

# ROLE OF KONGU IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE

## Abstract

Freedom struggle in the Kongu region has a unique character of its own. The people of Kongu region made remarkable contributions at every stage of the freedom movement. Every Section of the society participated in the struggle even from the early stages. Kongu Hero Deeran Chinnamalai and a number of unsung heroes brought out the freedom spirit which is a character of the Kongu people. The paper highlights the role of Coimbatore in Kongu region in the National Movement particularly during the Quit India Movement.

**Key Words: Freedom struggle, Coimbatore, Leaders, Participation of Students & Workers**

The present study brings to light the importance events of the movement in various parts of the Coimbatore city. The contribution of the Coimbatore city to the National Movement, the active participation of the congress workers in the absence of the arrested leaders, the measures of the Government at the critical stages, the attitude of the various political parties and the important events during the movement are also studied and evaluated in the present study.

Thus the activities, incidents, the personalities, who directed the movement etc., were all studied and evaluated for the present study.

Coimbatore, also known as Kovai, is a major city in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Located on the bank of the Noyyal river surrounded by the western ghats, it is the second largest city in the state after Chennai and the sixteenth largest urban agglomeration in India. It is administrated by the Coimbatore Municipal Corporation and is the administrative capital of Coimbatore district. It is one of the fastest growing tier-two cities in India and a major hub for textiles industries, commerce, and education, information technology, health care and manufacturing in Tamil Nadu. It is often referred to as the “Manchester of South India” due to its cotton production and textile industries. Coimbatore is also referred to as the “Pump city” and it supplies nearly half of India’s requirements of motors and pumps. The city is one of the largest exporters of jewelry, wet grinders, poultry and auto components with “Coimbatore Wet Grinder” and “Kovai Cora Cotton” recognized as geographical indications by the Government of India.

The Quit India Resolution was passed with majority by the AICC on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1942. Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad as president of the Congress explained very clearly that the Quit India demand did not mean the physical removal of Britishers from India. It only meant the transfer of the political power to Indian hands. Gandhi made a passionate two hour speech giving his mantra of ‘Do or Die’. He would wait upon the viceroy and plead with him for the acceptance of the Congress Demand. By the Resolution the AICC sanctioned the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines to secure India’s Freedom without any further delay. For this nonviolent movement the reaction of the Government was not favourable. It branded this movement as ‘disturbances’ arising out of Congress’ ‘fifth- columnist’ conspiracy. Gandhi and all the important congress leaders were arrested. Repressive measures were let loose.

## The Leaders of Freedom Struggle

The Kongu region gave birth to the luminaries of independence movement like Dr. C. Vijayaraghavachariar (Grand old man of Salem), C.Rajaji ( the first Indian Governor General), Dr.P.Subbaroyan (Union Minister), T.S.Avinashilingam Chettiar (State Education Minister and Champion of women’s Education), Tiruppur Kumaran, “Nammakal Kavignar” Ramalingam Pillai, E.V.Ramasamy Naicker (Periyar), K.B.Sundarambal, A.Ayyamuthu (President of the All India Spinners Association), and C.Subramaniyan (former Maharashtra Governor).

On August eleventh 1942 eleven mills in Coimbatore and three mills in Udumalpet areas went on strikes. There was a strike in ten cotton textile mills in Singanallur, a suburb of Coimbatore, on August fourteenth, 1942. Mr.N.G Ramasamy, a member of the Madras Legislative Assembly and the congress labour leader was arrested in connection with the worker’s strike and was detained in the central jail at Coimbatore. Soon the textile workers in different areas plunged into action.

There was stay-in-strike in the Pankaja mills on August twenty second, 1942. On the same day at noon, the police went to the scene and cleared the labourers from the mill by a lathi charge. But they threw stones from a field opposite to the mills and the situation grew more violent, within few seconds. After due warning, the

police opened fire. In all nineteen rounds of firing, two workers were fired, a few of the police workers were wounded and the car of the inspector was badly damaged. Soon the workers of all the textile mills in Singanallur strike were on August twenty second, 1942. The students strike was the next important event in the Quit India Movement.

The students of the Government College and High School in Coimbatore town came out of their institutions on the morning hours of August twelfth, 1942. They continued their strike till September eleventh, 1942. They were supported by the students of the Agricultural College. They picked other schools, colleges and people observed hartals and held meetings and processions under the prohibitory order of the District Magistrate. The government orders the school managements that the students who took part in the freedom movement should be dismissed from their educational institutions. In spite of this, the student activities spread out in different areas.

On August eighteenth, 1942, about four hundred students of the local Board High School in Dharapuram absented themselves from their classes and showed their protest as a protest against of the congress leaders. They marched in a procession from the school, shouting congress slogans and assembled in the local Agastiswarar temple where a meeting was held and a resolution was passed criticising the responsible policies of the government and urging the release of the leaders. The local police dispersed a crowd of the students who were trying to organise a meeting in the evening first at the Hanuman Temple in Dharapuram at the Amaravathi river bank. Three students of the local High school and four other congressmen were arrested and taken to the police station. Some persons threw stones on the police which results in mirror injuries to two police constables. After an hour the arrested persons were all released with a warning.

On August nineteenth, 1942 a prohibitory order under section 144 of Indian Penal Code, prohibiting processions and public meetings for a period of one month from that date within the municipal limits. The government was very particular in suppressing the movement Mr.Siddhia, a congress worker was arrested on the same evening at the Erode railway station when arrived from Coimbatore by the Blue Mountain Express. Mr.E.G.Govindasamy was also arrested both under the defense of Indian rules for allied prejudicial speeches made by them and were remarkable police custody.

On August twenty second 1942 Mr.T.S.Avinashilingam Chettiar M.L.A of Coimbatore were arrested by the town police for making printing, publishing and distributing of a pamphlet entitled "Fulfillment of a Prophecy" condemning the government attitudes. The widespread and violent activities in different parts of the district became a challenging event to the government. The section 144 of Indian Panel Code was promulgated at Palladam, prohibiting Public meetings and processions. But disobeying the order Mr.Kuppunaidu, the president of Palladam taluk congress committee conducted and so he was arrested in the evening of August twenty second 1942 at Palladam.

The congress volunteers adopted picketing of liquor and toddy shops as a part of the Quit India Movement. Several toddy shops were burnt at Singanallur, Perur and Kariyapalayam. On August twenty second, 1942 a crowd of about four hundred people smashed and burnt the Singanallur toddy shop and successfully dispersed themselves from the spot before the police could arrive there. In Annur village toddy and arrack shops were burnt by the congressmen on September third, 1942.

The congress volunteers actively works and sent anonymous letters to the government servants asking them either to resign or to refuse to act against the nationalists. In Coimbatore district posters containing slogans were posted on the walls of the main streets there was a picketing of college students and law courts by women volunteers. The picketers were arrested and crowds in different areas were dispersed by force. The toddy sales went down as the toddy shops were picketed by the volunteers.

The Coimbatore Municipal Council at its meeting held on September twenty sixth, 1942 passed resolutions endorsing and supporting the Quit India resolution of the all India Congress Committee and strongly protesting against the repressive policies of the government. Hence the government suspended the council for a period of six months.

Damage was done to Government property including a few post Offices. The Government collected thousands of rupees as a compensation for the damages of properties. The brutal lathi charge was made by the Police Due to unannounced firing many died on the spot. The continuous searches of houses led to the arrests and convictions of numerous inmates.

Nevertheless the Quit India Movement continued unabated with variations depending on local conditions, chiefly lead by an underground leadership. But an unarmed and leaderless mob could not be a match to the violence of a powerful and organized Government having unlimited force at its disposal. A veritable reign of terror was let loose by the government. Thousands of people were arrested and send to various jails away from their homeland. In about three weeks the government was successful in crushing the uprising.

The dispersal of mobs was at the point of rifle, pistol, and weapons. The beating, and flogging to political prisoners were combined with all types of insults unheard of. People were tied to the trees and beaten, sometimes undressed and whipped.

The Cellular jail in Andaman stands as a testimony for the human rights violation by the rulers. The rigorous treatment ranged from extra hours on the grinding mill, standing handcuffed for a week or so, Some were confined to solitary cells for months together,. Some prisoners were starved for four or five days.

Thus there were numerous arrests, convictions, beating, flogging, firing, suspension, and dismissals from service. This kind of repression did not exhaust their zeal and enthusiasm. They moved from village to village to spread the message of Congress by issuing hand-bills, posters, and News bulletins for wider circulation in town and villages.

Nevertheless, the non violent methods got the appreciation of big powers of the world. Gandhiji was able to lead the nation towards independence by his political philosophy of truth and Non- violence. Obama the President of America said in 2009, his biggest inspiration came from Mahatma Gandhi. He said that Gandhiji changed the world just by the power of his ethics.

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