

INESAMONY S KOLE IN THE KANYAKUMARI RESCUE STRUGGLE

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Abstract:

Marshall Nesamony carried Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress across the subjugated people of Tamil speaking regions like kalkulam, Vilavancode, Peermade, Devikulam and Chittoor Taluks. He was undoubtedly the monarch of the Tamils and was called thereafter by the people “Kumari Thanthai” which means father of kanyakumari. He had under the umbrella of his party conducted welfare activities for the Tamils. Fazal Ali Commission had recommended merger of Thovalai, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavancode with Madras State. The joint Committee which was appointed to give a final shape to the state boundaries suggested that only eastern portion of shenkottai should be merged with madras. This was the ultimate decision and it was published on 16 January 1956.

Tendency to connect

In 1954 general elections were held for the Travancore-Cochin Legislative Assembly of the United Provinces. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and K. Kamaraj campaigned for Kerala State

contested. As no party had an absolute majority in the Legislative Assembly, the Praja Socialist Party, supported by the State Congress, formed a cabinet on 16 March 1954 with Thanupillai elected as Chief Minister.¹

The return of Pattom A. Thanupillai signalled the adverse political conditions for the Tamils. In South Travancore he used the police to support Nair landlords against Tamil tenants. He promoted the government-aided Malayali settlement scheme in Devikulam and Peermedu taluks and tried to drive out the Tamils from those areas with Malayali influence. Tamils feared being relegated to a minority in their own territories. The situation worsened as the police forces sided with the landlords.²

Its conflict with the Tamil-controlled South Indian Plantation Workers Union created a precarious situation for the existence of the Tamil population. Tamils had to complete many important issues like integration of taluks with Greater Tamil Nadu, Vilaturai Lift Irrigation Project, Siddar Pattanamkal drainage works.³

So they organized meetings in important places of South Travancore and discussed the burning issues with the people. A series of meetings were organized at Nagercoil, Kulithurai, Iranial, Mangarai, Vadaseri and Mylaudi. On June 16, 1954, a meeting was convened at Nagercoil where the leaders warned the government to start the Pattanamkal and Vilaturai lift irrigation projects and the Neyyar Left Canal without delay and that any further delay would lead to a strike.⁴

Travancore wanted to put an end to the anti-Tamil attitude of the Tamil Nadu Congress government. Therefore, 4 members of the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress, Travancore-Kochi assembly members visited the above 2 taluks and after inspecting the situation, complained about the police encroachment in those taluks and submitted a petition to the Chief Minister. They demanded that the atrocities be stopped and that they be given due protection from police action. Despite the chief minister's promise to look into the matter, the situation worsened. To end police

June 19, 1954 and declared June 30 as "Anti-Devikulam Day" or "Repression Day".⁵

Devikulam Day

But the Devikulam Sub-Divisional Magistrate on June 29, 1954, issued an order prohibiting meetings and processions in the taluks for a period of one month. However, led by Nesamony, Abdul Razak and Chidambaranathan Nadar (former minister) defied the ban on July 4, 1954 all of them were arrested at Devikulam on Sunday and sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment.⁶

Instead of neutralizing the protest, government actions acted as catalysts. According to the government's evil plan, TTNC leader Nesamony and others were released from the Central Jail three days before 11 August 1954. Meanwhile, a request came from Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. They demanded TTNC leader Nesamony to drop the satyagraha plan. He said that neither the Centre nor the state government can do anything before the report of the State Reorganization Commission is submitted. He expressed his displeasure over TTNC's proposed satyagraha. The day of the proposed release arrived. A public meeting was held in Nagercoil under the leadership of Nesamony. On that day, public meetings, processions and satyagrahas were held peacefully in Kuliturai and the surrounding areas of Travancore Tamil Nadu, but there was tension and loss of life due to police brutality.

The Liberation Day programs began on 11 August 1954 with a public meeting at Gandhi Ground, Marthandam. 16 volunteers were selected to picket the First Class Magistrate Court, Kuliturai. The selected volunteers were garlanded and taken in a procession.

The procession, which initially had about 5000 participants, doubled to 10,000 as it neared the pit at around 11.30 am. When they reached the gate of the Magistrate's Court, the people who came in the procession raised slogans such as "Abolition of the title rule", "A united Tamil Nadu will be formed", "Until then the struggle will continue", "The struggle will begin".

arrested several people. Hundreds were injured. The mob at the Magistrate's Court split into two and one mob went to Kuliturai Bus Station. Then the students of Marthandam English High School came down from the school premises and went in a procession. The police resorted to batons and arrested two of the students, claiming that the students attacked by pelting stones. Thus the situation worsened in Marthandam due to the wrong attitude of the police department.

The next day Chief Minister Pattom Thanupillai visited the shooting locations. He congratulated the police department for a job well done. He was accompanied by 1600 armed reserve policemen when he came to visit. After the visit he returned to the capital leaving the reserve police to identify the Nadars and torture them. The Reserve Police Force stationed at important centres in South Travancore started harassing the Nadar community. They identified and ransacked isolated houses, entered market areas and brutalized Nadars irrespective of gender and age.⁷

The suppression of peaceful protests has come under bitter criticism everywhere. Irritated by Pattam Thanu Pillai's vindictiveness, Ramaswami Pillai, a key legislator of Pattam Thanu Pillai's own Praja Socialist Party, resigned in disgust. On 17 August 1954, the All India General Secretary of the Praja Socialist Party, Ram Manohar Lohia, demanded the resignation of Pattam Thanu Pillai for his misrule.⁸

Meanwhile, A. Nesamony met Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on 21 November 1954, explaining the atrocities of the Travancore-Cochin government and emphasizing the need to merge the nine Tamil-speaking taluks of South Travancore-Cochin with the Madras state. Considering the widespread criticism and demand, the Travancore-Cochin government appointed a commission of inquiry headed by Justice K. Sankaran of the Travancore-Cochin High Court to inquire into the police firing.⁹

In February 1955, Ramaswami Pillai of the Praja Socialist Party moved a no-confidence motion against Pattom Thanupillai's cabinet. The resolution was passed in the assembly. Panampilli Govinda Menon formed the Cabinet on 11 February 1955.¹⁰ Nesamony pointed out

languages to draw the attention of the State Reconstruction Commission to provide justice to the Tamils of Travancore-Cochin state. The demand for the formation of states on the basis of language also gradually arose.¹¹

On June 17, 1948, the President of the Constituent Assembly appointed the Linguistic Provinces Commission consisting of S.K. Dar, a retired judge of the Allahabad High Court as Chairman and Dr. Pananlal, a retired I.C.S. officer and Jegath Narayan Lal, a member of the Constituent Assembly as Members. It was also known as Dar Commission after the name of its Chairman.¹² The Commission submitted its report on 10 December 1948. It recommended that provinces should not be created on linguistic basis but on administrative convenience. The formation of provinces on an exclusively or mainly linguistic consideration was not in the larger interests of the Indian nation and should not be taken in hand.¹³

Dhar Commission

The report of the Dar Commission created a stir in the country, especially in Travancore-Cochin State. The Indian National Congress felt it prudent to respect the public's feelings by creating another Committee to consider the question of the linguistic provinces.¹⁴ The members of the Committee were Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel, and Pattabhi Sitaramayya, which was popularly known as the J.V.P. Committee from the initials of its members. It submitted its report to the Congress Working Committee in April 1949. It recommended the postponement of the linguistic provinces by a few more years.¹⁵

On 22 December 1953, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru made a statement in Parliament to the effect that a Commission would be appointed to examine the question of the reorganisation of the States of the Indian Union.¹⁶ Justice Fazal Ali was appointed as Chairman, and Pandit H.N. Kunzru and Sardar K.M. Panikkar who was then Ambassador of India in Egypt, were the other members.¹⁷ According to the terms of reference, the Fazal Ali Commission was at liberty to devise its own procedure for collecting information and for ascertaining public opinions.

suitable for the expedient execution of the task entrusted to them, decided to dispense with a questionnaire. They issued a Press note on February 23, 1954 inviting the members of the public as well as the public associations interested in the problems of reorganization of States to put their views and suggestions before the Commission by submitting written memorandums in matters on which they felt they could assist them. The Commission expected that wherever concrete suggestions were made, they should be supported by historical and statistical data and if any proposal regarding the formation of any new State or States were made, it would, if possible, be accompanied by one or more maps, as the case might be.¹⁸

When the States Reorganisation Commission came to Trivandrum, A. Nesamony and some prominent members of the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress met the States Reorganisation Commission and submitted a memorandum. The important factors put forward in the memorandum were the geographical and linguistic affinities of this region with that of the Madras State. They explained the relevance of the merger of Thovalai, Agasteeswaram, Kalkulam, Vilavancode, Neyyatinkara, Devikulam, Peermedu, Shenkottai and Chittoor taluks, which they specified as Tamil areas of Travancore-Cochin State and claimed their merger with the Madras State.¹⁹

The Tamil-speaking taluks of Travancore-Cochin State have a history behind them, and there were certain circumstances which were adverse to the political and administrative stability of the region.²⁰ Taluks and make recommendations accordingly. As a result of seeking the census report of Tamil speaking taluks of Travancore-Cochin state, the State Reorganization Commission concluded that the percentage of Tamil speaking population in the four southern taluks of Dovalai, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavancode. It was over seventy-nine percentage and the will of the people of the region was clearly and positively expressed. Sengottai Taluk was a part of Tirunelveli District of Madras State and the percentage of Tamil speaking population in this taluk is ninety three. Physically and geographically it belongs to Tirunelveli district in Madras state and should be annexed. The State Reorganization Commission

areas should not be the only determining factor.²¹

The Commission recommended the transfer of the four southern taluks – Thovalai, Agasteeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavancode and half of the Shencotta taluk to merge with Tamil Nadu.²² The remaining four taluks, which the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress wanted to be merged with Tamil Nadu, were allowed to remain with the Travancore-Cochin State. The claims of the Tamils over the taluks of Devikulam and Peermedu were ignored by the Commission as these taluks were of great economic importance to the Travancore-Cochin State. These two taluks produced the major portion of the ‘dollar earning crops’ in the State mainly tea, cardamom and rubber, hence these taluks were called “dollar earners”. A. Nesamony disapproved the States Reorganisation Commission’s recommendation which related to Devikulam, Peermedu, Neyyatinkara and Chittoor and explained that the main aim was to dislodge the Tamils from those taluks. As to the second reason, the rivers referred to by the States Reorganisation Commission were only mountain streams, which were augmented by the flows from the forests of adjoining taluks.²³

The States Reorganisation Bill was discussed in the Parliament on December 19, 1955. A. Nesamony made a vehement speech in the Parliament during the discussion insisting that Devikulam, Peermedu, Neyyatinkara, Chittoor and part of Shencottai to be merged with the Madras State.²⁴ But all these were in vain hartals and demonstrations were held on February 7, 1956 throughout the Tamil areas. Meanwhile, the advocates of Aikya Kerala argued that the Tamil taluks were part and parcel of Kerala geographically, culturally and economically. They further pointed out that the Western Ghats divided Travancore-Cochin State from the Madras State. This argument was inconsistent with their claims for Shencottai which admittedly lay beyond the Ghats.²⁵ It should be noted that Western Ghats were in no way an impediment for their merger of these areas with adjacent Madras State.²⁶ The leaders and the activists of the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress now felt that they had achieved a part of their aim. They knew

present context and accepted the decision as a partial success.

District was born

The Indian Parliament, based on the recommendations of the States Reorganisation Commission based the States Reorganisation Act in March 1956. Accordingly the four taluks of Thovalai, Agasteeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavancode were merged with the Madras State and constituted them into Kanyakumari District with Nagercoil as its Headquarter. K. Kamaraj, the then Chief Minister of the Madras State inaugurated it at a public meeting in Nagercoil on November 1, 1956.

Notes & References

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⁴ *Dinamalar*, 9 June 1954.

⁵ *Dinamalar*, 1 November 1956.

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²⁴ *The Hindu*, 22 November 1955.

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²⁶ *Chellawamy's Memorandum to National Congress*, 1954, 4.