

KAMUDI TEMPLE ENTRY CASE - A STUDY

Dr. S. Sathiyasekaran

Assistant Professor in History,
Thiru. Kolanjiappar Govt. Arts College,
Vridhachalam

In November 1985, the Nadars of Kamudi petitioned to the Meenakshi Sundaraswara temple of the town, a temple under the trusteeship of the Raja of Ramnad M. Baskara Sethupathi for permission to conduct a ritual feast. Their petition was approved but it should be conducted so as not to contravene the custom and that Nadars should not enter into the temple. The Nadars asserted that it was the ancient privilege of the Nadars to worship in the temple. Vellasami Thevar, a hereditary ruler of a vast estate under the Raja of Ramnad formed an anti-Nadar combination to prevent the Nadars from exercising their rights. From his village of Pasumbon, two miles from Kamudi, he commanded the loyalty of the Marava community and demanded the difference of all classes. The Nadars refused to humble themselves before him with a tightening economic hold over the area. To bring the Nadars into line, under his leadership, the Maravars of the surrounding villages and the caste Hindus of Kamudi entered into a confederacy against the Nadars and covenanted themselves not to buy things from or sell things to them. The confederacy ended only with the arrest and five year imprisonment of Vellasami Thevar, who was the grandfather of the late Muthuramalinga Thevar, leader of the Maravar dominated Forward Block.¹ This incident kindled the spirit of the Maravara against Nadars.

On May 1897, a group of fifteen Nadars belonged to Erulappa Nadar family entered the Hindu temple of Meenakshi Sundareswara in Kamudi and himself performed puja to the chief deity. It was opposed by the Maravars and the Ramnad Zamindar M. Baskara Sethupathi filed a suit against fifteen of the Erulappa Nadar's family stating that they had polluted the temple and demanded the payment of Rs. 2,500/- towards ritual purification. On July 20th 1899, the court ruled that neither the defendants nor any member of their community were entitled to enter into any part of the temple of Meenakshi Sundareswara. The defendants were ordered to pay the sum of five hundred rupees for the necessary purification ceremonies in the temple. Each side was to bear its own costs.²

Under the legal justification by the section 15 of the Act V of 1861, when an area was disturbed, the inhabitants of the area should be called upon to bear the cost of additional police necessary for the preservation of peace.³ Accordingly an additional police force was quartered at Kamudi at the cost of its inhabitants for a period of five years from 5th November 1900.

Dissatisfied at the decree of the subordinate judge of Madurai, with fund of Rs. 42,000/- collected from members of the community, the Nadars appealed to the High Court of Judicature at Madras. The decision went against the Nadars and they then carried their case to the Privy Council in London. The Privy Council affirmed the decree of the subordinate judge of Madurai citing the decision of the High Court in

1908.⁴ The District Magistrate of Madurai recommended the extension of the stay of the public force for another term on the ground that the decision of the Privy Council on Kamudi Temple Entry case might cause trouble again.⁵ This case worsened further the relation between Nadars and Maravars.

The Sanskritised life and customs adopted by the Nadars in the latter part of the nineteenth century had not raised their position in the eyes of the caste Hindus, but had only subjected the community to ridicule and outraged protest. The mutual antagonism had by no means abated by the Kamudi judgement.⁶

DISCONTENT AT KALLOORANT

In 1913, seven Nadar residents of Kallorani village in Ramnad brought suit against the caste Hindus for a declaration that the Nadars were entitled to the use of the village tank and well which alone contained water during the period of scarcity. The casts Hindus including the Brahmins, Vellalars and Maravars contended that the well was reserved exclusively for the clean castes. The court issued a verdict in favour of the caste Hindus unholding the long established customs. This again increased the tension and finally culminated a conflict on August 1918 at Kamudi.⁷

THE COMMUNAL RIOT

In August 1918, the disturbance arose at the weekly market, when a Maravar merchant squatted upon a stall site prepared by the Nadars, they attacked the Maravars. Though further clashes were averted by themselves, the Maravars led by Ukkrapandian Thevar, the son of Vellasami Thavar wanted more definite action. As a clash was apprehended, the government brought a detachment of fifteen constables and their commander of Sivakasi special force on September 16. On the very next day a large group of Naravars gathered on the South east of Kamudi. They threatened the reserve police stationed at Kamudi and made them to keep mum. Then they commenced the plunder and riot.⁸ Five of the Sivakasi special force were butchered by the rioters. The Maravars then went up to the Bazar street and set fire to everything. Another small party of Sivakasi special force rushed to the scene and warned them that they would shoot them. It made them to retreat soon from that place.⁹ The District Magistrate of Ramnad sent a telegram to the government of India informing that two police killed and six injured. In view of the very serious situation message was sent to send two hundred troops immediately.¹⁰

On the following day there had been outbreak of Maravars at Perumali, one at Mettupatti near Mudukulattur and also at Sayalkudi.¹¹ All the Maravars in the neighbourhood of Kamudi had left their villages and wandering about in large gangs, intimidating the villagers and extorting money from them also stealing sheep and committing house breakings.

IMPOSITION OF PUNITIVE TAX

The District Magistrate of Ramnad and Inspector General of Police appealed to the government to the immediate reestablishment of an additional police force at Kamudi to restore peace and order in that areas.¹²

The government posted an additional police force at Kamudi on October 1918. The cost was recovered under section 15 of the Police Act V of 1861.¹³

About fifty eight villages in and around Kamudi were notified as the area of disturbance¹⁴ and the inhabitants of these places particularly Nadars and Maravars were asked to pay the punitive tax upto 31st March 1920.¹⁵ Thus the forces were retained year by year by the government by subsequent proclamations till W.P.A. Soundra Pandian, a member of the Legislative Council called for the repeal of punitive tax.

Certain Maravar inhabitants of the Ramnad district and Agamudaiyar Periya Velankudi village in Aruppukkottai Taluk submitted petitions to exempt them from the payment of the punitive tax. But their appeals were rejected.¹⁶ Agamudaiyar claimed that they were neither Maravar nor Nadars and why they should pay the tax. But the government rejected on the ground that they were only a civilised section of the southern Maravars and that some of them took active part in the late disturbances at Kamudi.¹⁷ The Seventh Conference of Nadar Mahajana Sanga, held at Sattur on June 1921 passed the resolution demanding the removal of punitive tax.¹⁸

REPEAL OF PUNITIVE TAX

On 21st January 1922, W.P.A. Soundra Pandian covered a resolution in the legislative council to repeal the government order for collecting a punitive tax from the people of Kamudi and surrounding villages. He described the whole Kamudi case vividly and put forth his opinion that the economic distress and the spirit of lawlessness engendered by the reverses of the war and the political agitation in the country that the disturbance took an anti-Nadar character at Kamudi was probably by accident rather than by design.¹⁹ In the council debates to regretted for the sufferings of the people due to the continued imposition of tax for three years. He gave the assurance that there would be no longer any conflict between the two communities.²⁰ W.P.A. Soundra Pandian thanked the efforts of Nadar Mahajana Sabha and Haravar Association for their attempts in establishing a friendly understanding between the Nadars and Maravars. He pointed out that the maintenance of order was the primary duty of the government, the expenses thereon should be the first charge on the revenue and so the cost of maintaining the special force at Kamudhi should be met from the general revenue. The Raja of Ramnad joined with his colleague, who was also a member of the legislative council, argued that if the general tax payer contributed to the Sivakasi additional force, the general tax payer should also pay for the additional force stationed at Kamudi. Though Sir Lionel Davidson, the Home member of the Legislative Council only promised a consideration of the question of continuance of the payment of tax till September, the motion was carried out with a great majority.

Though the resolution was carried the Special Magistrate in charge called on the people to pay the tax at Kamudi for the year 1922 and threatened to issue distress warrants if they refused to pay within a week W.P.A. Soundra Pandian again questioned about that matter in the Council met in March 1922 that if this would be the fate of the resolutions affecting the interests of the people he doubted the intentions of the government. On 22nd March 1922, W.P.A. Soundra Pandian put forth another resolution to scrap the allotment

of Rs. 20,344/- for the punitive police at Kamudi. His resolution was put to vote and got the majority support.²¹ Thus W.P.A. Soundra Pandian succeeded to bring out the abolition of the punitive tax and was able to establish temporary friendship between the Nadars and Maravars. To show their friendship, the Nadar Mahajana Sangam invited Raja rajeswara Muthuramalinga Sethupathi, the Raja of Ramnad to preside its annual Conference held at Sivakasi on 28th June 1922.

END NOTES

1. Robert L. Hardgrave, **The Nadars of Tamilnadu**, Bombay, 1969, pp. 99-101.
2. Kuru Thenmozhi, **Nadar Chamuga Varalaru (T)**, Madurai, 1969, p. 2.
3. Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council, Vol. IV, dated 21 January 1922, p. 2104.
4. Robert L. Hardgrave, **Op.cit.**, p. 126.
5. Inspector General's Letter, p. 6.
6. Robert L. Hardgrave, **Op.cit.**, p. 155.
7. **Ibid.**, p. 156.
8. District Magistrate of Ramnad's letter dated 26 September 1918, p. 5.
9. **Ibid.**, p. 2.
10. Telegraphic report dated 18 September 1918, No. 991.
11. All the Maravars in the neighbourhood of Kamudi had left their villages and wandering about in large gangs, intimidating the villagers and extorting money from the also stealing sheep and committing house breakings.
12. District Magistrate of Ramnad Letter dated 29 October 1918.
13. **G.O.** No. 2305, dated 11 October 1918 Home (Judicial) Department, Mis. Series.
14. **G.O.** No. 2673, dated 2 December 1918.
15. **G.O.** No. 2688, dated 21 November 1919.
16. **G.O.** No. 1293, dated 22 May 1920.
17. **G.O.** No. 2732, dated 1 November 1920.
18. Mahajanam, dated 29 June 1957, p. 1.
19. Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council, Vol. IV, dated 13 January 1922, p. 2104.
20. Robert, L. Hardgrave, **Op. cit.**, p. 157.
21. Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council, Vol. IV, January 22, p. 2108.