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Azhagiandampam, Thiruvithancode, Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu, India - 629174



POSTGRADUATE AND RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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Historical Studies And Research

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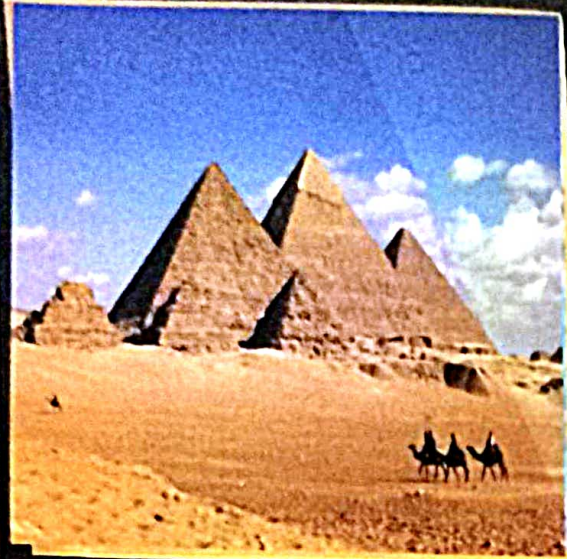
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TAMIL NADU - INDIA



**International Conference
On**



**Historical Studies and
Research**

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TAMIL NADU - INDIA

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MARSHAL NESAMONY – THE MAKER OF KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The history of the struggle for liberation witnessed a number of movements, organisations, leaders, cadres, patriots, their sacrifices etc. The ultimate hero for the liberation of the Tamil speaking people and their areas from the clutches of the oppressing rulers and the architect of the present Kanniyakumari district is marshal Nesamony. The liberation struggle under the eminent leadership of Marshal Nesamony and the culmination of his efforts in separation of the Tamil speaking areas, formation of Kanniyakumari district etc., are briefed in this article.

INTRODUCTION

The present Kanniyakumari district forms part of Tamilnadu state and is located at the southernmost tip of the state. Till 1956 AD, the portion of Tamil speaking people was under the governance of the erstwhile Travancore – Cochin State. Caste based communal system prevailed in the Travancore – Cochin princely state. The so-called lower classes of people were oppressed socially, economically and politically. The oppressed classes of people had to fight continuously to gain and safeguard their liberty and dignity. They fought for their liberation during the nineteenth century AD, from 1810 to 1859 and again in the twentieth century AD, from 1947 to 1956 after Indian independence¹.

KANNIYAKUMARI

Researchers reveal that there existed a continent named 'Lemuria' south of present Indian sub-continent. The continent which was submerged and lost is referred to 'Kumari Kandam' in Tamil. It is believed that an ancient Tamil civilization existed in Lemuria before it was lost to the sea due to a catastrophe. Silappathikaram, the earliest Tamil epic composed probably in the 5th or

6th century AD, narrates that the river Pahruli along with Kumari mountain submerged in the sea². The term Kumarikandam is depicted in Kanthapuram written in the 15th century AD³. According to Tamil scholars, Kumarikandam was the region where the first two Tamil academies were organized during the Pandya reign. It is claimed to be the cradle of civilization to prove the antiquity of Tamil language and culture. V.G.Suryanarayana Sastri in his work 'Tamil Mozhiyin Varalaru' (History of Tamil language), used the term 'Kumari nadu' in 1903. Devaneyya Pavanar and many other Tamil scholars and historians also describe about the existence of Kumarikandam which was the place of origin of the human beings⁴.

The adjoining portion of the submerged Kumarikandam is said to be the present Kanniyakumari region. The survivors of the catastrophe have built the Kumari Amman temple at the tip of the land near the sea⁵.

Kanniyakumari is the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula. It is the meeting point of three seas namely, Arabian sea, Bay of Bengal and the Indian ocean. The district comprises of the four types of lands Kuringi

(Hills and nearby areas), Mullai (forest areas), Marutham (agricultural land) and Neithal (sea and nearby areas). It is a fertile region with different flora and fauna. All types of agricultural and horticultural produces are found here in plenty. It is the southern boundary of Tamilnadu which had its northern boundary as Venkada hills (Thirupathi) as mentioned in Tholkappiyam, the most ancient Tamil literature available today⁶.

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF TRAVANCORE

SOCIAL BACKGROUND AND RESTRICTIONS

It is well known that thousand years back, present Kerala from Kasarcode to Thiruvananthapuram where Malayalam is spoken now was a part of wide Tamilnadu and was called Cheranadu. Tamil language existed as the language of people, literature and state. Since Chera kingdom was the illustrious part of Thamizhagam, while denoting the old rulers of the region, the usage of the term 'Chera Chola Pandya' prevails (where 'Chera' comes first).

After the ruin of Chera kingdom, many changes happened in the history of the region. The responsibility of safeguarding the Tamil language and culture was shouldered by the Venadu Thiruvadi dynasty. This continued from 9th century AD to 18th century AD. There was no language as Malayalam till then⁷.

King Marthandavarma (1729 – 1758 AD) was the maker of modern Travancore. In due course, Malayalam, a language formed by the mixing of Sanscrit with Tamil took the place of the official language. But the language spoken by the people in the taluks namely Devikulam, Peermedu, Chenkottai, Vilavancode, Kalkulam, Thoivalai and Agastheeswaram in Travancore region was Tamil.

The society of the princely state of Travancore comprising of Tamil speaking

areas was subjected to many divisions based on caste and religion. The two major divisions based on religion in the state were Hindus and non-Hindus. Hindus were divided as Savarnas, the high caste ones and Avarnas or non Varna Hindus known as the low castes⁸.

Cultural difference prevailed between the communities. Untouchability was at its peak. The so-called low caste people were known as 'soil slaves' and they normally lived away from the living areas⁹.

Missionaries belonging to London Missionary Society (LMS) landed in South Travancore during the Nineteenth century and saw the pathetic conditions of the people. They

started educating and converting people to protestant Christianity, the present Church of South India (CSI). LMS brought a huge number of people within its fold¹⁰. The fishermen along the sea coast were already converted to Catholic Christian tradition by Francis Xavier who came to India in 1542 AD¹¹. Lot of people from Nadar caste also embraced Catholic Christianity. The entire Vaniga Chettiar community from Asaripallam also got converted to Catholic Christianity due to the heavy taxed levied on them by the rulers. People in bulk number also converted to other dominations of Christianity.

Muslims who came from Arabia and Afghanistan and settled in Travancore had children born to local women. Huge number of natives of Travancore were converted to Islam during the Mysore aggression between 1766 and 1790 AD. Some people embraced Islam to relieve themselves from the high caste oppressions¹².

ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

The land was fertile all over, with produces from agricultural, plantation and other commercial crops. People in the upper strata of the society and also the temple trustees enjoyed the major portion of land

properties. Feudalism, in the name of 'Jenmy System' prevailed which assured the upper class people stability and status socio economically and politically. The low class people were highly exploited. Various kinds of taxes and fines were levied upon the peasants and workers¹³. Majority of the people were in poverty. They were compelled to do 'Oozhiam service' without any payment. The meagre wages if any were also misappropriated by the officials¹⁵. Thus, the common public suffered a lot economically and socially.

MOVEMENTS FOR LIBERATION

In the nineteenth century AD, oppression, cruelty and exploitation carried out on the common people especially the Tamil speaking, by the Government of Travancore and the upper caste people were unexplainable. As per a treaty between Veluthambi Thalavai of Travancore kingdom and the British, the kingdom had to pay a tribute of Rupees eight lakh per annum. Due to that, the common public were loaded with different kinds of taxes¹⁶.

The cruelty of the rulers being unbearable, the people began to revolt and started movements in different areas. A few of the movement but the well known and important ones formed by groups of people were

- 1) Malayaligal Ethirpu Iyakkam in 1810 by Moses, Solomon, Arumainayagam, David, Neelan etc.
- 2) Malayala Makkal Iyakkam in 1822 by Pulippunam Esakkimadan.
- 3) Anbukodi Makkal Iyakkam in 1836 by the followers of Mudisoodum Perumal alias Muthukutti Ayya.
- 4) Thamizhar Viduthalai Congress in 1928 by Kunjan Nadar.
- 5) Thamizhar katchi in 1935 by Appavu Aasan.
- 6) Thamizh Sangam in 1938 by Kavignar P. Ramasamy.
- 7) Mathiya Vaalibar Sangam in 1943 by S.Sivan pillai, T.M. Sundaram etc.

8) Nanjil Thamizhar Congress in 1945 by R.Velayutham, R.K.Ram, P.S.Mony, Markandan, Gandhiraman etc.

9) Akhila Thiruvancore Thamizhar Congress in 1945 with Sam Nathaniel as president.

10) Akhila Thiruvancore Thamizhar Sangam by Dewan Subramaniya Iyer in Trivandrum.

11) Travancore Tamilnadu Congress in 1945 by Marshal. A. Nesamony.

All the above movements and also other small groups and individuals fought for the liberation of the Oppressed mainly Tamil population. During various struggles, the organisers, participants and other public were brutally punished by the government. Despite the patriotic efforts made by the movements, the effect was not so fruitful that the people had to live a miserable life¹⁷.

TRAVANCORE TAMILNADU CONGRESS (TTNC)

On 2nd January, 1945 Nesamony convened a meeting in Mavaravilai, at the house of Mr.Karuthudayan to form an organization for the welfare of Tamils in Travancore. It was resolved that the Administrators and Police officers having knowledge in Tamil to be posted in the Tamil speaking areas of Travancore. Nesamony was selected as its organizer. On December 9, 1945, Nesamony formed the organisation 'Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress' (TTNC) in its executive committee meeting held at Edwin Memorial Hall, Neyyoor. The aim of the movement was the liberation of backward and downtrodden and to raise voice for social justice¹⁸.

TTNC AS A POLITICAL PARTY.

After Indian independence, Travancore was annexed with Indian Union in 1947. In 1949, the state of Travancore - Cochin was formed. As the Tamil speaking people became minorities, the linguistic discriminations and sufferings of the already oppressed class people increased multifold since their rights were denied. Malayalees

were involved in the act of making United Kerala from Kasarcode to Kanniyakumari. Hence the people and Travancore Tamilnadu Congress insisted for linguistic state and annex the Tamil speaking areas namely Thovalai, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam, Vilavancode, Neyyatinkarai, Devikulam, Peermedu, Chittur and Sencottai in Travancore – Cochin state with Tamilnadu, the then Madras state.

Many groups of Tamil welfare joined the movement and TTNC was made as a political party at the meeting held in the Allan Hall, Nagercoil on 8th October 1947, with the symbol 'Pot' and it was prepared for facing the assembly election in 1948¹⁹. In the assembly election TTNC won all the 14 constituencies it contested. Nesamony became the leader of the Legislative Members of TTNC¹⁹.

ROLE PLAYED BY NESAMONY

Since 1921, Marshal Nesamony had involved himself to safeguard Tamil Culture, oppressed Tamil people and to enable them to lead a respectable life. He strived hard and fought for their status starting from courts of law to Parliament. Nesamony entered the Indian Parliament as the only representative of Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress in 1952. His was the sole voice that spoke for the Tamils of the Travancore – Cochin State. The subjects of the Tamil speaking nine taluks namely Devikulam, Peermedu, Chittur, Neyyattinkarai, Senkottai, Vilavancode, Kalkulam, Thovalai and Agastheeswaram were deprived of justice socially, economically and politically. Nesamony served as the saviour of those people. Being a distinguished lawyer, he put his arguments with his fluent language and use and authority of reason so that the parliament members were attracted by his speeches. Nesamony put forth the reasons before the parliament for merging the nine taluks with Madras State. He narrated the necessity of annexing each taluk with separate vivid reasons and enormous data.

The States Reorganisation was taken into consideration due to the great efforts of Nesamony. Due to the biased views of the State Reorganisation Commission and lack of necessary support and actions from the State of Madras, all the nine taluks could not be fully recovered. In spite of the vehement fight by Marshal Nesamony and TTNC, only four and a half taluks were annexed with Madras State, the present Tamilnadu.

While Nesamony was practicing law, he became the Chairman of Nagercoil Municipality in 1943. In the same year he also became the member of Sri Moolam Assembly. With the help of Sir.C.P.Ramasaamy Iyer, he devised many plans for the renaissance of Nagercoil Municipality. To obtain the needful developments and improve the sanitary conditions of the town he set right the tax system and increased the funds. He persuaded the government to implement a scheme for the town alignment. For the welfare of beggars and destitute, he got donations from the public and built an orphanage near Periavilai. During his chairmanship Muster roll checking and Slaughter house checking were conducted frequently and surprisingly. Hence sanitary conditions were maintained well.

BIRTH OF THE NEW DISTRICT

The State Government of Madras wanted to merge the five regions with Thirunelveli district. Since those regions had been trapped in the Malayali administration with a step mother treatment for a quite long time, Nesamony wanted to make the taluks except Senkottai as a separate district and develop it with special welfare schemes. He demanded this in appropriate forums including the Parliament. All the front line leaders of Travancore Tamil Nadu congress and patriots wanted to keep the Travancore Tamil areas as a separate district with the name 'Nesamony District'. The people of

Thovalai district demanded that it should be named 'Nanchil District'. However, Nesamony had his own lofty idea. He argued that the Himalayas is the country's northern boundary and the southern boundary the tip of the peninsula, Kanniyakumari and so the area having Kanniyakumari in it should be named 'Kanniyakumari District'. Kamaraj, the then Chief Minister of Madras State agreed to accept this suggestion and thus the region comprising the four taluks Vilavancode, Kalkulam, Thovalai and Agastheeswaram was named **Kanniyakumari District**. After facing innumerable hardships, losses, sufferings and sacrifices by lot of individuals and families, the achievement of the honourable leader Marshal Nesamony made it a reality. Sencottai was annexed to Thirunelveli district and Chittur to Andhra Pradesh.

RAILWAY IN KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT

Marshal Nesamony felt the need of transportation facilities to be enhanced and hence he put his demands during the railway budget for the year 1965-66 in the parliament. He reiterated the necessity of the proposed railway line from Thirunelveli to Kanniyakumari and Thiruvananthapuram be expedited and priority to be for the execution of the work citing various reasons and advantages. There were proposals put forward by various people regarding the alignment of the line from Valliyoor to be taken via Kanniyakumari to Nagercoil, the headquarters of the district. Others had put forward the plea that it must go from Valliyoor straight to Aralvoimozhi via Panagudi. Nesamony suggested that the latter one was advantageous citing reasons. Later his suggestion has been implemented in laying the route.

Since there was no means of rail transport in Kanniyakumari district in those days, reservation of train tickets from Thirunelveli 50 miles away from Nagercoil

was done at out-agencies. There was one out-agency at Nagercoil. The number of passengers that book their tickets at the out-agency at Nagercoil was generally very large. But the number of tickets that could be reserved in that out-agency was very limited. It was not in any way comparable with the demand that was made by passengers for the reservation of tickets. They had to go to Thirunelveli, 50 miles off, if they were to book their tickets since the number allowed to the out-agency was small. So, he requested the Railway Ministry to look into the matter and enhance the number of tickets that could be reserved at Nagercoil in proportion to the passengers who book their tickets there, so that the difficulties of the passengers might be minimized. In addition to that he indicated that the difficulty in reserving the tickets not only in out-agencies but also in the counters at junctions and cities. He mentioned about the black market in certain centres and travel agencies booking tickets in bulk and cancelling them subsequently, thus causing difficulties to the passengers. In the parliament session he put forward these matters to be looked into so that the ordinary passengers might not feel any difficulty in the matter of booking their tickets. Subsequently appropriate actions were taken by the Ministry of Railways and the problems sorted out.

VOCATIONAL AND INDUSTRIAL GROWTH

For enhancing the industrial development and employment opportunities of the people of Kanniyakumari district, Nesamony paved way by bringing technical institutions. The Polytechnic college and Industrial Training Institute situated at Konam, Nagercoil are the outcome of his great efforts. The TANSI Saw Mill, Wood seasoning plant, Wood working plant and Industrial Centre near the ITI at Konam, Industrial Estate at Konam and Kappukadu are also examples of his achievements. In addition, he was behind creating various Carpentry Units and other Industrial Units in various villages across Kanniyakumari

district. The Nagammal Mills started by Pioneer Kumarasamy and the Government Co-Operative Spinning mills at Aralvoimozhi are the effects of his great effort. He was the person who initiated the creation of a bus depot, workshop and bus body-building unit at Ranithottam, Nagercoil. As a welfare measure of 1. employees and labourers, he started unions such as Indian Rare Earth Employees' Union and Plantation workers' Union in 2. order to raise voice for their rights and 3. demands.

CONTRIBUTION FOR IRRIGATION DEVELOPMENT

Vilavancode taluk and Nanchilnadu frequently became drought hit areas due to water scarcity for irrigation. Though there occurred poor harvest, land owners had to pay tax without any reduction. Nesamony persuaded for the execution of schemes like Perunchani dam, Chittaru dam. Mullaiyaru dam, Neyyaru Idathukarai channel and Chittaru Pattanankal and got them implemented. In Vilathurai of Vilavancode taluk, due to his effort a Lift Irrigation System was implemented by the government. Because of this scheme, places like Kunnathoor, Melamangalam, nattalam, killiyoor and Nelveli got water for irrigation. Later when the Pattanankal was dug, this was converted to Integrated Drinking Water Scheme. Mathur aqueduct, the highest of its kind in South Asia which carries water from Pattanankal over Parali river to carry water for irrigation from an elevated level of one hill to another was made as a drought relief measure. This was a great achievement of Marshal Nesamony.

CONCLUSION

"Things hard in the doing will great men do" says Thirukkural. Marshal Nesamony set an example for this Kural. Separating regions from a state and merging with another, by relentless efforts and struggles was a Himalayan task. Marshal Nesamony succeeded in his fight and won the task of saving the southern boundary of Tamilnadu. Kumari Tamilnadu is the result

of his chieftainship and the sacrifices of innumerable number of patriots. The legendary person lived a righteous life and won the minds of all people. His name as 'Kumari Thanthai' will last forever in the history of Kanniyakumari and Tamilnadu.

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