



LIFE AND TIMES OF MAHARAJA PILLAI AT PALAYAMKOTTAI

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Introduction

History is a record of events that happened in the past which makes an impact on the present and sometimes causes dramatic changes in the life of people. The place Tirunelveli in Tamilnadu has been well known for its historical importance in Indian History. The first person who raised his voice against the British rule hails from this land. Many kings and prominent persons like Veerapandiya Kattabomman, Marudu Panidars, Vellaithurai, Veera Mangai Velu Nachiyar Queen Management belong to this prestigious region.

The current study is about the person whose statue can be seen at the crossroads near the Government Medical College, Tirunelveli. One might wonder who this man is and why he gained such importance and how he achieved it. The particular place (Maharaja Nagar) is also named after him. He is none other than Mr. Maharaja Pillai (Here after we call him as MSM). The following study discusses in detail the life history of this man, the legend, Mr. Maharaja Pillai.

Historical Background of Palayamkottai

In the age old times this place was ruled by 'Palayakaras'. It was utilized for military purposes. Cavalry and infantry were kept here. It was also used as the store-house for military weapons. The present 'Murugankurichi Salai' was called as 'Palayamsalai' by the British.

Boundaries of the Research Area

The present Palayamkottai comes under Tirunelveli Corporation. It is surrounded by Vannarpet in the West, V.M. Chatram in the east Kulavanikarpuram in the South and Thimmarajapuram in the north. They formed the boundry of Palayamkottai.

Reason for this Research

Tirunelveli played an important role in the administrative system during the British rule and Palayamkottai was considered as their Army Camp. After India got independence the local municipalities and the MLAs brought dramatic changes in the construction of this town. The schemes which were carried out by MSM, the former chairman, are being utilized by the people even today. But all these good deeds reached the hands at people not in the name of MSM. To understand the reason we should know about the situation that prevailed at that time.

Proofs Utilized for this Research

The facts about Palayamkottai have been gathered from the members of Corn Wallis (1830) and Bishop R. Caldwell Book 'The History of Tirunelveli (1881), A guidance for local-self government – A guidance for local-self government – A Souvenier 2007 and some tit-bits from local newspapers were also utilized apart from these there was no clear authentic record for this research. The facts and the things discussed about the man MSM had to be collected only through field work. No other person had ever written the history of this individual man MSM.

Some Precursors in this Line of Research

Many had done significant work on the history of Palayamkottai. Some of the main topics of discussion were, history of Clarinda church, the administration of palayakaras, incidents at central jail, history of Veerapandiya Kattabomman, history of Umaidurai history of temples and festivals in and grand Palayamkottai, history of schools, but none has ever done any research on this individual man. MSM who was the foremost maker of the town Palayamkottai. The gigantic building of the corporation, streetlights, palay bus stand, VOC Park, Nehru children's park – all these which planned and constructed by this man MSM. This research in particular deals with not only the individual history of the man. MSM but also the social history of Palayamkottai. All these social activities were undertaken by this great men. Giving proper recognition to the man who was able to establish all these things, is the man aim of this research.

His Early Life

He was born on 30th July as the son of Mr. Shunmugam Pillai and Ulagammal at Munanchipatti in Tirunelveli. The first wife of Mr. Maharajan's father, Mr. Shunmugam Pillai was Mrs. Piramuammal. As, unfortunately, she did not bear a child for ten years Mr. Shunmugam Pillai, as was the custom in that period married Mrs. Ulaggammal from Thiruvencatanathapuram near Sirumalanji in Tirunelveli district. The second wife gave birth to a male child and two daughters whose names were Karapaga Sundarathammal and Gomathiammal respectively.



MSM's Life as a Politician

India got independence in 1947. Indian National Congress played a important role at that time. MSM was inspired by Mr. Kamaraj who was a prominent leader in the INC party. When Kamaraj ruled Tamilnadu. MSM's age was 33.

He worked as a district board member and Secretary of Hindu College, Tirunelveli for 2 years. He held the position of chairman of the chamber for three years. For 2 years his wife was chosen for the position unopposed. From 12.11.1952 – 26.02.1967 he worked as the head of the municipality and succeeded in completing many fruitful schemes. In 1963, he became the legislative member of the Tamil Nadu Government. Some of the notable predecessors of this post were.

1. Divan Bagdhur S. Kumarasamy Reddiyar (27.07.1911-13.05.1921)
2. Rea Bagdhur K.S. Ponnusamy Pillai (14.05.1921-08.11.1934)
3. Former Tamilnadu Minister Thiru. Daniel Thomas (09.11.1934-26.03.1946)
4. P.T. Subbiah Pillai (23.05.1946 – 31.03.1947)
5. P.S. Subbramania Pilai (15.10.1947 – 01.11.1952)

His Involvement in Politics

MSM was one of the wealthiest and most respected men in the society. Though he was interested in politics some particular incidents forced him to get into the main stream of politics.

One day MSM's supervisor's son. Mr. Azhagiya Nambi who was studying at St. Xavier's School came to MSM's house. At that time a police man asked him to produce the licence for his cycle. He did not have a licence. The policeman told him either to pay a fine of Rs. 15 or to leave the cycle with him.

When MSM got this news, he sent a man to the policeman. Promising him that he would pay the fees the next day. The policeman was very adamant he told MSM that he should either pay the fine or not get involved in this issue. This incident infuriated Mr. MSM. It kindled his involvement in politics. He felt that he was a most prominent men in the society. He had done many good things to the people still the policeman did not respect the words of MSM. He was also not in a position to understand the situation. Fact rupees was big money at that time usually school going students would never carry that much amount to school unless any necessity arose.

It Hurt the Feelings of MSM

In 1947 Mr. P.S. Subbramania Pillai was the chairman of Palayamkottai. He was the first chairman. He was a famous lawyer too. His house was situated near the present museum at Palayamkottai. He appeared in the case of Dr. Maragatham Pillai who was alleged with the murder of 7 people. He was a very good and successful lawyer. He also appeared in many civil cases for MSM's property.

In 1952, MSM decided to contest in the election. Double membership system prevailed at that time. Two contestants, a male and a female would contest in the election. Double Vote system was in vogue. MSM was of the opinion that if he achieved power it would increase his status in the society.

Improvement Corporation Funds

At the market situated at Tiruchendur road, initially there was only a limited shops on one side and from that the income in the form of rent received only Rs.20000/-. After 1952, he extended the shops and increased the income into Rs.70,000/-.

Nehru Auditorium

An auditorium in the name of Nehru was constructed at a Cost of Rs.15000/-. In which the corporation earned rent by permitting for conducting Exhibition, and Public meetings. Thus he introduced a Long term plan for improvement of funds.

Recreation Centers

Initially there was only one library and 3 radio boxes available. No reading room was available. M.S. Maharaja Pillai has extended the number of library into 12. From 1956 onwards 31 radio stations were provided for which a sum of Rs.7500/- per year as rent was spent.

V.O.C. Ground

It is the one of the important scheme implemented by M.S. Maharaja Pillai for increasing income of the corporation. During the British rule, this ground was called in the name of Governor Hurgzon who played an important roll on the dispute of Hindu Muslim. Only because of his sincere steps, this ground was constructed at a cost of Rs.1,25,000/- for which a sum of Rs.50000/- was granted by the Govt. Thus the V.O.C. ground was constructed and for its development a All India Hockey Competition was held and from which a sum of Rs.20,000/- on profit was earned. This amount was spent for construction of



gallery on the eastern side of the ground. Such a ground was not found even in biggest Towns in Tamil Nadu. M.S. Maharaja Pillai changed the name of Harsion ground into the name of the National Freedom Fighter V.O. Chidambaram Pillai. Because of his interest on the Hockey play, he organized a competition with the players who won the India-French Hockey Competition on this ground. During the year 1964-65, he permitted the circus company for convening show in the ground and collected rent. He has also conducted the political meeting. Congress leader and former Chief Minister Kamarajar addressed to the public in the meeting. He has also organized the meeting in that ground with famous cinema fronts M.G.R. and M.R. Radha. In such a way he increased the income of the corporation and by which the ground was maintained in a better useful manner.

Children Park

An annex with the Nehru Auditorium a Children Park was established as Valluvar Children park, a library and a play ground at a cost of Rs.10,000/- As stated by the national poet, he formed the public parks with plants and trees at 7 places and maintained.

Street Lights

Before 1952, there were only 847 electric lights found in corporation area. Among them only 11 were mercury and no tube lights were found. In view of his sincere steps, it was increased into 1848 electric lights. On the Tiruvanandapuram Road, and on the important roads, a sum of Rs.40,000/- per year was spent for the maintenance of Mercury lights.

In the year 1962 the corporation established a hostel for 50 old persons. For this purpose the ancient building of Navab Chatram was purchased and constructed on his personal efforts.

In the year 1964 a residential building for the Commissioner. It was also proposed for constructions of residential built for Engineers, Health officers and Corporation administrative officers.

Marriage Hall

Since there was no marriage Hall in the corporation area, in view of his sincere steps, a corporation Marriage Hall was constructed with all facilities at a cost Rs.1,70,000/-.

Bus Terminal

Since there was no sufficient facilities, a new building was constructed at Palayamkottai bus terminal and from which he increased the income Rs.11,000/- per year. After wards, 9 new shop buildings were constructed and the same was inaugurated by the State Minister for Administration. Thus arranged for the corporation income in a better manner.

Conclusion

Maharaja Pillai is one among the important congress leaders. He dedicated the public service for the improvement of public, social life. He spent his own property for the welfare of the public is long remembered in the Corporation History. Now the public enjoyed the results of the projects introduced by M.S.M. When we call the name of Tirunelveli, all the following are raised in our mind, such as Tirunelveli Halwa, Freedom Fighter Veerapandia Kattabomman, V.O.C. Sulochana Mudaliar and Loordhunathan. Similarly the name of M.S. Maharaja Pillai is also ever remembered. In order to remember his by the youth, the name of bus terminal High Ground may be changed into Palai, Maharaja Nagar. In the corporation the date of his demise may be remembered in every year as a memorial day thus honour him.

The history of M.S. Maharaja Pillai may be included as a lesson in the school education system as like the Ashokar, Periyar, Anna, Kamarajar, and Veerapandia Kattabomman. Thus the younger generation has to follow his policy of rendering service for the development of poor people. Thus M.S. Maharaja Pillai is an ever remembering noble man in the history of Palayamkottai Corporation Development.

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