
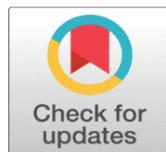
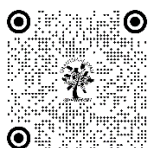


MARSHAL NESAMONY'S EFFICACY IN SRI MULAM POPULAR ASSEMBLY

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ABSTRACT

Various political, social and religious reformers contributed for the upliftment of the oppressed communities in the Travancore region. Among them, Nesamony, fondly called 'Nesamony Raja', 'Marshal Nesamony' and 'Kumari Thanthai' (Father of Kanniyakumari District) stands distinctive for his exemplary achievements towards the liberation of the oppressed class and their resurgence. Nesamony occupied a unique place in the minds of the Tamils of Travancore. As a popular leader, Nesamony became the Chairman of the Nagercoil Municipality in 1942. He was elected to the Sri Mulam Assembly of Travancore State in 1944 from the Kalkulam cum Vilavancode constituency. Till 1956 the present Kanniyakumari district was a part of the erstwhile Travancore State. The political activities of the people of the region were mainly influenced and guided by the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress founded by Marshal Nesamony. This article elaborates his valuable services during his tenure as member in Travancore Legislative Assemblies.

Keywords: Adult Franchise, Irrigation, Ecology

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. SRI MULAM POPULAR ASSEMBLY

Sri Mulam Popular Assembly, also known as Sri Mulam Praja Sabha was formed in Travancore state in the year 1904. This has the pride of being the first popularly elected legislature in the history of India. This was in succession to the legislative council formed in 1888 with 8 members of whom 6 were to be officials and 2 non officials nominated by Mulam Thirunal Rama Varma Maharaja. The purpose of the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly was to have participation of peoples' representatives in the administration. It had 88 members in the beginning. This is the first legislature elected from among the people in modern Indian history. This system has the precedence from Kudavolai system prevailing in the administration of Chola empire.

Though the representatives were chosen from landlords and merchants, it gave the people an opportunity to bring out their requirements, wishes and grievances to the government. Also, it enabled the people aware of the policies and actions of the government. The members of the assembly were nominated by the district heads two per taluk from landlords who had a tax assessment of Rs.100 and above and landlords or merchants whose annual income was Rs.6000 and above.

The assembly was modified in the year 1905 to have 100 members out of which 77 were to be elected and 23 nominated. The eligibility for voting was to have an annual income not less than Rs.2000 or a land tax not less than Rs.50 per year. Also, University graduates with minimum 10 years of standing were eligible to vote. The assembly was given the right to elect members of the Council or Upper House which had 15 members, in the year 1907. In 1921, the strength of the Council was enhanced to 50.

In the year 1932, both the Council and Assembly were made as a bicameral system known as the Sri Chitra State Council, the Upper House and the Sri Mulam Assembly, the Lower House. This status continued up to 1947. In 1947, the constituent assembly came into existence, Cochin State was merged with Travancore and its accession to India happened after independence.

1.2. EVOLUTION OF TRAVANCORE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Due to the birth of Independent India, lot of changes occurred in native states. As per the announcement of the Maharaja of Travancore on 4th September 1947 for the establishment of a responsible Government, a new Assembly known as the Representative Body was to function as the Constituent Assembly. Adult franchise was introduced in 1948 and by means of that 120 members were elected. The Travancore Interim Constitution Act was promulgated on 24th March 1948 in view of the Assembly to have the powers and functions of a Legislative Assembly and to have a Ministry to take responsibility for that. The Constitution enabled providing a Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister and responsible to the Assembly. The Maharaja acted as the Constitutional Head.

The states of Travancore and Cochin were merged on 1st July 1949. The United State of Travancore-Cochin came into existence and the Maharaja of Travancore became the Raja Pramukh of the new state. Its first Legislative Assembly (1949-1951) comprised of 178 members of the Legislative bodies of Travancore and Cochin. In December 1951, General Elections was conducted, and the Assembly was reconstituted from 21st February 1952. It had a strength of 109 members. In January 1954, elections were held to the 118-member Assembly of the Travancore-Cochin State. The Ministry fell in 1955 due to a No Confidence Motion. It was succeeded by another Ministry which also had to end the term on 23rd March 1956 due to the resignation of 6 members. Hence, President's rule was imposed in the state on the advice of the Raja Pramukh and the Assembly was dissolved.

1.3. NESAMONY IN TRAVANCORE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Timeline

- 1944-1947: Member, Sri Mulam Popular Assembly, Travancore State.
- 1947-1949: Member, Travancore State Legislative Assembly.
- 1949-1951: Member, Travancore-Cochin State Assembly.

The third tenure of the bicameral set up of Sri Mulam Popular Assembly was held from 1944 to 1947. While Marshal Nesamony was functioning as the Chairman

of Nagercoil Municipality (1943–1944), he received request from prominent people of the Travancore Sri Mulam Assembly's double constituency Kalkulam – Vilavancode with twin member representation, to contest the election in 1944. He could not refuse the persuasion since it was from different segments of people from different places in the constituency. They belonged to Hindu, Muslim and Christian denominations and were very earnest in their request and hence he could not cold-shoulder them. At that juncture, he did not have the wherewithal and manpower to set up election offices and organize effective canvassing. However, he managed to borrow money, purchased an old car and went around the constituency. The constituency was comparatively big one, but the electoral roll was very small. In spite of its population more than four lakh, the number of voters was just 3726 only. The landlords and University graduates only could find their names in the electoral roll. It was a three-corner contest, and the contestants were Nesamony, Sridharan Pillai and Ponnumony Nadar. The votes were counted on 15th July 1944 and Sridharan Pillai and Nesamony were elected as first and second winners. The first winner Sridharan Pillai left the counting centre at the Magistrate Court at Mettukadai in Thuckalai without any fanfare, but Nesamony had to struggle for an hour to get out of the campus due to the huge crowd and its elation.

The inaugural session of the Assembly began at 11.30 AM on 27th July 1944 in the Legislative Chamber, Public Offices. The President Sir.C.P.Ramaswamy Aiyar took the oath saying "I, C.P.Ramaswamy Aiyar, Ex-officio President of this Assembly, solemnly affirm that I will be faithful and loyal to His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore, and to his Majesty the King Emperor of India, and to their heirs and successors, and that I will faithfully discharge the duty upon which I am about to enter". Then the President signed the Rolls and took the Chair. Marshal Nesamony took the Oath of Office as Member of the Legislative Assembly representing Kalkulam cum Vilavancode constituency, along with 71 other members.

1.4. MAIDEN SPEECH IN SRI MULAM ASSEMBLY

The maiden speech of Marshal Nesamony in the Assembly was noteworthy. Throughout the course of his thunderous speech, smile was quite visible on the lips of the Divan and President of the assembly Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar. Nesamony said that he could not understand as whose representative he was making his speech. It was not only his condition but also that of all the other members in the House. Then he described the way in which the election in his constituency was carried out. He mentioned it an 'electoral farce'. The word picture of the election woven by him in the House is as follows:

"A voter gets off a vehicle near the booth and holding his umbrella over his head walks to the booth. Thirty to forty people as a group surround him immediately and he stands blinking as if he has committed some crime. The people who surround him take care that he does not fall down. Unruly groups of men of the rival camp raise a hooting or a slogan-shouting. The voter, if he is an old person, swoons. Somehow or other, he enters the booth and exercises his franchise. In most cases, it is the presiding officer who does this work for him. Is this an election? Why was the voter surrounded by groups of men, and why did they do so? What was the purpose that the voter achieved? What was the connection between the voter's purpose and that of those who had surrounded him? Was the voter aware of this? If he were, would he openly acknowledge it here? But I can tell you! It is a farce. This question having no answer was not welcome there nor is it now welcome here. This is a shameful affair, and I have emerged victorious in it. And we are assembled here in dignity of being members of this legislative assembly. To claim to be representatives, whom

do we represent? Do we represent the voter who had come to the booth holding an umbrella or those who has surrounded him? If we represent the voter what is the status of those who had surrounded him? Is it not necessary that their voice should be heard here? Is it not necessary that all should have voting, right? If they did not have voting rights, then I would say that we are on an ivory tower”.

Marshal Nesamony was the one to speak about the franchise to all grown up people of the country. It can very well be asserted that his was the first voice which rose in the Indian sub-continent for all the adult citizens. The requirement of adult franchise put forth from his maiden speech in the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly came into reality in Travancore after a long and continuous struggle by Marshal Nesamony. The revolutionary election in Travancore held in 1948 with the introduction of Adult Franchise was the fruit of this long struggle.

2. BUDGET PRESENTATION

The budget session for 1120 M.E started on 14th August 1944 (30th Karkadakam, 1119). During the general discussions of the budget held on 18th August, Marshal Nesamony initially remarked that it pained him when he heard the personal incriminations, insinuations and non-cooperation amongst the members in the House. To fulfil the hopes of the electors and to enhance the liberties of the subjects of the State, he requested the members to try to enlist the sympathy of those who were prepared to cooperate with them on the broad fundamental principles when they made their speeches.

Then he passed on to the budget and made an extensive talk on various points. He mentioned that a lakh of rupees had been allotted for the investigation of major schemes on irrigation and there was a surplus of Rs.6.66 lakh. Hence, probably a scheme would have been in operation by that time which would have accelerated the pace of the 'grow more' food campaign. But though it was nearly forty years since the Kodayar project was inaugurated and the people living between the Thiruvithan code channel and the Kuzhithurai river in the taluks of Vilavan code and Kalkulam could not get the benefit of that project by the construction of the Pattanam Kal. Also, those living on the other side of the Kuzhithurai river in the Vilavan code and Neyyattinkara taluks by the Right bank Channel from the Kodayar lake. He put up his opinion that the investigation being made for forty years would not stand but during the course of the next two or three years the programme would be carried through. He suggested that by damming the Paralayar at the confluence of the Mekode stream and Ponmana stream at Valiyattumukam, the Pattanam Kal would be a reality soon. He reiterated that those who were appointed to undertake the investigation of the scheme would do it in right earnest and not stop with the investigation alone but prepare all the plans so that the scheme might be put through in the subsequent years.

Secondly, he touched upon the income from Excise. He confined his remarks mainly to toddy and arrack. The estimated income from the sale of arrack was Rs.66 lakh. The estimated receipts in the previous year (1118 M.E) were Rs.38 lakh. There was therefore an increase of Rs.28 lakh on the revenue side. The number of trees that were tapped in 1117 was about 15,000 but in 1118 the number was 24,000 marking an increase of 9,000. The increase in the consumption of liquor could be attributed to the earning capacity of the labourer and to affect a check upon that habit, the measures which Government were proposing were to enhance the tax and to enhance the price. He apprehended how far those measures would act as a check upon that habit was a difficult question. He also mentioned that since the Government were contemplating compulsory free education throughout the State,

it was worthwhile whether it was not time a total prohibition to be introduced in the State. He brought to the notice of the House that the scarcity of jaggery had been brought about by the tapping of fermented toddy and the free indent of jaggery by the distilleries at Nagercoil for distillation of jaggery arrack and it was a source of nuisance.

Marshal Nesamony pointed out that the distilleries in Nagercoil were worked to the maximum of their capacity. The spent wash that was discharged from those distilleries was a source of nuisance to the municipal town of Nagercoil. It was hoped that the nuisance would be obviated by two lorries which were carrying the spent wash, but they were practically useless for the purpose. Sometimes the contractors emptied it into the fields nearby and hence the evening breeze was very contaminated and affected injuriously the health of the people of the town. He requested the Government to take very early action regard to that. It had already been stated by the President of the House Sir.C.P.Ramaswamy Aiyar that prohibition had failed elsewhere. Marshal Nesamony appealed to him that since his name was associated with epoch making reforms in the State, if he out of his abundant and rich experience declare Travancore dry posterity would cherish his name.

Marshal Nesamony put two more things before the President. The first was regarding the food control. He informed him that the public were much indebted to him for the timely help he had rendered to them in that direction. But he commented the system of taking away all the rice in a family and then asking them to get rationed articles did not commend itself to him. He opined that the system caused hardship to the small landholder. He emphasized that an exception be made in the case of those who do not possess rice even according to the unit of rationing, and to small landholders, charitable institutions and boarding homes.

Secondly, he stated that he could find that in the three higher grade offices, the Huzur, the Financial Secretariat and the High Court, the salary of the higher ministerial staff did not conform to any standard. There was no equality in the distribution of standards. Also, he stressed that it was time that the Government seriously think of implementing the recommendations of the Law's Delays Commission relating to the status, powers and salaries, and the grievances of the staff to be redressed. Then again, he indicated that for the emergency offices, it seemed it was only the preserve of the Huzur and the Finance Offices. He pleaded that that might be thrown open to all people in whatever departments they might be and that would set right the inequality that remained then in the higher ranks of the service⁷.

This speech of him in the Assembly shows his concern over the welfare of the people in all walks of life. He was involved in farming works during his young age and he himself had carried water for irrigating plants using pitchers yoked across his shoulders. Thus, he knew the sufferings of the peasants⁸. This made him struggle for alleviating the pains of poor farmers. The coverage of welfare measures seen in the speech of Marshal Nesamony, especially prohibition of alcoholic liquor indicates that not only he was kind to the farmers but also to all the citizen of Travancore showering love, care and fatherly affection. The realization of Pattanam Kal, Neyyaru left bank channel, the aqueduct at Mathur, Vilathurai Lift Irrigation scheme, and Chittar dam –II are due to his strenuous efforts. One cannot imagine his humanitarian approach in view of prohibition which came into effect in Madras State where the Tamil speaking areas of Travancore Cochin State were annexed. His vision in equality among Government staff of different departments shows his noble attitude.

3. FOOD CRISIS AND DISAFFORESTATION

The state of Travancore faced an acute food shortage and hence a resolution was moved in the Assembly for increasing the area of cultivable land by means of disafforestation. The resolution states: "This Assembly recommends to Government that five lakhs of acres of forest lands in Travancore be set apart forthwith for paddy cultivation to meet the acute food problem in the State". Marshal Nesamony who was very much concerned about ecology and preservation of forests moved an amendment to the resolution before the House. He mentioned that the figure mentioned in the resolution seemed to be a very tall one and that it would affect a third of the reserved forests of Travancore. Further the resolution confined itself particularly to paddy cultivation. The people in the South, where every inch of land had already been converted into paddy land, would not find their way to be benefitted by any motion that might be passed by the House in regard to the fact that all the lands that were then disafforested should be used only for paddy cultivation. So, he moved that the House might recommend to Government that 50,000 acres of forest land might be set apart for the cultivation of paddy and other food crops to meet the acute food problem in the State.

The amendment was seconded by V.S.Krishna Pillai. But even though the amendment was moved without prior permission from the Chair, the President was kind enough to suspend the rules and allow the amendment to be moved. In support of the amendment, Marshal Nesamony brought to the notice of the House the fact that everybody was then concerned with the food crisis that was facing the country and that therefore something had to be done. He thanked the President for the earnest efforts put forward by him to secure food crops from abroad to feed them but he suggested that to augment that supply it was necessary to tap the local resources also. All the lands that could be disafforested could not be used for paddy cultivation. Cash crops like tapioca and other millets necessary for daily consumption could be raised locally of course. So far as South Travancore was concerned it was the Veerapully Reserve that was available for any disafforestation, and that he believed that any part of Veerapully Reserve would be useless for paddy cultivation. However, he stated that the people in the South would like to have the forest land disafforested so that tapioca and other cash crops could be raised and the food production augmented in the South.

Some other members supported the resolution in the amended form citing various reasons and examples. The President Sir.C.P.Ramaswamy Aiyar made an elaborate speech detailing the forests not only in India but also all over the world and their importance and current conditions. Finally he asked the member P.M.Varghese who moved the resolution, either to withdraw the resolution or press it to a Division. The member made a small statement ending that he moved the resolution because he understood how much the people suffered from want of food. Finally, he withdrew the resolution. Thus, the resolution was, by leave withdrawn⁹. This act of Marshal Nesamony clearly reveals the wide knowledge he possessed about ecology and geography of the State and above all, his concern over the Mother Earth and mankind.

4. THE TRAVANCORE NADAR BILL

S.Thiraviam Nadar, nominated Member of the Assembly moved a motion for leave to introduce 'The Travancore Nadar Bill' on 21st February, 1945. Immediately Marshal Nesamony opposed the measure. He made a very long lecture quoting

various social conditions, legal points, judgments and prevailing situations and opposed it vehemently. Finally, the motion to introduce the bill was put to vote and lost.

5. OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

During the debates of the Travancore Public Health Bill on 23rd July 1945, Marshal Nesamony moved an amendment to a clause and gave a large explanation in order to safeguard the Trivandrum Corporation and other municipalities by sustaining their powers over staff. On the event of the budget demands and grants in the subject of Public Works Department including Water Works and Drainages on 28th July 1945, he talked portraying the picture of the draught hit areas of South Travancore made a request to complete the Perunchani which was not in a developed condition and the Mambalatharu Dam and Arambozhi dam were to be constructed. He mentioned that it was always said that Nanjilnad was the granary of South Travancore and would be able to supply rice to every part of Travancore. If that was to be achieved, and if really the whole land was to be brought under cultivation, and proper facilities were to be given to the agriculturists, he reiterated that all those schemes should be put into operation as soon as possible. His contributions as remarks, suggestions, legal opinions and arguments are seen all over the proceedings of the Sri Mulam Assembly from 18- 08-1944 to 05-08-1946. His efforts and dreams came into reality when the Perunchani dam was constructed in 1952 and came for use in 1953. The Poigai dam at Aralvoimozhi and Mambalathurayaru dam were constructed in 2000 and 2010 respectively only after the separation of Tamil speaking areas from Travancore and annexure with Tamilnadu and formation of Kanniyakumari District by the long struggle under the heroic leadership of Marshal Nesamony.

6. CONCLUSION

In addition to the active services of Marshal Nesamony in the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly, his enormous activities as a Member of the Representative Body, Travancore Legislative Assembly, United State of Travancore and Cochin Legislative Assembly and the Travancore Cochin Legislative Assembly continuously from 1944 to 1951 gave tremendous benefit to the Travancore Cochin State especially the South Travancore portion. His statesmanship and leadership qualities made him achieve an excellent turning point in History.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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