

P.S.MANI-A VETERAN NATIONALIST OF SOUTH TRAVANCORE**R.Praymina****Ph.D. Research Scholar****Reg. No. 18223041052006****Department of History and Research Centre****Holy Cross College (Autonomous)****Nagercoil, Kanyakumari District.****Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University,****Abishekapatti Tirunelveli,****Tamilnadu, India.****Dr. B. Palammal****Assistant professor,****Department of History and Research Centre****Holy Cross College (Autonomous),****Nagercoil, Kanyakumari District.****ABSTRACT**

Perumal Pillai Subra Mani was popularly known as P.S.Mani and he was born on 7th February, 1916 in a respectable and well known family of Ramavarmapuram in Nagercoil. It is a significant factor in the life of P.S. Mani to enroll himself in the National Movement to fight for the freedom of the nation. With his enrolment as a member in the State Congress, Mani's role in the national movement became a reality. His faith in the basic principle in almost all the agitations and activities organised by the Nagercoil Divisional Committee of the Travancore State Congress, till he left the organisation in 1945, to lay the foundation of the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress. The State Congress had taken active part in the various agitation programmes of the Indian National Congress. Mani's contact with the Congress Movement began even during his school days. It was in 1942 that Mani took an active part in the National Struggle and underwent vigorous imprisonment. Even before the Quit India Movement, he had contact with the nationalist leaders like Dr. M.E. Naidu. Joining hands with him, Mani was active in the constructive programmes of Gandhiji. P.S.Mani rallied behind the leadership of Muthukaruppa Pillai, together with other stalwarts like A. Sankara Pillai of Nagercoil, S. Sivan Pillai of Theroor, Sam Nathaniel Dr. T.M. Sivam, C. Sankar of Vadasery, T.S. Velayudham of Tamarakulam and others. As a beginning of the August Movement, it was decided to launch a march from Nagercoil to Aralvaymoli under the leadership of S. Sivan Pillai. His activities in the Congress Movement for the National cause should have been for about five years from 1940 to 1945. As has already been noted he was very active during the Quit India Movement and after, for in 1943 he can be seen as doing strenuous work to mobilise the youth of the area towards the Congress ideals through Youth Movements.

Keywords : National Movement, Travancore State Congress, Sama Panthi Bojanam, Temple Entry Proclamation, Abstention Movement, Responsible Government, Harijan Seva Sangham, Quit India Movement, All Travancore Tamilian Congress

Introduction:

Perumal Pillai Subra Mani was popularly known as P.S.Mani and he was born on 7th February, 1916 in a respectable and well known family of Ramavarmapuram in Nagercoil. His father, Perumal Pillai was a government contractor of eminence in south Travancore. The formal education that Mani had no relation to the acumen during his career as a student can in no way be compared to the acumen of knowledge he possessed during later years of his life. As a student in the high school classes, Mani seemed to be not at all a promising student, as is conceivable from the fact that he had studied in two high schools, first in Nagercoil and then at Trivandrum. With his enrolment as a member in the State Congress, Mani's role in the national movement became a reality.

National Movements:

It is a significant factor in the life of P.S. Mani to enroll himself in the National Movement to fight for the freedom of the nation. In order to understand his role in the movement, one has to assess the vigour with which he established contact with the leaders of the Travancore State Congress like Pattom A. Thanu Pillai, C. Narayana Pillai and Ponnara Sridhar, during his sojourn in Trivandrum. It is an undisputed fact that the above mentioned three were stalwarts in the freedom struggle in Kerala. Though he learned his alphabets of the National Movement at Trivandrum, soon he came to his native town Nagercoil and established contact with the local leaders of the Travancore State Congress. His faith in the basic principle in almost all the agitations and activities organised by the Nagercoil Divisional Committee of the Travancore State Congress, till he left the organisation in 1945, to lay the foundation of the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress. The second quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the intensification of the freedom struggle by the Indian National Congress that was founded in 1885. The organisation was interested in the initial stages to demand more and more participation of educated Indians in the

administration. But the partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon, the Viceroy and the enthusiasm and interest shown by Mahatma Gandhi after his return from South Africa turned the Indian National Congress into a fighting movement for complete independence. Successive repressive measures adopted by the British regime towards the National Movement strengthened it into a strong force. In every nook and corner of the country, the movement spread its activities through its Provincial Committees and in the Native States ruled by Indian princes through their respective organisations with affiliation to the Indian National Congress.

Travancore State Congress:

It is worthwhile here to note that the term National Movement in the native State of Travancore was the 'State Congress' organised in February 1938. The Travancore State Congress was started with the aim of fighting against the arbitrary administration of the Diwan Sir. C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, with a view to establish a responsible government in the state. Mani's involvement in the movement was an eye-sore to his father Perumal Pillai, who happened to be a friend of the Diwan, in his capacity as a government engineering contractor. Mani earned the displeasure and wrath of his father who condemned the activities of Mani. In that respect, a State Congress functioned in Travancore, known as the 'Travancore State Congress'. It had its own Divisional Committees and the Nagercoil Divisional Committee was one of them that function in the southern taluks of Travancore. Travancore was a native state ruled by a Maharaja. The aim and scope of the State Congress was to fight against the administration for the establishment of responsible government in accordance with the ideals of the Indian National Congress. However, the State Congress had taken active part in the various agitation programmes of the Indian National Congress. Mani's contact with the Congress Movement began even during his school days.

Sama Panthi Bojanam:

In those days certain communities were not permitted to walk through the streets in the precincts of Hindu temples. The traditional orthodoxy behind the practice was opposed by the Congress under the leadership of Gandhiji. Dr. Naidu's name is connected with the Suchindrum Satyagraha. Apart from such activities, to gain entry to such places for the communities considered as untouchables. The leaders organised 'collective feasts' called '*Sama panthi bojanam*' in which the so called high caste people belonging to the movement ate with the untouchables. In those days such an act was considered as a heinous social crime by the elders in the high caste Hindu families. In one such feast, Mani is mentioned to have participated together with Dr. Naidu and Muthukaruppa Pillai. When he returned home, the women of his house-hold condemned him and forced him to enter the house only after taking a purifying bath. But his father did not condemn it on the ground that he might not have done anything sinful under the leadership of Dr. Naidu. When this incident took place, Mani was a school boy and it can be said that his association with elders like Dr. Naidu might have been instrumental in evoking a sentiment of national feeling in his young mind.

Temple Entry Proclamation:

The urge to eradicate untouchability and to secure temple entry, the so called 'lower castes' tried to organise several movements like the Civil Rights League of 1919, formed by T.K. Madhavan. Encouraged by the Malabar Congress leaders in general and K.Kelappan Nair in particular, and actively supported by the Congress leaders of Madras like E.V. Ramaswamy a Satyagraha was launched on 30th March 1924, in front of the temple at Vaikkam in Travancore. Though the Satyagraha failed to achieve its goal in complete. It was a success in as far as opening of all roads except those on the eastern side of the temple. The partial success of the movement resulted in social awakening in the state and in 1926 a similar Satyagraha was launched in Suchindrum demanding the right of entry to the famous temple there for the Harijans. It was led by Dr. M.E. Naidu and continued for a month, when

it was withdrawn on the assurance of the Government. Again the agitation was resumed in 1930 under the leadership of A.Gandhiraman Pillai, as no settlement was reached with the Government. Agitations of these types succeeded in securing the Maharaja's 'Temple Entry Proclamation' on 12th November, 1936.

Abstention Movement:

Travancore State did not lack behind in sanctioning constitutional reforms to the people. The scheme of associating the people in legislative activities attempted by the Maharaja Sri Mulam Thirunal under the guidance of his constitutional adviser, Sir. C.P. Ramaswami Iyer. Instead of a single legislative council, two houses came into existence, coupled with the liberalisation of franchise. However certain communities demanded reservation of seats, and started the Abstention Movement. By August 1936, the Abstentionists succeeded in getting some concessions and withdrew their agitation. The organisation that spearheaded the Abstention Movement was the Joint Political Congress. Its sole aim was to secure rights for the backward communities like Elavas, Muslims and Christians. Though the Movement created rivalry between the Nayers on the one side and the volunteers of the Abstention Movement on the other, very soon the Nayar leaders understood that the communal rivalry would strengthen the hands of the Diwan.

Responsible Government:

With the formation of a full-fledged political organisation to fight for the establishment of a Responsible Government in the State, State Congress, it began to chalk out programmes to attain the end. Local committees were organised in various places, including South Travancore. Muthukaruppa Pillai, S.Sivan Pillai, Sam Nathaniel, Fenn Russeliah and others belonging to South Travancore whole - heartedly plunged into the forefront of the agitations of the State Congress. Some of these leaders participated in the agitation of the State Congress in 1938 itself for attaining Responsible Government and courted

imprisonment. Sam Nathaniel and Fenn Russeliah, who later associated themselves with the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress Movement were two important leaders of South Travancore, who courted arrest in 1938. It has already been noted, how he came into contact with the State Congress leaders in 1938, while he was in Trivandrum. As a result of their impact on him, he joined the State Congress as a member in 1938. The aim of the State Congress was to remove C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer from the position as the Diwan of Travancore and to enthrone a government responsible to the people. Mani's association with that movement irked his father who, as a Government contractor, happened to be a staunch supporter of C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer. As such, he had little chance to participate in any agitation organised by the State Congress, though he was a member of the party.

Harijan Seva Sangham:

It was in 1942 that Mani took an active part in the National Struggle and underwent vigorous imprisonment. Even before the Quit India Movement, he had contact with the nationalist leaders like Dr. M.E. Naidu. Joining hands with him, Mani was active in the constructive programmes of Gandhiji. As an ardent worker of the Harijan Service Society (Harijan Seva Sangham), he had engaged himself in the promotion of Kadhi spinning, equality in conducting feasts (Samapanti Unavu) and boycott of foreign goods. As a result of ideological differences with the Congress Leaders, Dr. Naidu left the State Congress and concentrated himself on Harijan welfare activities during the rest of his life. With the exit of Dr.Naidu, Muthukaruppa Pillai took the mantle of directing the State Congress activities in South Travancore, for the attainment of Responsible Government in Travancore. P.S.Mani rallied behind the leadership of Muthukaruppa Pillai, together with other stalwarts like A. Sankara Pillai of Nagercoil, S. Sivan Pillai of Theroor, Sam Nathaniel Dr. T.M. Sivam, C. Sankar of Vadasery, T.S. Velayudham of Tamarakulam and others. As a beginning of the August Movement, it was decided to launch a march from Nagercoil to Aralvaymoli under

the leadership of S. Sivan Pillai. One by one, S. Sivan Pillai, T.M. Sundaram of Thovalai, C. Sankar, R. Padma Singh of Edalakudy and other leaders were arrested. With the arrest of the leaders, the task of leading the agitation was entrusted to P.S.Mani who went underground due to police surveillance. But he was not able to carry on the struggle from underground for a long time. Very soon, P.S.Mani was arrested and locked up in the Kottar lock-up on 30th August 1942. He was in the goal with the sons of A.Sankara Pillai for about a month and later was taken to Madurai under Police escort.

Quit India Movement:

The Quit India agitation continued for about three months in British India under police surveillance. During that period, the British Government instructed the state administration to crush the movement in Travancore. C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer suppressed the movement with an iron hand. The nationalist leaders in the State wanted to present before the public the naked truth of the atrocities perpetrated by C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer. Such a step was taken in South Travancore and the part played by P.S.Mani in the propagation was commendable. Besides a Tamil Pamphlet called "*Ahimsa Puratchi*" was published every week. This underground secret publication contained fiery articles portraying the atrocities of the administration and cartoons on the same subject. At that time these activities boosted the morale of the nationalists. These two works were carried out with conviction and courage by P.S. Mani, with the help of S. Sivan Pillai and T.M. Sundaram. But the publications of *Ahimsa Puratchi* had to be given up because of the espionage of some Communists who revealed the facts about the clandestine publication. In 1943, the Congressmen in prison were released and subsequently there was a period of lull in the Congress activities in the Travancore State, for its activities were banned by the government in the state. Though the State Congress activities came to a standstill in the State, in Nanjilnadu, comprising the Thovalai and Agasteeswaram taluks, attempts were afoot to propagate the ideals of the

Congress movement. During that time there were a number of Youth Movements in different towns and villages of Nanjilnadu. All these were integrated into a federation of a Central Movement. It had a central committee consisting of representatives from various places. They had contact with the nationalist leader S.N. Somayajulu of Tirunelveli. It was through this Youth Movement that the Congress ideologies survived in South Travancore during this period of lull in the activities of the State Congress. These steps were taken by three individuals, S. Sivan Pillai, T.M.Sundaram and P.S. Mani. Later this Movement merged with the State Congress and looked after the affairs of the State Congress in its fight for the establishment of responsible government. P.S. Mani's activities during these epoch making era of tension was praise worthy.

But soon the tables turned against him and he was compelled to quit the State Congress after which he had to shift his area of political activities at the local level. The causes for such a turn of events came from the State Congress and he could not be blamed for the firm decision taken by him. The forces of circumstances that culminated in the exit of Mani from the State Congress were brewing in the State Congress itself for sometimes. The state administration under the stewardship of the Diwan C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer nurtured the idea of an Independent Travancore as and when the transfer of power to take place in India and he gave vent to his ideas, public a through announcement. Most of the organisations-social, political and religious in Travancore condemned the idea. In the meantime, another scheme was gaining ground in Congress circles. In 1946 the demand for the formation of a Malayalam speaking United Kerala by merging Travancore-Cochin and Malabar of the Madras Presidency on linguistic basis was gaining ground among the Congress movements in the three areas, with the contemplation of establishing it as and when India would become independent. With the announcement of the Maharaja of Cochin in Cochin Assembly on 29th July 1946 about his desire to work towards merging Cochin in United Kerala Province the

Congress and the Communists in Travancore favoured the idea. This view echoed in the Sri Mulam Assembly where two Tamilian members V.S. Krishna Pillai and M.L.Janardhanan Pillai moved adjournment motions against the very idea itself and spoke that "serious anxiety and alarm among the Tamil citizens in the taluks of Thovalai, Agasteeswaram, Kalkulam, Vilavancode, Shenkotta and Devikulam" had been created. Taking the string from the speech, the Diwan President argued against the formation of the Kerala Province. He explained the position thus: 'One of the main grounds which are militating against the entertainment of the idea of a Kerala Province comprising Travancore is this very matter. Obviously, in Travancore one third of the population speaks Tamil and equally obviously those people are more ask in linguistically to Tamilnadu than to Kerala.

Therefore, from Trivandrum to Cape Comorin, the people of Travancore will if the underlying idea of the Cochin scheme is adopted and became a part of the Tamilnadu province and obey the orders of the Governor of the province of Tamilnadu. Then there is the area from Trivandrum to Parur and that portion will come under the Kerala province envisaged in Cochin. The Kerala province idea is therefore unthinkable and would involve a partition of Travancore. In this warning of the Diwan, one can see the logic of the linguistic affinity of the Tamils of Travancore. The assertion of the Diwan, "unless there is a partition of Travancore for the purpose of putting one half or one-third into Tamilnadu and the rest in the Kerala Province, the scheme cannot be got through, did not create any effect on the Malayalam speaking majority of the population of Travancore. The three political parties of the area, the Travancore State Congress, the Cochin Praja Mandal and the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee decided to adopt the proposal in the Cochin scheme and to work for its realization. In their joint venture they had the patron in the person of the Maharaja of Cochin. The votaries of the new scheme did not leave anything unturned. They organised propaganda units throughout the area. Conventions and conferences in support of the scheme were held.

On 26th and 27th April 1947 they convened a United Kerala Convention at Trichur under the chairmanship of K.Kelappan, president of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee. The convention constituted a working committee of fifteen members to prepare the people for the scheme. The concerted move of the Kerala (Travancore Malayalee) leaders did not fail to evoke considerable apprehension among the Tamils of South Travancore. The prophecy of the Diwan C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer became a reality. The echo of the determined effort of the Travancore State Congress to Vouch-safe the move of the leaders of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee and the Cochin Praja Mandal without ascertaining the opinion of the people of South Travancore to form a United Kerala from Kasarcode to Kanyakumari, including the Tamil Taluks, appeared on the surface even in the Nagercoil Divisional Committee meeting of the Travancore State Congress itself.

It has to be noted that as early as November 1945 itself, there arose opposition to the United Kerala scheme, as soon as the idea had its birth in Cochin. Travancore State Congress tried in vain to enlist support for the United Kerala Scheme, though the Tamilian leaders V.S. Krishna Pillai and M.L. Janardhanan Pillai and the Diwan expressed that the move would not get any approval from the Tamils. In South Travancore and named one of the leaders Ponnara Sridhar for that purpose in this connection, it should not be forgotten that the State Congress leaders were not to be blamed, for a number of leaders of the South Travancore apart from the Malayalam speakers, came forward to support the United Kerala move. There was only a lone voice of dissent to it in the Nagercoil Divisional committee meeting convened to discuss the issue, despite the fact that the committee had a Tamilian majority. He opposed the move on principle and walked out of the meeting after resigning from the State Congress. The ultimate result of his move was the birth of the new organisation to look after the interest of the Tamils, as the State Congress could no longer do it. From the foregoing discussion about the activities of the National Movement in South Travancore and

the role of P.S.Mani as one of the prime movers of things in it, it is possible to arrive at the conclusion that P.S. Mani's role in the National Movement was hardly for a period of five years between 1938 and 1945. His activities in the Congress Movement for the National cause should have been for about five years from 1940 to 1945. As has already been noted he was very active during the Quit India Movement and after, for in 1943 he can be seen as doing strenuous work to mobilise the youth of the area towards the Congress ideals through Youth Movements.

All Travancore Tamilian Congress:

Though P.S.Mani left the State Congress in 1945 and founded the All Travancore Tamilian Congress with the help of the elite of the area like Sam Nathaniel, Fenn Russeliah, of Nagercoil, R. Velayudhaperumal of Erachakulam K.Nagalingam of Nagercoil and others, he cannot be dubbed as a Regionalist for his first love was always towards the national fervour to establish an Integrated Democratic India. One can illustrate this fact by his participation in hoisting the National Flag of the Indian National Congress at a place called Kottaram, a few kilometers South of Kanyakumari. In 1946, the British Government banned the hoisting of the National Flag of the Indian National Congress and the Government of Travancore also followed suit. A decision was taken to hoist the flag at different places and P.S.Mani violated the police ban and hoisted the flag at Kottaram, near Kanyakumari for which he was arrested and kept in the Kottar police lock-up for about a month. Thus it can be illustrated that Mani was not swept away from the mainstream of national interest, even after he had put in his heart and soul into the whirlpool of the struggle for the liberation of the Travancore Tamils to join the Tamil main kind of the Madras Presidency.

Conclusion:

To conclude, it may be worthwhile to note here that he was the only individual to catch the tenor of the arguments of the Diwan of Travancore C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer in the Sri Mulam Legislative Assembly against the outcome of the United Kerala move, in South Travancore. At that moment, the public opinion among the Tamils of South Travancore was divided between two groups, one supporting the State Congress blindly and another serving as the champions of C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer. His role in public life, as a nationalist might have began only after 1940 and that too, probably from the Quit India Movement of 1942. It seems that no one had any inclination to muster the strength of the Tamils to safeguard the Tamil interests in the same tempo as the Malayalees were towards the United Kerala Scheme except Mani supported by a group of elite having similar views, as we notice in the tenor of the discussion in the Nagercoil Division Committee meeting of the Travancore State Congress on 18th November, 1945. Thus, one can say that P.S.Mani was a nationalist in his heart of hearts with the courage and conviction to project the local interests, when they were jeopardized and to struggle for the preservation of their identities.

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