



# ROLE AND BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THIYAKI P.S.MONY - A HISTORICAL STUDY

<sup>1</sup>V.MARY SHYLAJA, <sup>2</sup>Dr.S.BHAGAVATHY PERUMAL

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar

Register Number: 20213151082005

Department of History

S.T Hindu College

Nagercoil – 629 002

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor

Department of History / History and Tourism

S.T Hindu College

Nagercoil – 629 002

(Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli – 627 012)

DOI Number: 10.48047/nq.2022.20.22.NQ10138

NeuroQuantology 2022; 20(22):1533-1539

Perumal Pillai Subramoniam, known in common parlance as P.S. Moni was born on 7th February, 1916 in a respectable and well known family of Ramavarmapuram in the town of Nagercoil. His father, S. Perumal Pillai Was an engineering government contractor and his mother Anandammal was a member of a respectable family from Kulasekaranputhur, a hamlet in the vicinity of Nagercoil town, at about a distance of five kilo meters from the town. Perumal Pillai was a member of the family settled. In a village called Biimneri from Tirunelveli, sometimes in the past. Such a belief exists among the members of a number of Vellala families of the Kanyakumari District that their families are the descendants of immigrants from the Tirunelveli District. Savants of Tamil like K. N. Sivaraja Pillai, K. N. Kumaresa Pillai and S. Vaiyapuri Pillai are related to the family of Perumal Pillai, either directly or indirectly, and this may well establish the theory of immigration of the family from Tirunelveli area. Of course at the time of the birth of P. S. Moni, the family was permanent resident of the area, now known as the Kanyakumari

eISSN1303-5150

District.[1]

Perumal Pillai was a government contractor of eminence in South Travancore, as is evident from the outcome of his work on buildings like the Sethu Lakshmi Bai English High School, Nagercoil and the Secretariate building at Trivandrum. As a government contractor, he was closely connected with the Travancore administration and the Diwan of Travancore. In those days, there existed the practice to consider themselves the loyal subjects of His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore, among the people of South Travancore, just like their counter parts in the northern districts of the State of Travancore. As such, it is no wonder that Perumal Pillai was much loyal to the ruling family and the administrators under them, for he was a prospective engineering contractor under the government. In a family of such a background that P. S. Moni was born as the eldest of the eight children of Perumal Pillai. Three of them including Moni were boys and the rest were girls.[2]

Being the first born boy after the birth of a few girls, Moni, happened to be the

1533



loving child to his parents. Probably, this affectionate approach of the parents turned him to be a spoilt child, who failed to show a keen interest in his studies. As years passed, he developed an innate desire in public activities in him and soon he was ushered into the thresh hold of politics. The love and affection shown by his parents turned Moni into a spirited youth with determination and unstinted conviction that cannot be easily influenced or changed by others. Despite these qualities that had become the hall mark of his character. Moni has never been fallen a prey to any bad habits. Anyone who comes into close contact with him can easily note that he is a man of determination and conviction in his words and deeds.[3]

His educational career ended abruptly with the high school education. His father realised that Moni may not be in a position to continue his studies. So he decided to provide his son with some training in a vocational pursuit that might be of use in his future life. Narrating his school life in the S. L. B. English High School, Nagercoil, Moni mentioned the incident how his name Subramoniam was abridged to Moni. While he was in the Middle School classes, there were a number of Subramoniams in his class and there were two P. Subramoniams; and his class teacher, Mr.Soosai abridged his name as 'P.S. Moni' and from that day onwards, P. Subramoniam became P.S. Moni.[4]

P.S. Moni was sent to Trivandrum by his father to put him under the guidance of a German engineer, Dietrich who was appointed as the construction engineer of the Trivandrum Government Rubber Factory which was started in the year 1935. Moni was able to find a place in the good books of Dietrich. The cordial relationship that developed between Dietrich and Moni, enabled the latter to pick up some knowledge in the German tongues. It seems that there was a plan in the mind of Dietrich to take Moni to Germany and to provide him with adequate knowledge in the trade. However, this intimacy was a short lived one, for the general strike that broke out in the Rubber factory deprived Moni of his job and again he was forced to seek new pastures.[5]

In 1936, the Government Rubber Factory witnessed a General Strike of the labourers and, employees. Kochappan Nair, Rajappan Pillai and P. S. Moni were at the vanguard of the strike. The workers picketed at the factory gate under the leadership of the trio. At that time, the striking workers did not have any political ideology behind their strike. Their main demand was to fix monthly payment instead of the daily wages that was in vogue. The management of the factory issued notice condemning the strike with the warning that they should join work within twenty-four hours, lest they would be dismissed. To the surprise of all, the entire lot, except three individuals returned to the factory to resume their work. Moni was one of three persons who abstained from joining the work, and they were dismissed. Those were days when the workers' movement was not strong and the courage with which Moni stood to the end to safe-guard the rights of the workers clearly exhibit his resolute will in such endeavours. But he had to pay heavily for his conviction by losing his job.[6]

The Travancore State Congress was started with the aim of fighting against the arbitrary administration of the Dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, with a view to establish a responsible government in the state. Moni's involvement in the movement was an eyesore to his father Perumal Pillai, who happened to be a friend of the Dewan, in his capacity as a government engineering contractor. Moni earned the displeasure and wrath of his father who condemned the activities of Moni. In the mean time, as a result of his political activities and the neglect of his father, Moni business concern ran into bad weather of bankruptcy and it was finally closed in 1938. With the closure of Moni & Co., he left Trivandrum and settled in Nagercoil.[7]

After coming to Nagercoil, he assisted his father for a couple of years in the latter's contract business; and within a few months, he learned the art to such an extent as to engage himself in independent contract works. In the year 1940, he undertook the construction of the Government Transport Carriage at Meenakshipuram in Nagercoil. He

was not able to carry on the contract business without any hindrance, for the Political urge in him had drawn him to plunge into the freedom struggle, while he was engaged in the work of the Nagercoil Public Park in honour of the 60th birthday of the Dewan C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer. The result was loss of money and moreover he was not able to carry on the business, as he had earned the displeasure of the government.[8]

Moni was swept away by the current of the national struggle that sparked off in 1942, with the declaration of the 'Quit India' movement on 9th August, 1942. He took an active part in the Quit India Movement and courted arrest. This brought him into contact with the senior Congress leaders of the area, like Siva Muthukaruppa Pillai, popularly known as Pethachia Pillai of Kottar. Dr. M. E. Naidoo of Edalakudy, Dr. S. Muthukaruppa Pillai and S.Sivan Pillai both of Theroor and others. Moni was one among the stalwarts in every agitation and struggle that occurred in this part of the country from that time onwards and courted arrest. He was also a participant in the movements connected with the ideals of Gandhiji like the abolition of untouchability, Common Feasts of the people of, all communities (Sama panthi bojanam), Prohibition and the like that had taken place in and around Nagercoil.[9]

Moni was the nerve-centre of the activities of the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress from its inception in 1945; and his Monimalar Nilayam became the de-facto official centre of its activities, in the early stages of its growth. Very soon the organisation became a mass movement with the entry of A.Nesamony a native of Palliyadi whose role in expanding its activities beyond the Agasteeswaram and Tovalai Taluks into the Kalkulam, Vilavancode and Neyyattinkarai Taluks cannot be by-passed. Still the impact of Moni and the stamp of his personality were there in every agitational programmes of the Movement and constructive designs of the organization. Even after the nation became independent, the struggle of the Tamils continued.[10]

With the exit of the Diwan Sir C. P. Ramasami Iyer and the dawn of responsible

government in Travancore - Cochin, the condition of the Tamils began to deteriorate. The Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress had to intensify its struggle and a number of agitational programmes were chalked out. In all those activities, the hand of the master mind of Moni was visible; and he had not failed to participate in all the agitations of the Movement till the final one that occurred in 1954. During this period, of course, he had differences of opinion with the leaders and peers; but he did not choose a course that would be detrimental to the common cause. It was during this period that he came into contact with the Tamil leaders of the Madras State, like M.P. Sivagnana Gramaniyar, N.Somayajulu, Saraswathi, Pandurengam, K.P. Janardhanam, S.M.Sheriff and others, who whole heartedly supported the movement, though the Congress leadership in Madras State failed to give any encouragement to the movement.[11]

The states of Travancore and Cochin were integrated into a single unit, Travancore-Cochin, in 1949. The T.T.N.C. considered it, as the first step towards the formation of the United Kerala, and decided to launch a struggle against the scheme. On the previous night to the launching of the agitation, the police arrested S. Nathaniel, A. Gandhiraman, R.K. Ram and P.S. Moni. The intensity of the agitation, compelled the then home minister, Sardar Vallabhai Patel to intervene; and he sent K. Kamaraj, as his emissary to the Southern Travancore. As a result of the talks between Kamaraj and Nathaniel, the agitation was withdrawn and the leaders were released. In this connection, it would not be out of place to mention the contact that existed between the Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhai Patel and Sam Nathaniel, thrice in Delhi, once each at Madras and Trivandrum. Sardar Patel kept this list with him and at the last meeting in 1950 at Trivandrum; he told Nathaniel that he would see that Tamil areas were merged with those of Madras.[12]

After the release of the leaders, the agitation ended for the time being. In 1950, an attempt was made to patch up the differences between the Congress leaders of the Travancore-Cochin State and the

Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress leaders in the presence of the Madras Congress leaders. The temporary scheme arrived at Palayamkottai, is generally known as the Palayamkottai Pact. According to this pact, a number of concessions were granted to the Tamils of South Travancore. There was stiff opposition to this Pact, and the General Body was convened to discuss the pros and cons of the Pact. On 6th October, 1950, the general body met at Edalakydy, in which a resolution from the Chair in support of the Pact was discussed thread-bare and finally was defeated by one vote. However, the outcome of the defeat of the resolution seemed to be a split in the T.T.N.C., one led by P. Ramaswamy Pillai and the other led by P. Thanulinga Nadar. Though this split lasted only for a couple of years, it affected the interest of the Travancore Tamil Movement. The founder president of the organisation had to leave the party for ever. Moreover, the two groups contested the elections, held in 1952, in which one group got only eight seats, while the other did not secure any seat.[13]

One of the groups was represented by P. Thanulinga Nadar as President, T.T. Daniel as general secretary and P.S. Moni as the secretary. The preparation of the election manifesto of this group for the 1952 elections was entrusted with P.S.Moni. According to T. T. Daniel, 'No such manifesto had been released by any political party, either before or after the one prepared by Moni. It envisaged that the elected members of the

T.T.N.C. should move a resolution demanding that the Tamil areas of about 2,000 square miles in Travancore should be merged with the Tamil areas of Madras, when India would be reorganised as states on linguistic basis, and in case the resolution was either declared as unacceptable or as defeated, then the T. T. N. C. members should walk out and boycott the Assembly. Then there would be fresh election in which also they should contest, enter the Assembly and should repeat the same procedure. Such an agitation should continue till the goal would be achieved. When the manifesto came up for discussion in the Executive Committee and the general council, Moni argued in favour of

it by quoting the example of Ireland which agitated in a similar manner in the British Parliament Daniel concludes that the above manifesto of Moni will remain as the symbol of latter's thought provoking approach to problems.

Understanding that any split in the Tamil Movement was detrimental to the cause of the Tamils in Travancore, the two groups merged to function under the banner of Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress from 1953 onwards.

In 1954, the Praja Socialist Party formed the Government in Travancore-Cochin with the support of the Congress, Pattom A.Thanu Pillai became the Chief Minister. During his regime, the T.T.N.C. had to undergo a bloody agitation to safeguard the interest of the Tamils. Migration of Malayalees into certain areas where the Tamils lived as a major group took place with the connivance of the Government. In certain areas, the police forces supported the Malayalee landlords against Tamil workers. The worst affected were the Tamil workers in Devikulam.

In Devikulam, the conflict between the South Indian Plantation Workers Union and the employers, led to a crisis that evoked apprehension in the minds, of the Tamil workers to be in that area. The police rounded up the Tamil workers and had beaten them mercilessly. With a view to stop such police atrocities, the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress met on 19th June, 1954 and decided to declare 30th June, 1954, as Devikulam Day or Anti-Repression Day. The Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Devikulam issued a prohibitory order banning meetings and processions for one month on 29th June, 1954. Then the T.T.N.C. executive met and decided to violate the ban, on the basis of a resolution moved by P.S.Moni. The ban order was violated on 4th July 1954. All the leaders who violated the ban were arrested at Devikulam on a Sunday. In the case, they were sentenced to six weeks imprisonment by the Kottayam District Magistrate. But the leaders were released on 9th August itself.

In the month of June 1947, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Diwan declared that

Travancore will be an independent State from 15th August, 1947. He warned of dire consequences to those who failed to cooperate with the Government and who were not working towards the fulfilment of the scheme. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer consulted a number of leaders, on the declaration of an independent Travancore. Some of the independent political leaders of South Travancore welcomed the proposal and led the movement to support the Diwan. Even among the members of the T.T.N.C., opinions were sharply divided and it was expected that the organisation was on the verge of a split. At the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress Committee meeting held at 'Marunthuvalmalai' near Kanyakumari on 6th July 1947, from dawn to dusk, on the problem of the Independent Travancore, no conclusion was arrived at. It seemed that the party - might split on the basis of that issue; and P.S.Moni telegraphically informed M. P.Sivagnanam who was camping at Courtalam about the developments in the Party. On the intervention of M.P.Sivagnanam the split was averted. It must be remembered that the contact between the T.T.N.C. leaders and those from the Madras Presidency began to strengthen, thereafter it was during that period that the party was able to get the financial support from the artistes like Kalaivanar N. S. Krishnan and T.K.S.Brothers, who belonged to Nagercoil and settled in Madras.

After unity was established in the T.T.N.C. on the advice of M.P.Sivagnanam, the T.T.N.C. decided to impress upon the Tamil leaders of Madras, once again. Nathaniel. R. K. Ram Gandhiraman, Sri V. Dhas and P.Veerabadran went to Madras and halted at Madurai on their return journey. In a meeting at the Gokale Hall in Madras on 1st August, 1947, Sri V.Dhas and P.Veerabadharan explained their difficulties in Travancore. P. Thirukudasundharam Pillai, who presided over the meeting appealed to the Tamils of Madras to extend their support to the Tamilians of Travancore, and 'passed a resolution to that effect. S.Nathaneil and R.K.Ram, the president and secretary of the T.T.N.C., respectively met the Congress leaders of Madurai and sought

their support. Speaking to a gathering of Congressmen of Madurai on 31st August, 1947, Nathaniel said, 'unless the Travancore State Congress made an unequivocal declaration conceding the right of self-determination to the Tamilians of Travancore, it could not win their confidence. The Travancore State Congress did not represent the Tamil speaking population of the state and if it were to reflect the will of the state's people as a whole, it should be reorganised so as to consist of two autonomous units-one representing the Tamils and the other representing the Malayalam speaking population. Good will missions like those of Nathaniel's and Sri V. Dhas's had contributed towards the understanding of the problems by the Tamils of the Madras State.

With the exit of C. P.Ramaswamy Iyer from Travancore, when an attempt on his life was made, things began to move towards the establishment of a responsible government in the State. Situations in South Travancore were also changing, for those who were close to the Diwan during his closing years in office, were in search of new pastures. Some of them turned their attention towards the Tamil Nadu Congress in Travancore, while others wanted to launch separate organisations for the protection of the Tamils. However, all the individuals of different shades of opinions finally came under the umbrella of the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress. C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer, was succeeded by P. G. Narayana Unnithan as the officiating Diwan and during his tenure, the Maharaja issued the Royal Proclamation granting responsible government on 4th September, 1947. It was also announced that a preliminary Rules Committee, called the Reforms Committee had to be constituted to recommend constitutional reforms. The demand of the T.T.N.C. that one fourth of the representatives should be from the T. T. N. C. was not accepted by the Government.

In the meantime, the T.T.N.C. had decided to declare 11th August, 1954 as the 'Deliverance Day' of the entire Tamil areas of Travancore. As part of the deliverance day, it was planned to take processions and picket government offices in, general and the courts

in particular. As a part of the move, a procession was organized with leaders like A.Kunjan Nadar, P.Ramaswamy Pillai, N.A.Noor Muhammad and P S.Moni to proceed from Parakkai to Nagercoil. The processionists picketed the Nagercoil Post office, Taluk Office and First Class Magistrate Court. With this incident, began the last struggle of the Travancore TamilNadu Congress for the merger of the Tamil areas with those of Madras State.

The 1954 agitation was a comprehensive one, with members belonging to different political shades taking an active part in the struggle. It was also planned to expand the movement of struggle to the Tamil areas of Madras State. But the struggle had a waning effect with the police firing at Marthandam and Puthukkadai, in which eleven persons lost their lives. As the struggle did not continue for some more time on the face of police repression, some of the arrested leaders suffered inhuman treatment in jails. One such leader who suffered police repression was A.Kunjan Nadar, a dictator of the 1954 agitation.

During the 1954 struggle, the agitation was intensified in its early days. Batches of volunteers picketed Courts and courted arrests. Other political parties in general and the Dravida Munnetra Kalakam in particular took an active part in the picketing of courts. Arignar Annadurai, the D. M. K. supermo came to Nagercoil, met the leaders who spearheaded the agitation and voluntarily announced his party's involvement in the struggle. Accordingly, 6th August of that year was set apart for the D. M. K. volunteers to picket the District Court at Nagercoil and the Taluk office at Shencotta. Madurai Muthu headed the programme and despatched eight sets of ten volunteers each, to march from Vadasery to the District Court, where they picketed and courted arrest. Similarly eight sets of five volunteers picketed the Taluk head-quarters at Shencotta.

P. S. Moni was one of the Five Members Action Committee during the 1954 agitation that started from July. He was at the forefront together with A.Kunjan Nadar and others. When the police firing took place at

Marthandam and Puthukkadi, the leaders of the party including A.Nesamony decided to withdraw the agitations, though some of the local leaders and others from Madras, particularly M. P. Sivagnanam wanted to continue the struggle atleast in other places hit by police firing. But the agitation was stopped and some of the leaders had to go underground in the neighbouring Tirunelveli District of the Madras State. P.S.Moni was one of the individuals who went underground after making a fiery speech at a Tamilarasu Kalakam meeting that took place at the Nagercoil Municipal grounds. Leaders like him who escaped to the Madras State were engaged in seeking support to the demand of the merger of the Tamil areas of Travancore with those of Madras. P.S.Moni had addressed a few meetings in and around Tirunelveli in favour of the Travancore Tamil Movement. But by the end of August, P.S.Moni was arrested and lodged in Kuzhuthurai and Thuckalay sub-jails. Finally the arrested leaders including Moni were released by the February of 1955.

1538

## REFERENCES

- [1] Gopalakrishnan M., Kanyakumari District Gazetteer, Madras 1995, p.1.
- [2] Muruga Thanuskodi, Kamaraj Oru Charitrams (Tamil), Madras, 1976, p.74.
- [3] Indian Annual Register, Vol.II, p.18.
- [4] Tara Chand, History of the Freedom Movement in India, Vol.1-4, Publications Division, 1965, p.72.
- [5] India's Struggle for Independence : Visuals and Documents, National Council of Educational Research and and Training, 1985.
- [6] Census of India, 1961 and Sreedhara Menon, A., Travancore District Gazetteer, Trivandrum, 1962, p.5.
- [7] Manmohan Kaur, Women in India's Freedom Struggle, New Delhi, 1988, p.220.
- [8] Ramaswamy A., Tamil Nattil Gandhi(Tamil), Madras, 1969, p.76.
- [9] Daniel D., "Quit India Movement in Travancore in the Journal of Madurai Kamaraj University", Vol.VII, No.1, 1979.

- [10]Freedeom Fighters Association Office record, 1979, Nagercoil, Kanyakumari District.
- [11]Issac Jayadhas R., Kanyakumari District and Indian Independence Movement, MCL Roy Publications, 2011, p.41.
- [12]Ibid., p.42.
- [13]Rajayyan K., History of Tamil Nadu (1565-1967) P.334-338.
- [14]Nagam Aiya, The Travancore State Manuel, Vol.II and III, Trivandrum, 1906, p.58.