
A STRUGGLE OF MARUTHU PANDIYARS - A STUDY

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Abstract

There are two types of freedom struggle in India. In the first type, the Native Rebels furnished stiff resistance when the British involved in the territorial expansion in India. In the second type, when the British settled well in India, the natives started freedom struggle against the political and economic domination and exploitation respectively. In the history of Freedom Struggle especially the role of Tamil Nadu is remarkable in both types. Nercattumseval, Panjalamkurichi and Kalayarkoil were the citadels of the Native Rebels of the Eighteenth Century. Kalayarkoil occupied a special significance, because where the Marudu Brothers put up a heroic resistance against the British in the last phase of the South Indian Rebellion of 1800-1801.

The Early Life of Maruthu Pandiyars

The "Murdoos" the rulers of Sivagangai at that time, were two brothers, Vellai Marudu, commonly called Periya Marudu, and China Marudu. They belonged neither to the family of the ancient poligars nor to their division of the caste, but were retainers of the family Parivaras is the Tamil term for such-belonging to a lower division of the caste. The title peculiar to this class is Servaikara, and they are bound to do service to their poligar masters. Hence in all English letters and narratives pertaining to that time they are called "Sherogars" "that is, servaikaras, never devas or poligars."

During the reign of Muthu Vijaya Regunatha Sethupathi one Udaiyar Servai alias Mokka Palaniyappan Servai and his wife Anandhayi alias Ponnathal were residing at Ramanathapuram at Kongaru street. Periya Marudhu and Chinna Marudhu were born to them at their native village, Narikudi Mukkulam on 1748 and 1753 respectively. They were named as Marudhus after their family deity Maruthappasamy.

Marudu or Murdoo as it was written by the English, was their family title, not a personal name. Marudu is the name of a tree, the Terminalia alata. At the temple of Nainarkovil, in the Ramnad Zamindari, Siva is supposed to have appeared in the shape of a lingam. at the foot of a Marudu tree. Hence, as worshipped in that place, he is called Marudappa or Marudesvara. This being the family divinity of the Siruvayal people, each of them, in honour of their divinity, took the title of Marudu. Servaikaran was the caste title, Marudu the family name both the chiefs were called Marudu, with this distinction only, that one was Periya, the elder, and the other Chinna, the younger. Periya Marudu was the nominal ruler of the country. It is he that is meant when the Sherogar or the Marudu is mentioned, but the real ruler was Chinna Marudu. The elder brother devoted himself

wholly to field sports and left the administration of affairs in his younger brother's hands.

The Role of Maruthu Brothers in The Restoration of Velu Nachiyar As Rani

After the death of the Pradhani, (Thandavaraya Pillai) the Marudhu brothers who were with the Queen (Velu Nachiyar) became prominent. The Marudhu brothers took a lead in the affairs of the occupied territory. They had been looking forward to the opportune moment. The opportunity was thrown in the Second Mysore War in 1780. When Hyder Ali fell upon Arcot in 1780, the Marudhus having obtained a small force from Syed Sahib, the general at Dindigul desolated the Nawab's territories at Madura. Upon their advance to Sivaganga, the inhabitants joined them and the rebellion spread. The illdisciplined forces of the Nawab stationed in walled towns offered no resistance. The Rani accompanied by the Marudhu brothers entered Sivaganga, and Vellachi, the daughter of Vaduganatha Thevar was proclaimed Queen of Sivaganga and the Marudhus assumed the charge as ministers. The Nawab could not send additional troops to Sivaganga due to preoccupation caused by the invasion of Hyder Ali.

It will be remembered that the two Marudhus returned to Sivagangei Country in 1781 when the whole of the South was in a most disturbed and anarchial state, and meeting with no opposition usurped the Government; and that the expedition under Colonel Fullarton in 1783 restored British Authority in the revolted districts of the South. Amongst other things the Government of Sivagangei was at this time taken out of the hands of the Marudhus, and made over to the widow of the late Raja, Vaduganatha Tevan. But the change was merely nominal. The Marudhus very soon acquired a complete ascendancy over the Rani and over all her friends' connections and relatives; and were regarded as the de facto rulers of the Country, not only by the inhabitants but also by the British Government. And the peshkash or tribute appears to have been paid by them rather on their own behalf than on that of the Rani, their mistress.

The Maruthu Brothers Versus Muthu Ramalinga Sethupathi

Muthu Vaduganatha was a relative to the Sethupathi and they belonged to the same sub-caste of Maravas. And as a Marava, Muthuramalinga Thevar naturally did not like the state of Sivaganga, pass into the hands of the Agambadias. This may look ridiculous but the Maravas as a class were like this. They were very much concerned about these petty things. Moreover, while Muthuramalinga was in confinement at Tiruchirappalli, the Marudhu brothers looted the Ramnad villages in 1779. They continued that even after Muthuramalinga was reinstated.

The Sethupathi now promptly took action and drove them away. Even though the Sethupathi succeeded in sending the Marudhus' troops away, he knew that he was not strong enough to remove them from power. Therefore he appealed to the Nawab, who was not very much pleased with the Marudhu brothers, for unification of the two administrations for an annual payment of 3.5 lakhs of rupees. As a next step he proposed to marry Vellachi, the de jure princess, but she foiled the Sethupathi's plans by marrying Vodaya Thevar,

(Sakkanthi Vengai Periy Oodaya Thevar) a nephew of her father. The Sethupathi continue his attempts but made no progress. On the 4th August 1784, the army entered Sivaganga. Fullerton directed the Marudhus to clear the arrears of tributes but the latter withdrew to the woods of Kalayarkol and assembled about 10,000 armed men. However, a settlement was effected and the Marudhus paid 40,000 rupees as part of the arrears. Determined to suppress the Marudus, the Nawab in 1786 sought military assistance from Fort St. George on the alleged ground that the Marudus refused the payment of the tribute of two lakhs of rupees, that they neglected the administration of their territory and that they committed depredations upon Ramanathapuram.

But Governor, Sir Archibald Campbell rightly cautioned the Nawab that it was dangerous measure to collect revenue by the force of arms and asserted that such a policy not only alienated the subject but caused a heavy military expenditure.

Sometimes ago, Gowri Vallaba Thevar, Zemindar of Sivagangai having fed from the oppression of Marudhu Serokar took refuge in the fort of Ramanathapuram. When the said Cherokar became informed of the circumstances, he (cherokar) resolved to plunder my (Sethupathy of Ramnad) taluks and has accordingly done so to a greater degree which I cannot detail. (Vide the letter dated 30th June 1794 of Sethupathy of Ramnad addressed to the Governor of Madras- Military Country Correspondence Vol 451 1794 AD)

The RIFT Between The Rani Velu Nachiyar and Maruthu Brothers

The situation appeared favourable to the Nawab when a serious rivalry between the Queen and the Marudus for the control of administration disturbed the tranquillity of the territory and weakened its power of resistance. He entered into an agreement with the Rani and promised his assistance in her conflict with the Marudus. This precipitated a clash, In consequence of which the Rani was forced to seek shelter in the fort of Sivaganga. Mohammad Ali promptly despatched a body of troops for the rescue of the Queen. But Marudus with 12,000 armed men surrounded Sivaganga and plundered the Nawab's territories in retaliation. Unable to suppress the Marudus, Mohammad Ali on the 10TH of March 1789 again appealed to the Madras Council for aid. John Holland, the successor of Sir Archibald Campbell in the Presidency, furnished an army for operation in Sivaganga.

The Attack on Kalayarkoil by The Company

On the 29th April, 1789 the British forces led by Colonel James Stuart arrived at Tirupatore in Sivaganga where 3000 troops sent by the Tondaiman joined them on the 1 st May. The combined forces reached Sivaganga on the 8th. Reinforced by the Nawab's detachment, Stuart attacked Kollangudi on the 13th. A considerable village surrounded by a mud walls and a thick jungle, it was defended by a large body of Marudhus' troops armed with fire locks. Despite the obstinate resistance of the Marudus, the English forces scored a victory on the 14TH. After this reverse, the Marudus retired to their strongholds in the jungles of Kalayarkoil.

On the arrival of reinforcements from Madura, Thanjavur and Tiruchirappalli, Stuart

launched an offensive against the Mardhus' strongholds which had been constructed in the thick woods. The pioneers laid a road to Ramamandalam situated three miles from Kollangudi. Stuart won the allegiance of Du Pre, a French General whom the Marudhus employed to train their troops and occupied their stronghold. The thorough knowledge of the terrain possessed by Du Pre, considerably helped further military operations against the Marudhus. The forces advanced to Kalayarkoil, and captured it after a short cannonade. The Marudhus took their stand at Piranmalai, but on the approach of the enemy, fled to the territories of Tippu Sultan.

Succession Dispute in Sivagangai

Sasivarna Peria Oodaya Thevar died in or about the year 1750 and was succeeded by his son Muthuvaduganatha Peria Oodaya Thevar. He, the 2nd Rajah of Sivaganga, was shot dead at Kalaiarkovil in or about the year 1772 in an engagement with the Nawab. He had no male issue, but he left behind him his widow Velu Nachiar and an infant daughter named Vellachi alias Velu Nachiar. The widow Velu Nachiar succeeded her husband in 1780.

She took under her protection Padamathoor Gowry Vallaba Thevar, an intelligent lad, and a collateral relation of Sasivarna Thevar, with a view to adopt him as her son and successor. But the two Shervaigars again usurped the Country and contrived to marry the Rani's daughter Vellachi Nachiar to their favourite Vengam Peria Udaya Thevar and sought several times to put to death Padamathur Gowry Vallabha Thevar.

Vellachi Nachiar, daughter of the Second Rajah of Sivaganga was married to Vengam Peria Godaya Thevar by the intrigues of the two Marudhu Shervaigars. They knew that Gowry Vallaba Thevar was not only the Padamathoor Poligar, but also a powerful man who had several influential men to protect his interests, and it was proposed that Velu Nachiar should adopt him. They therefore thought that to prevent such an adoption and to effect the above marriage they must put under restraint Gowry Vallaba Thevar and reduce his power and influence; and consequently they imprisoned him at the Kalaiarkoil temple with sufficient guards, and attempted to put him to death.

While he was in prison, Karuppayee, a dancing girl attached to the said temple, pitying his condition, secretly supplied him with food etc and administered to his convenience and comforts. Naturally enough he fell in love with her and kept her as his concubine. She knew that the Shervaigars intended ultimately to put him to death, and therefore contrived to effect his escape. Gowry Vallabha Thevar at last managed to escape and took refuge with Karisaipatty poligar, Vellai Bommai Naick, the Poligar and his Manager, one Sama Iyer alias Shesa Iyer sheltered him at Thuvarankurichi for some months... when this fact was known to the Shervaigars, they demanded the surrender of Gowri Vallaba Thevar from the poligar who being afraid of the Shervaigars powers and influence, sent him to Pudukottai Rajah who gave him refuge at Arunthangi.

Conclusion

After the death of Marudhu Brothers, Sivaganga came under the control of British Government. In 1801 British introduced Gowry Vallbhaas a Zamindar in Sivaganga. He was the first zamindar of sivaganga under the control of British.

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