



DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

# SREE AYYAPPA COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

(Reaccredited by NAAC with B grade (3<sup>rd</sup> cycle))  
Chunkankadai, Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu

## ONE DAY NATIONAL LEVEL SEMINAR

ON

Un glorified Freedom Fighters of

Kanyakumari District

sponsored by

### INDIAN COUNCIL OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH (ICHR)

New Delhi



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## Prominent Freedom Fighters of Kanyakumari District

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### Abstract

Nanjil Nadu and Idai Nadu formed the modern Kanyakumari District. It was also called as South Travancore under the Travancore Princely State. Being a part of a Princely State, that too have a friendly alliance with the British in India, South Travancore or the present day Kanyakumari District took part in the activities of the Indian National Congress much later than other parts Tamil Nadu. However, Kanyakumari District actively participated in the Temple Entry Agitation and Quit India Movement. Prominent freedom fighters hailed from the Kanyakumari District were Kavimoni Desigavinayagam Pillai, Sheik Thambi Pavalalar, Dr. M.E. Naidu, P. S. Moni, P. Jeevanandam and Chenbagaraman Pillai and so on. In this article an earnest effort has been taken to bring out the contributions of the freedom fighters of Kanyakumari District.

**Keywords:** Civil Disobedience Movement, Suchindrum Satyagraha, Quit India Movement.

### Introduction

A brief survey of the Indian freedom movement shows clearly that the national movement was an Indian response to the British challenge and that almost the whole of India responded to the common challenge. Indian National Father, Mahatma Gandhi was the one who popularized the national movement to the common people of all walks of life. His visits to remote places mobilized the people of that area to the realm of Indian National Congress and Indian freedom movement. Gandhi visited Kanyakumari District twice in his lifetime, once in 1925 and then later on in 1937.<sup>1</sup> After the visit of Gandhiji, the spirit of national movement spread to Kanyakumari District. Until then the people of Kanyakumari District considered themselves only as the part of the princely state not as the part of India. So the organizations like Nanchilnad Youth Congress and the Travancore State Congress were formed respectively in 1931 and 1938.<sup>2</sup> Even before the formation of that organization, some prominent personalities of Kanyakumari District took part in the freedom movement of India.

#### Sheikh Thambi Pavalalar

Sathavathani Sheikh Thambi Pavalalar was a Tamil poet, scholar and an Indian independence activist. He was born on 31 July 1874 at Edalakudy in Nagercoil, Kanyakumari District, as the third son of Pakeer Meeran Sahib and Ameena. He had his earlier education at

Edalakudy. He learned Arabic language in his early age and was a disciple of Sankaranarayana Pattariar, a Tamil scholar who lived at Kottar. Thus, Pavalar became well versed in 'Kamba Ramayana'. Sheikh ThambiPavalar was a good orator.<sup>3</sup> In 1859, he worked as the editor of two Tamil magazines namely 'Yatharthavadhi' and 'Islamic Mithran' in Chennai. He wrote and published books – Kottatru Pillai Tamil, Alahappa Kovai, Pathirruppaththu Anthathi and commentaries of 'Seerapuranam', which contained 5,027 poems.<sup>4</sup> As a writer and orator, he had popularized the idea of freedom through his writings and speeches.

### **Kavimani Desigavinayagam Pillai**

Kavimani Desiga vinayagam Pillai born on 27 July 1876 was a Tamil poet and freedom fighter. He was born to Sivadhanu Pillai and Aadhilakshmi in a village called Theroor in Kanyakumari District.<sup>5</sup> Asiya Jothi, Nanjil Nattu Marumakkal Vazhi Manmiyam, and the translation of the work of Omar Khayyam are his masterpieces. He also wrote 'Varumun Kaappom' in his book 'Malarum Malayum'. Through his poetry and books he sowed the seeds of nationalism and social equality.<sup>6</sup>

### **Dr. M.E. Naidu**

Dr. M.E. Naidu was the pioneer in bring the freedom movement of into the soils of Kanyakumari District. He was born on August 30, 1880 in a respected Naidu family at Kottar.<sup>7</sup> His father Meenakshi Naidu was a palace-artist of Maharajas of Travancore for many years. M.E. Naidu had his early education in the Maharaja High School at Kottar and passed the Matriculation examination in the first division. He then pursued his higher education in the Scott Christian College, Nagercoil.<sup>8</sup> He continued his further education in medicine and surgery at Madras, Edinburg, Glasgow, Ireland and qualified himself as a doctor. Then he went to Ceylon for accepting the offer of the government to serve there as a surgeon. It was here Dr. M. E. Naidu had developed a love and sympathy for the common people, who were ignored and exploited by the British.<sup>9</sup>

Dr. M. E. Naidu soon left Ceylon and came to Kottar where he started a private hospital and deeply involved in the programmes evolved by Mahatma Gandhi and did his bit in spreading the ideals of Gandhi such as boycott of foreign cloth, prohibition, Harijan-upliftment and removal of untouchability.<sup>10</sup> Even before the formation of Nanchilnad Youth Congress, motivated youths of Kanyakumari District like Dr. M.E. Naidu, Therur Subramania Pillai, M. Sivathanu Pillai and A.C. Sundaram Pillai took an initial step to found a committee to fight for the cause of the nation.<sup>11</sup> As a result of Vaikom Satyagraha of 1925 and the visit of Gandhi to Kanyakumari District in 1925, the Suchindrum Satyagraha was organised in January, 1926.<sup>12</sup> This Temple Entry movement was effectively organised by Dr. M.E. Naidu for gaining the right of entry into the roads around the Suchindrum temple for the depressed class people.<sup>13</sup> In the meantime Gandhi undertook the Salt Satyagraha in 1930. Motivated by this, they took active part in the temple entry movement.

Further, the native leaders formed the Nanchilnad Congress Youth League on 16 May 1931. Nagendra Panicker of Kottar was its first President.<sup>14</sup> Under the leadership of M.E. Naidu picketing of foreign cloth was organised.<sup>15</sup> Amidst this, the Temple Entry Proclamation which was announced on 12 November 1936 opened the temple to all people irrespective of caste, colour and creed.<sup>16</sup> Apart from the picketing of the foreign cloths they also participated aggressively in the picketing of the liquor shops. The liquor boycott brought the government revenues a crushing down. Soon this boycott movement assumed a new popular form, that of cutting of the heads of Palmyra trees, which were in abundance at those days.<sup>17</sup> National volunteers of Kanyakumari District actively took part in those movements in the nearby districts of Tirunelveli, Ramnad and Madurai (under the control of the British at that time), as the Kanyakumari District was a part and parcel of Travancore Princely State. Dr. M.E. Naidu was the person who had secretly sent volunteers to British India from Kanyakumari District during the Civil Disobedience Movement.<sup>18</sup>

As a continuation of Dandi March which was started on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1930 by Gandhiji opposing the imposition of tax on salt, Rajaji, the ardent follower of Gandhiji launched the Vedaranyam march on 28<sup>th</sup> March and violated the salt law.<sup>19</sup> A Salt Satyagraha Committee was organised in Kanyakumari District and volunteers were sent to Vedaranyam. They decided to attain the goal of the movement. G. Ganapathy of Aralvaimozhi, A. Arumugam Chettiar, S. Perumal Nadar, S. Subramania Pillai, Virabhahu Pillai of Agasteeswaram, S. Subramania Iyer, T. Mahalinga Saliar, S. Sivarama Nadar, S. Sivalinga Pannaiar, S. Pandaram, S.N. Krishna Pillai, S. Ramachandran, S. Subramanian, S. Sivathanu and S. Vasudevan of Nagercoil, and Kumbalingam of Chidambaranagar were actively participated in the movement.<sup>20</sup> Dr. M.E. Naidu had made all the arrangements for the volunteers to go to Vedaranyam and took part in the Salt Satyagraha.

### Chenbagaraman Pillai

Chenbagaraman Pillai was a revolutionary and person who had coined the word "Jai Hind". Chempakaraman Pillai, also called as Venkidi was born on 15 September 1891 in Thiruvananthapuram, to Tamil Pillai parents, Chinna Swami Pillai and Nagammal.<sup>21</sup> Even during his early age he left for Europe and studied at ETH Zurich from October 1910 until 1914.<sup>22</sup> In October 1914, Pillai moved to Berlin and emerged as one of the pro-Indian revolutionary activist in Europe because of the influence of Lala Har Dayal. During the I World War both of them cooperated with the German Intelligence Bureau for removing the British yoke from India.<sup>23</sup> With the support of Chempakaraman Pillai and other revolutionaries in Germany, SMS Emden, a German warship commanded by Captain Karl von Muller entered the waters off the coast of Madras on 22 September 1914. It bombed the facilities near the Madras harbour and slipped back into the ocean.<sup>24</sup>

After the end of World War I and Germany's defeat, Pillai stayed in Germany, working as a technician in a factory in Berlin. When Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose visited Vienna, Pillai met him and explained his plan of action. He became a friend of Germany's new administrator Adolf Hitler and introduced Subhas to Hitler. However, soon this friendship got ended because of the racist policy of Hitler.<sup>25</sup> In 1931, Pillai married Lakshmi Bai of Manipur, whom he had met in Berlin. Unfortunately they had a short life together, as Pillai soon fell ill. There were symptoms of slow poisoning and he went to Italy for treatment. He died in Berlin on 28 May 1934. Lakshmi Bai brought Pillai's ashes to India in 1935 where they were later ceremonially immersed in Kanyakumari with full state honours. It was Pillai's final wish that his ashes be sprinkled in Nanjilnadu (Kanyakumari), his family's native place.<sup>26</sup>

### Jeevanandham

P. Jeevanandham was born in Boothapandi, in Kanyakumari District into an orthodox middle-class family on 21 August 1907. His original name was Sorimuthu that was given in memory of his clan god Sorimuthu. The orthodox and religious background of his family exposed Jeevanandham to literature, devotional songs and the arts.<sup>27</sup> Even as a schoolboy he became averse to Varnasrama Dharma, a Hindu religious code that stratifies society on caste lines and facilitates the practice of untouchability. The national movement and Gandhi's call to wear khadi and his stand against untouchability influenced Jeevanandham to join the movement. He began wearing only khadi from then on.<sup>28</sup>

Jeevanandham took his Dalit friends into the streets and public places where, usually, entry was denied to them, which earned him the displeasure of his family and orthodox caste members in his village. His father disapproved his behaviour and asked him to stop all things which were against their caste traditions. Jeevanandham said he would rather leave his home rather than follow discriminatory practices and eventually did so. In 1924, he participated in the Vaikom Satyagraha against upper-caste Hindus, where Dalits were barred from walking on the road leading to the temple at Vaikom. He participated in a similar protest, demanding entry for Dalits into the Suchindram temple. When he joined an ashram run by V. V. S. Aiyar at

Cheranmadevi, he found that Dalits and 'upper-caste' students were fed in separate halls. He supported Periyar's protest against this practice and quit the ashram. Later, he took charge of an ashram funded by a philanthropist in Siruvayal near Karaikkudi. The ashram life gave him an opportunity to read a lot of books. In this ashram, he got opportunity to meet Gandhi.<sup>29</sup>

When Periyar E. V. Ramasamy had expressed his desire to propagate socialism, Jeevanandham, who was by then familiar with the egalitarian principle, felt elated and supported that idea.<sup>30</sup> His hopes of getting the national movement merged with the Congress Socialist Party were dashed when Periyar began dragging his feet. He, however, remained in the Congress. Later, when the Madras Provincial Congress Socialist Party was formed in 1937, Jeevanandham became its first secretary. He joined the Communist Party of India (CPI) two years later along with P. Ramamurthi, another veteran of the movement. He was an active leader of Communist Party of India in Tamil Nadu until his death on 18 January 1963.<sup>31</sup>

### P. S. Moni

When the Indian National Congress started the Quit India movement in August 1942, Kanyakumari District readily responded to that call. On 12<sup>th</sup> August the Travancore State Congress called for a hartal in Nagercoil. Shops and theatres were closed. In the evening a student's march was arranged to popularize the movement among the youngsters. After that there was a meeting held in the Municipal ground, under the leadership of S.V. Muthu Karuppa Pillai and S. Sivan Pillai. T.M. Sundaram, S. Subramania Pillai and C. Perumal Pillai were the spokespersons.<sup>32</sup> The noteworthy feature of this Quit India Movement was the student's participation. They boycotted their educational institutions as a mark of protest against the arrest of the Indian National Congress leaders throughout India. They enthusiastically organised meetings and participated in processions, strikes, demonstrations and wore black badges.

The students were dispersed by the police inflicting lathi charge on them. However the students ceaselessly protested by shouting slogans in favour of a National Government for India and a Responsible Government for Travancore. Exasperated with that, the police made a few arrests and because of the lathi charge, some were admitted in hospitals too.<sup>33</sup> These atrocities committed by the Travancore government during the 1942 agitations in Kanyakumari District by the students were circulated in the Nagercoil area as revolutionary pamphlets. The mastermind behind these pamphlets was P.S. Moni.<sup>34</sup> Thus, P. S. Moni had emerged as a leader during the Quit India Movement condemned the British Imperialism vigorously. He published a weekly against the British Government. With the experience gained in the freedom movement, P. S. Moni has actively led the merger movement along with Nesamony who is considered as the Father of Kanyakumari District.

## Conclusion

Leaders like Dr. M. E. Naidu, Kavimoni Desigavinayagam Pillai, Sheik Thambi Pavalar, P. Jeevanandam, Chenbagaraman Pillai and P.S. Moni tried their best for curtailing the imperialistic power of the British, because of which they faced many difficulties. Despite those difficulties the freedom fighters of Kanyakumari District played an active role in the Civil Disobedience Movement, Salt Satyagraha and Quit India Movement. However, all these struggles were ruthlessly suppressed by the then Dewan of Travancore, Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer. Later, the demand for the establishment of a responsible government turned a new shape and became the merger movement since 1945. At last all those struggles came to an end in 1956 when the majority of Tamil speaking areas of Travancore-Cochin State were merged with the then Madras State or Tamil Nadu.

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