 April 1930 on the proposed date an attempt was made to manufacture salt from saline seawater under the leadership of B. Ramasamy and P. Santhanam. Their first attempt was very crude and unsuccessful as Government took action against the organizers by arresting them with 6 months imprisonment each. Though this episode ended up in utter failure, the local people decided to continue to violate the salt laws amidst of Government repression.¹⁶

In the morning of 10 April, 1930, 30 volunteers including R. Kumarasami and V. Arumugam with hundreds of satyagrahis started their March towards the beach by singing patriotic songs. Having waded a long distance of 20 miles parading the main streets of the town reached the beach by 9.00 a.m. R. Kumarasami gave a message to all the satyagrahis that a great civil resistance was about to take place at the beach in the evening which would surely strike terror in the hearts of the British officials that this tempo would continue until Independence was achieved. In the evening of the day, they set ovens and boiled the seawater by firewood and foreign cloth. They celebrated the success by distributing sweets. Two were arrested in this connection.¹⁷

On 23 April, at dawn, some 20 Satyagrahis reached the Thiruchendur beach. The congress leaders like A.Subramaniam, L.Loganathan and R. Ramachanthiran delivered inspiring speeches. Then the satyagrahis attended a prayer. After the prayer S.Govindarajan and others each with a small bag and a coconut shell to scarp the salt reached a saltpan. The salt fields on the beach presumably scattered by the officers of the Excise Department to quell the attempts of the satyagrahis. S.Govindarajan scraped out some salt, he tasted some salt. like him, other satyagrahis too marched a head and took salt. The enthusiastic spectators gathered there also broke the salt laws by indulging in the same tasks. The police superintendent was quietly watching the scene from a distance. After the Satyagrahis of the camp dispersed, a party of police and excise men under an Assistant Inspector of Excise went to spot and produced a warrant authorizing the confiscation of all the salt which the Satyagrahis had collected.¹⁸

On 12 May, 1930 nearly 40 Satyagrahis started from the town after saluting the tricolor flag and reached Thiruchendur beach under the lead of N.Vengataraman and D.Rajan and later the processionists swelled into hundreds. The procession went on its way to the beach N.Vengataraman, D.Rajan and E.Perumal, exhorted those present to observe strict Non-violence even in an atmosphere of cruel repression. D.Rajan manufactured salt in the presence of the Satyagrahis. By this time, a large contingent of armed police led by District Superintendent of Police and the Assistant Superintendent of Police, ordered the crowd to disperse and at once ordered Lathi (cane stick) charges. More than a 30 police men pounced on the defenseless Satyagrahis who were beaten mercilessly and kicked with boots. The police destroyed the vessels. N.Vengataraman, D.Rajan, E.Perumal and others were arrested and produced before the sub-divisional Magistrate and charged under section 45 of Indian Penal code and section C of the Madras Salt Act.¹⁹

Salt Satyagraha Movement in Uvari

Uvari is a hamlet located near Radhapuram in Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu on April, 1930 at Uvari under the leadership and guidance of S.Duraisamy and Masilamani Fernandez preparations were made for manufacturing salt by boiling sea water which had already been collected from sea. A huge gathering of volunteers including about 20 school students thronged there. After boiling sea water a hand full of salt was manufactured. The salt which was manufactured in such a way was auctioned. S.Somasundaram, Teacher,

R.Srinivasan, Lawer bought the salt for 2 anaas (a unit of paise). The Government revenue officials and two of the constables on duty viewed their activities and arrested all the four in midnight of the day. As a protest against the arrest, a meeting was held in the village in next day.²⁰

Salt Satyagraha Movement in Rameswaram

Rameswaram is a located 553 kms from South Chennai. A proposal to make salt at Rameswaram, a well-known place of Pilgrimage, was planned shortly after Gandhi's arrest on 5th May 1930. The reason was that local leaders had not sanctioned the scheme of violating salt laws as the sancity of the place would spoiled. About the middle of May once N.S. Ramaswami Ayyar came from the Thiruchirapalli District to infuse some patriot fervour among the people. Meanwhile on 26th May, preparations were completed.²¹ For making a salt March to Rameswaram, and on the Morning of the 28th May, some 100 people went into a procession to the sea shore and manufactured salt. Five were at once arrested and convicted on the 39 volunteers were taken by the police. The movement then stopped due to want of an organiser as well as cruelty of the Government.²²

A Government document reveals the following.

1. Good staff work between the police and District Magistrate that worked together, one issuing orders and the other trying to prevent the use of tenders. No demonstrations were allowed, and the prisoners were not removed with the minimum of imprisonment.
2. Local propaganda by the police and the Magistrate keepers of hotels and chattrams persuaded the public not to indulge in protests for the interest of pilgrimage.

Government had now expressed themselves in favour of more active measures by arresting leading congressmen of Rameswaram namely Balasubramaniam, Narasinga Doss, S. Mayan and V.Govindaswamy.²³

However on May 29th N.S. Ramaswami Iyer and five more were arrested and on the same day N.S. Ramaswami Iyer was convicted for an offence under Sec.117 I.P.C. and sentenced to suffer one year rigorous imprisonment for one year and to pay fine of Rs.200/-. Consequently the movement was stopped on May 30,1930.²⁴

Salt Satyagraha Movement in Thoothukudi

Thoothukudi called as "sea gateway of Tamil Nadu" is located about 693 Kms away from South of Chennai, the capital city of present state of Tamil Nadu. The people Civil Disobedience Movement, 1930-1931 said that the population in the Thoothukudi region was Christians who had sympathy with Congress Movements. They were under the wholesome influenced of the pastors who awakened the villagers through their usual preaching made the people to support the movement for the manufacturing of contraband salt. However, some of the contractors of salt at various factories along the coast were also powerful allies of Government in the matter of nipping such attempts in the bud. The District Magistrate and police as well as the Salt Department officials were also alert in forestalling all attempts to direct such operations in Thoothukudi. The secretary of

Thirunelveli District Congress Committee S.Palaniyandi Mudaliyar who was an ardent supporter of the Civil Disobedience Movement took the responsibility of violating of salt law in this region.

Plans were made from time to time from April to June 1930 for making salt at different centers on the eastern coast like Ovary, Tuticorin, Tharuvaikam and Veppalodai. However the plans were abandoned shortly before the actual dates of salt Satyagraha because the coastal villagers consisted mostly of Parava Christians populations who have no sympathy for the movement. The contractor of Salt at the various factories along the coast were also powerful allies of Government.²⁵

There was a spontaneous response from the people to that Salt Satyagraha March due to the positive propaganda of the National press and the political literature of Tamil Nadu. They motivated the rural and suburban people a lot to the movement. The Vedaranyam Salt Satyagraha turned the attention of India towards South Tamil Nadu. The Government took various counter measures to dilute the movement by issuing leaflets, passing anti Satyagraha acts, proscription of press etc. In spite of that the people of Tamil Nadu whole heartedly participated in the Salt Satyagraha and made the movement a successful one equivalent to Dandi March.

He and other office bearers, namely F.V. Fernandos, G.Madasami and Ponnambalam, with more than 200 Satyagrahis assembled at Thoothukudi beach on 28 April, 1930. Then, they made preparations for violating of the salt laws by 2.00 p.m. S.Palaniyandi Mudaliyar, Secretary of the District Congress committee gave instructions to all the Satyagrahis as how to collect salt water and violate the salt law. Then the Satyagrahis were very busy with manufacturing salt. They set ovens, collected fire woods, seawater and boiled it.²⁶ Palaniyandi Mudaliyar, who had already visited the spot, to know the feasibility of violating the salt laws thrilled the audience by narrating his experiences how salt was prepared at Madras earlier. The District Magistrate, a salt Inspector, a Sub-Inspector, an officer from criminal Investigation department, and a short-hand reporter all the five were also present there. But they were stunned to see the busy preparations and then threatened the salt attempt by pouring water on the ovens.²⁷

Gandhi advocated salt as one of the weapons to oppose the British Rule in India. As salt was used by all, he visualized that they would support his Salt Movement. He explained, "Next to air and water, salt is the greatest necessity of life. It is the only condiment of the poor. Salt is a necessary article in many manufactures. There is no article as valuable as salt, taken from the natural resources, water. By taxing on salt the British Government in India was exploiting the millions of starving Indians. He said that the salt, therefore, constituted the most inhuman poll tax. Gandhi thought that this tax was barbarous. He called for a mass protest against the Salt Act in 1930.

Salt Satyagraha Movement in Tharuvaikulam

Tharuvaikulam is a village in Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu. The village is situated 23 kms away from South of Thoothukudi town. On April 28, 1930 about 100

youths from the village and nearby areas proceeded towards a meeting spot under the lead of M.Ramasamy, M.Shanmugam, and N.Ranganathan. After the delivery of an inspiring speech by Ramasamy, the volunteers prepared salt weighing about ½ maunds. The salt was auctioned when an enthusiastic congress woman bought salt by donating her jewellery.²⁸

Salt Satyagraha Movement in Vepalodai

Vepalodai is a smallest village in ottapidaram taluk in the present Thoothukudi District. It is located 30 kms west of Thoothukudi. In the third week of April, 1930 a team of Congress Volunteers headed by Gandhi Natarajan, a Veteran Gandhian follower, enthusiastically participated in a salt raid. The Gandhian with a contingent of 60 men and 15 Women went in to procession to a local salt depot and collected salt in a number of gunny bags as mark of violating the salt laws mean while a team of salt peons spoiled the attempt by destructing the salt by pouring sea water. In connection with two were arrested. The rest returned to their town by Late night. Another Salt Satyagraha was also organized by boiling sea water at the town hall in May 1930 under the presidency of S.Chockalingam of Vepalodai.²⁹

Salt Satyagraha Movement in Muttom

Muttom is a coastal village situated very nearer to Kanyakumari town. The distance between Chennai and Kanyakumari is 632kms. The Salt Satyagraha in Muttom was initiated by veteran congress leader santhacruze. He along with more than 100 Satyagraha volunteers marched to Muttom. On 10 May, 1930. They manufactured salt by boiling sea water. The police poured water on the ovens to extinguish the fire. The police also arrested Elango, Sandhacurze, Esakimuthu, and Chellappa under section 145 of slat Act. They were imprisoned at Trivandrum Jail for 6 months each.³⁰

Conclusion

Gandhiji's salt satyagraha seemed to be an anecdote in the history of India. The pilgrimage to Dandi had really touched the hearts of the people of India. It seemed as if India had been awakened from the basis was the statement made by K.M. Munshi. Just as Napoleon Bonaparte had gone to Paris, Benito Mussolini, the Dictator had left for Rome, our Gandhiji had left Sabramati Ashram for Dandi was how the writer compared Gandhijis visit with that of the other personages. It was also during the struggle 70,000 people had raised against the imposition of tax on salt and got imprisoned. The same struggle attained very huge successes in Bombay, United Provinces, Tamil Nadu and South Tamil Nadu.

End Notes

1. [www//http//Districts of Tamil Nadu](http://Districts of Tamil Nadu).
2. *Ibid*

3. [www//http//](#) *List of Developmental administrative units of Tamil Nadu State.*
4. [www//http//](#) *List of Municipal Corporations in Tamil Nadu.*
5. P.V. Jagadisa Ayyar, *South Indian Shrines*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1982, p.498.
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7. *Ibid.*
8. Parch, *A Gazetteer of South India*, Madras: Government Press, 1855, p.433.
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14. *Ibid.*
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18. *Report on Civil Disobedience Movement, 1930-1931*, p.173.
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22. *Ibid.*
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27. *Ibid.*
28. Kasthuri, *The Civil Disobedience Movement in Tamil Nadu 1930-1934*, Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Annamalai Nagar: Department of History, Annamalai University, 2016, p. 117.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Government Order No. 1617, Law (General) Department, 11 April, 1930.