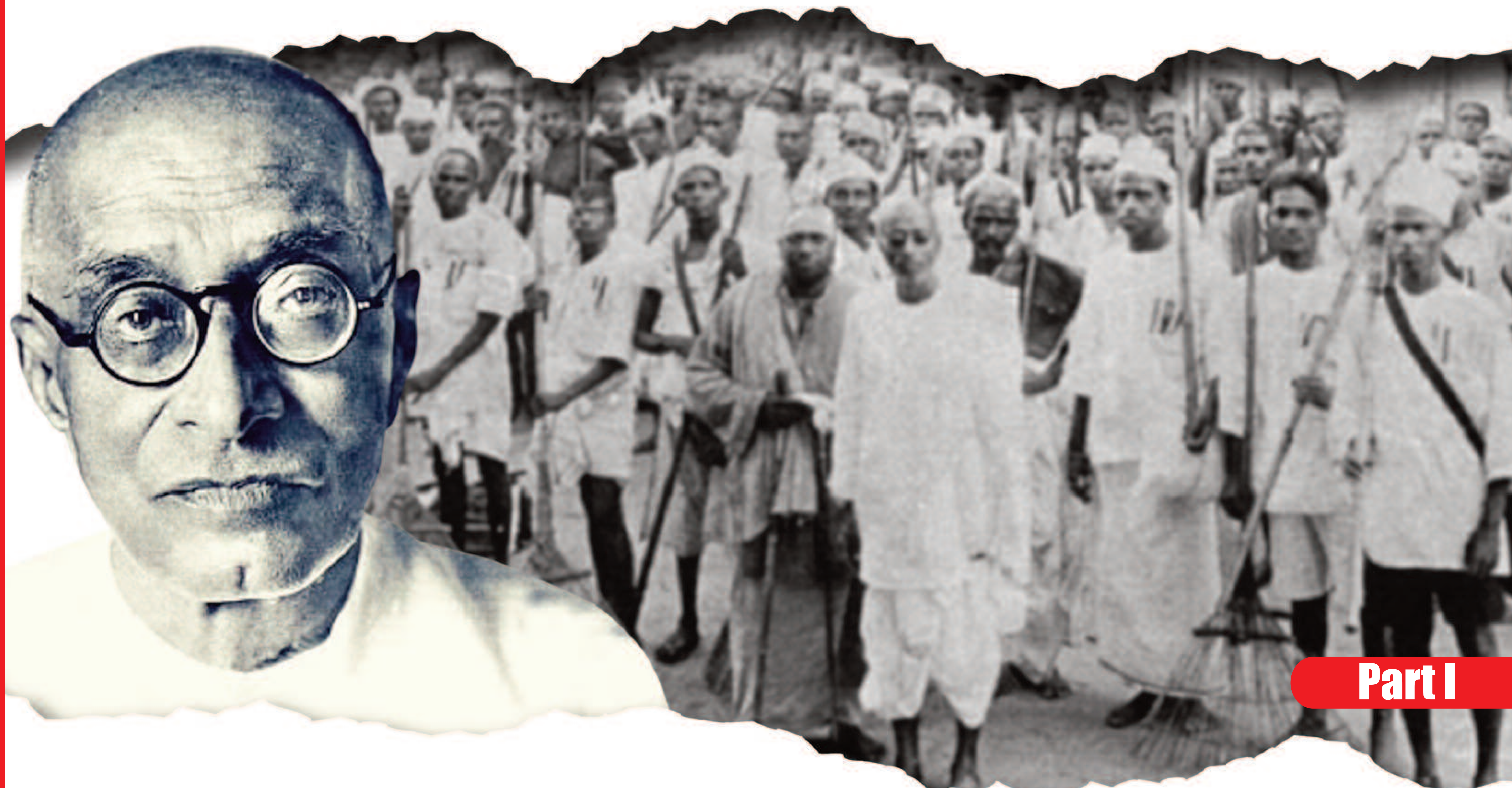




The Tunarama Festival is where the competitors throw frozen tuna as far as possible to win.

The young rebel


Part I

A Young Boy's Tale Of Steadfast Rebellion During The Indian National Movement

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I was just a 15-year-old boy then, but I can never forget the spark in the air. Our nation was fighting the British Raj with all its might, and almost every person was contributing in some way or the other. A new act of rebellion was taking place every day, but what drew my attention was the Vedaranyam March!

I was young, inexperienced, and could not fully understand the nationalistic fervour of the times, but it still swept me away, and all I wanted was to become a freedom fighter. Was it easy for me? I'll let you decide, dear readers, for who am I to determine that it was harder for me than the rest? I remember walking barefoot. The sun was scorching that day, its hot rays piercing through my skin. My face was beaded with sweat, tiredness and pain poking at each and every inch of my body. And then, there was the sense of fear. I had heard so many stories of rebels being shot on the spot by them. Those merciless armed men who attacked anyone trying to disobey them. And now, I was one of the insurgents, marching with a rebellious group towards the sea to transgress the rules.

I continued to walk with all my strength. There were more than a hundred people around me, all worn out due to the heat and dust. They had been walking for days. And yet, no one showed even a hint of wanting to stop or take some rest. Why would they? After all, they had come so far, and so had I.

A low yet strong chant with a heart-warming resonance had started from the front of the group and had now spread throughout. Their leader had started to incant two words, words that made all the difference and filled us with renewed vigour.

"Vande mataram!"

"Vande mataram!"

"Vande mataram!"

Despite my exhaustion, my face glinted with jubilation. I knew now what it was to be an Indian. And I, too, started to chant, "Vande Mataram!" Soon, we reached the coast, an endless reservoir of saltwater swimming in front of us. Slowly, our group gathered around the leader, who was al-

ready bending down and gently dipping his hands into the water. He announced, "We don't need to follow the Britishers anymore! We shall be inspired by Gandhiji and rebel against their inequitable rules!"

Everyone cheered, and the "Vande Mataram" chant was louder than ever, as the leader took a little amount of the seawater and boiled it. After a few minutes, which seemed to have passed by in seconds, C. Rajagopalachari pinched up a few white grains from the water he had been boiling, and said, "We, the Vedaranyam marchers, have followed Gandhiji's footsteps and fought for our country. We have completed the Vedaranyam Salt March. We have broken the salt law!"

This is not how my story begins, however. In fact, my journey to this memorable date has been unusual from the start. Everyone thought I was different. Some people admired my perspective. "Odd," others called me. People, including my parents, thought I needed to be quietened, suppressed. Why, you ask?

Well, it goes back to when I was just a 10-year-old. My father had (and still has) a good post in a British Agency, and thus, a good earning. I believe that was due to the fact that he never opposed the British. So, because of his cordial relationship with the British, he was able to enrol me in a British school in Trichinopoly, Madras. Until then, I had never studied at a school. My father had home-schooled me, teaching me some basic concepts in his very strict way. Yes, my father was very, very strict. Not just about studies, but also about what I learnt regarding the British Raj. If he heard me voice even a small, naive opinion that stood against them, he would scold me. Beatings would follow on worse days. My sister, who was a chubby one-year-old then, would always start crying whenever she would see our father hitting me. My mother, who was otherwise an amiable person, took his side as well. Whenever I complained to her about my father, she would say, "Oh my lovely child, do not say that. He is doing this work for us."

And so came my first day of school. In one of the classes, with a teacher of British origin, we were being taught about how great the British empire

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was. I might have believed him, but a few days ago I had heard a discussion on radio about the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. What they described was gruesome. How could the British soldiers be so ruthless as to kill hundreds of people mindlessly? It made it hard for me, almost ridiculous, to even listen to what the teacher was saying. How could anyone who had killed people for no fair reason be successful? I stood up in the middle of the class and questioned the teacher, rather aggressively, "How come the British are so great and respected if they massacred innocent families? How can you call them decent after all the ghastly things they have done to this place? Why are you even here?"

The next thing I knew I was being punished by the teacher, who was pummelling my soft, pink hands with an unyielding ruler. I was then taken home, just to receive another set of scolding from my father. That was the first time I heard my mother speak against my father. She said that I was just a child, and that I could not have meant what I said. And that day, I finally realised the kind of world I was living in. The Britishers had taken away all our freedom, all our rights. But I also knew that there were people willing to voice their opinions against them and fight for our nation, like Gandhiji, Sir Surendranath Banerjee, Jawaharlal Nehru, and many more. And I was inspired by them. The way they were standing up to the Angrezi sarkar, holding peaceful protests, spreading awareness, all of this made me respect them and want to follow their path.

Since that day, a fire of rebellious origin burnt in me. I wanted to do something that would help Indians gain freedom. I wanted to disobey and protest against every single unfair law the British had imposed to suppress us. I wanted to help make a change.

I finally got my opportunity on the morning of April 10, 1930, as I began eating my breakfast, and my mother switched on the radio to hear the daily local news about Indian National Congress or INC. Because I was now 15, I was allowed to listen to the news, but my sister was just six, so I had to get up early to catch the morning bulletin. The most talked about piece of information these days was the Dandi March led by Gandhiji to break the Salt Law.

Salt. It is such a simple white grain, yet a crucial part of our daily lives. And then the Britishers imposed the Salt Law, taking away our right to freely receive this gift from mother nature. Now we had to buy our salt and couldn't manufacture it ourselves. Everyone found this outrageous, but it was Gandhiji who took the initiative to protest, which is why he inspired me the most. The day he announced the march, I wanted to join them as well, but even I knew that this wish was unrealistic since we lived on the opposite side of the country, in Trichinopoly, Madras. But I didn't lose faith. I kept track of the event every single day, no matter how much my mother warned me, or my father chastised me.

But today, I heard a sense of excitement in the speaker's tone on the radio. As if they were about to announce something new. I leaned closer to the radio to be able to listen clearly above all the static. Then I heard C. Rajagopalachari, an INC leader, speaking, "We are a flame of nationalism that is determined to reach the height of freedom. And Gandhiji recently fuelled that fire, bringing it from an incipient flame to a roaring orange glory. But the vigorous rays of this fire haven't reached some places, therefore leaving many in the dark. People all over our country need to know of our struggles! And that is why, I will be hosting a Salt March, from Trichinopoly to Vedaranyam, to spread awareness about the unfairness of the British, and bring us a step closer to freedom! The applications have been sent out. So, let's break the Salt Law and show the British Raj they are nearing their end!"

Yes! The day I had been waiting for so long had finally come!

To be continued...