

# ROLE OF W.P.A. SOUNDRA PANDIAN IN NADAR MAHAJANA SANGAM - A STUDY

**S. Sathiyasekaran**

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

W.P.A. Soundra Pandian, as the General Secretary and the Vice President of Nadar Mahajana Sangam rendered great service to the welfare of the backward communities.<sup>1</sup> Since he was a strict follower of Self Respect principles he was highly critical on the dominance of high caste people particularly Brahmins. He demanded communal electorate and communal representations in the elections and in the government services for the backward communities particularly for the Nadar community. Under his influence the Sangam began its active work for the social upliftment and economic development of Nadar community through scholarship programme, rural development and other welfare activities.<sup>2</sup> W.P.A. Soundra Pandian served as a bridge to unite the Nadar community and thus gained its strength.

## Formation of Nadar Mahajana Sangam

The Nadars, one of the most enterprising communities of Tamil Nadu numbering about forty lakhs are settled in the Southern districts of South India.<sup>3</sup> At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century their economic position steadily increased and they wished to acquire social status. But their attempts were foiled. They realized that they should be organized into an association. The collective efforts of an organization would be more stronger than individual efforts. This resulted in forming the Nadar Mahajana Sangam in 1910.<sup>4</sup>

S. Ponnaya Nadar of Arumuganeri and A.M.P.S. Shanmuga Nadar of Sivakasi had the idea of forming a general association for the Nadars of Tamil Nadu. Both of them met T. Ratnasamy Nadar and V. Ponnusamy Nadar of Poraiyar in Tanjaore district and discussed about their plan. They decided to form an association with the name Nadar Mahajana Sangam.<sup>5</sup> They convened the first Nadar Mahajana Sangam Conference at Poraiyar in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> February 1910.<sup>6</sup> The office of the Sangam functioned at Poraiyar from 1910 to 1917. It was registered as Madurai Nadar Mahajana Sangam on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1918 under Act XXI of the year 1860 and shifted its headquarters to Madurai.<sup>7</sup> Ayya Nadar, and Marimuthu Nadar the father and close relative respectively of W.P.A. Soundra Pandian took substantial interest in the First Nadar Mahajana Sangam conference.<sup>8</sup>

## THE OBJECTIVES OF NADAR MAHAJANA SANGAM

The aims of Nadar Mahajana Sangam are as follows :

1. To protect the social, material and general welfare of the Nadars and interests and rights of the Community.
2. To take practical steps for the social, moral and intellectual advancement of the Nadars.
3. To start schools and colleges for imparting education to Nadar children and to help poor and deserving pupil with scholarship, books etc.
4. To encourage and promote commercial and industrial enterprise among the members of the community.
5. To foster and promote the spirit of union and solidarity among the members of the community and
6. To raise funds by subscription, donation or other means for the expenditure incurred in the above endeavours.<sup>9</sup>

### Representation in the Legislative Council

The first conference of Nadar Mahajana Sangam held at Poraiyar in 1910 expressed their loyalty and devotion to the Emperor of England Edward VII.<sup>10</sup> In the succeeding conferences of Nadar Mahajana Sangam the resolutions were passed demanding the representation of Nadar Community in the Madras Legislative Council.<sup>11</sup> Under the new Reforms Act of 1919, the Non-Brahmins had acquired the reservation of seats in the Legislative Council of 1920. Members of Madras Legislative Council would be both elected and nominated.<sup>12</sup> The Nadar Mahajana Sangam extended its support to the Justice Party in 1920 elections.

Nadar Mahajana Sangam selected S. Ponnaiya Nadar of Arumuganari to stand in Madurai-Ramnad-Tirunevvelly constituency. But he failed to get majority due to the small number of Nadars who met the necessary qualifications for voting.<sup>13</sup> On the recommendation of the Justice Party, the then Governor Wellington nominated W.P.A. Soundra Pandian of Pattiveeranpatti to the Madras Legislative Council in 20<sup>th</sup> December 1920.<sup>14</sup> He declared himself boldly in the Madras Legislative Council that he was the first representative of Nadar community and Nadar Mahajana Sangam.<sup>15</sup> He attended almost all the session of the Legislative Council regularly and put forth resolutions for the welfare of non-Brahmins. His reputation as a member of Legislative Council of Madras proved from the fact that he was continuously nominated from 1920 to 1933 except a gap of three years between 1923 to 1926.<sup>16</sup> He tried his level best to implement the aim of Nadar Mahajana Sangam in protecting the interest of Nadar Community by clamouring for the dissolution of punitive tax imposed on Nadars and Marvars of Kamudi in 1922.<sup>17</sup>

### NADARS IN GOVERNMENT SERVICES

In the early 1920's as the reservation of seats for non-brahmins began in government services, the Nadar Mahajana Sangam telegraphed the Governor, saying that the Nadars were among the most loyal enterprising communities in South India and in the forthcoming selection of candidates for I.C.S. scholarships and recruitment of District Munsifs, the government may be pleased to give serious consideration to the claims of Nadar community to representation in the public services.<sup>18</sup> In the Madras Legislative Council discussions, W.P.A. Soundra Pandian inquired the minister for Local Self Government,

the number of Nadars in the services of the lower levels of government.<sup>19</sup> In the council debates W.P.A. Soundra Pandian urged the government to appoint qualified Nadars to available positions as Sub Judge and District Munsif.

In the beginning of 1921, the Nadars had three elected members of the District Board in Tinnevely, three in Ramanathapuram and once in Madurai. For the Taluk Boards, there were four elected Nadars for Tinnevely, one nominated, two elected and four nominated for Ramanathapuram and three elected for Madurai. In the Municipal Councils, there was one nominated in Tinnevely district, six elected and five nominated in Ramanathapuram and in Madurai there were two elected Nadars.<sup>20</sup>

### **Shanar to Nadar**

The Nadars were described as Shanars in all government records and census reports before 1921. W.P.A. Soundra Pandian brought up the issue of census and the way in which the Nadars were described in the Nadars Legislative Council. He urged the government to rectify its mistakes listing of the Nadar community as Shanars.<sup>21</sup> On 8<sup>th</sup> April 1921, a Government Order was issued that the procedure followed at the recent census was to leave every one to write his caste name as he choose, adapting for use in the report that name which the majority of the caste actually written.<sup>22</sup> The order further indicated the government's decision to discontinue the indication of the traditional occupation of particular castes and the report only the actual occupation by which each person lived.<sup>23</sup>

Following the government's order regarding the census, the Sangam's Executive Council convened on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1921 decided to request the government to adopt the term Nadar-Kshatriyas instead of Shanars for use in all government records. It also established a committee of five members to meet the census superintendent to discuss about this matter. W.P.A. Soundra Pandian was leading member of this committee.<sup>24</sup> As a response to the Sangam's decision, the government recognized the simple term Nadar rather than Nadar Kshatriya and consequently on 7<sup>th</sup> July Government Order was issued to that effect.<sup>25</sup>

### **Soundra Pandian and Nadar Conferences**

W.P.A. Soundra Pandian attended all the conferences of Nadar Mahajana Sangam held from 1921 to 1953. At times, he was one of the organizers of the conference for he served as the member of the Reception Committee and Subject Committee which were used to be established prior to the organization of the conferences. He was both the member of the Reception Committee and Subject Committee in the VIII Conference and XIV Conference of Nadar Mahajana Sangam held at Sivakasi on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1931 and at Virudhunagar on March 1931 respectively.<sup>26</sup>

The duty of the Reception Committee was to provide a suitable place for holding meetings, to secure the delegates, to enlist local sympathy for the aims of the Sangam and to render an account of council of all receipts and payments in connection with the conference.<sup>27</sup> The duty of the Subject Committee was to decide the subjects to be discussed and the resolutions to be moved at the conference, to choose the speakers and to

give them timely intimation of subjects to be discussed the time when they would be called upon to speak and to settle a general programme of business in conjunction with the secretaries of the Sangam. Further, the committee was to meet daily during the conference and to prepare the agenda for the following day.<sup>28</sup> Almost in all the conferences W.P.A. Soundra Pandian served as the member of the Subject Committee. This fact alone was enough to prove his earnest interest in the Nadar Mahajana Sangam and its conferences. The tickets would be issued prior to the date of the conferences to the persons who wished to attend the conferences. W.P.A. Soundra Pandian never hesitated to shoulder the responsibility of selling more tickets and so he wanted the attendance of every person belonging to Nadar Community in the conference.<sup>29</sup>

W.P.A. Soundra Pandian brought a change in the rules and regulations of Nadar Mahajana Sangam. Before this change, it was usual that the person who presided over the conferences and the person who inaugurated the conferences belonged to other communities. An incident occurred in 1927 which turned the practice. R.K. Shanmugam Chattiar presided over the conference held at Kumbakonam in 1927.<sup>30</sup> In his presidential speech, he criticized the Nadar Mahajana Sangam as an association belonged to Nadar Community alone. On the same day he presided over another conference of Chettiars held at Kudanthai in which he called up all the members of that community to organize into group for their welfare. The contradictory statement of R.K. Shanmugam expressed in the meetings made W.P.A. Soundra Pandian to bring a change that the Nadars should alone be the presidents of the conferences. Another important incident that caused the introduction of this change was the refusal of C.D. Bok, a member of the Revenue Board at the last minute to open the conference due to Anti Nadars attitude.<sup>31</sup>

The resolutions introduced by W.P.A. Soundra Pandian at various conferences proved the active role he played in the conferences. Some of the important resolutions introduced by him were the following:

As a sponsor of Self Respect Movement in 1921, he passed the resolution conditioning Nadars not to give any kind of donation to the temples until disparity was removed.<sup>32</sup> At the Tenth Conference held at Madurai in 1925, he introduced the resolution urging the government to take steps for the abolition of the sale of intoxicant goods within ten years rapidly.<sup>33</sup> At the Eleventh Conference held during October 1927 at Kumbakonam, he moved the resolution requesting the government to appoint Nadar representatives in Taluk Boards, District Boards, Municipal councils and as Honorary Bench Magistrates.<sup>34</sup>

W.P.A. Soundra Pandian himself was the president of the Thirteenth Conference of Nadar Mahajana Sangam held on 29<sup>th</sup> April at Poriayar. It recognized the Self Respect principles and in his presidential address, he urged the people to accept and practice Self Respect principles in day to day life. He urged non Brahmanization in every ritual conducted by the people from their birth to death.<sup>35</sup> W.P.A. Soundra Pandian also presided over the Nadar Mahajana Sangam Branch Conference held at Sattankulam in 1921.<sup>36</sup>

## W.P.A. Soundra Pandian and the Executive Council

The management of the affairs of Nadar Mahajana Sangam was looked after by the Executive Council of Nadar Mahajana Sangam consisting of a president, a vice-president, two secretaries and less than twenty and not more than forty ordinary members. They were elected at the Annual General Body Meeting of the Nadar Mahajana Sangam and would held office for a period of one year or until the next Annual General Meeting would be held.<sup>37</sup> W.P.A. Soundra Pandian was the Vice-President from 1926 to 1928 and from 1932 to 1952 with the gap of nearly three years from 1947 to 1949. He served as the Secretary from 1928 to 1932.<sup>38</sup>

While he was the Secretary of Nadar Mahajana Sangam in 1928, the headquarters of Nadar Mahajana Sangam was shifted from Madurai to Pattiveeranpatti, the birth place of W.P.A. Soundra Pandian as decided in the Twelfth Annual General body meeting of Nadar Mahajana Sangam held at Aruppukkottai in 1928. It was an unusual transformation because never before and after such kind of transformation took place in the history of Nadar Mahajana Sangam.<sup>39</sup>

W.P.A. Soundra Pandian presided over the Executive Council of Nadar Mahajana Sangam held at Madurai several times and co-ordinaed the discussions to pass resolutions. Since he was the Vice-President of Nadar Mahajana Sangam for several years, he was the organizer of the various committees to enquire into the matters like collection of subscription, the disputes between the Nadars of Meenakshipuram of Tirumangalam taluk and other communities etc.<sup>40</sup>

### Educational Scheme of Nadar Mahajana Sangam

The main aim of Nadar Mahajana Sangam is to encourage and help all endeavours for the spread of education and enlightenment among the people.<sup>41</sup> W.P.A. Soundra Pandian believed that education was the instrument for the development of backward communities. He encouraged the educational schmes of Nadar Mahajana Sangam in every possible way.

The idea of scholarship programme originated in 1920 was developed rapidly in the history of Nadar Mahajan Sangam. Two persons donated sixty rupees to a poor student. Then the scholarship was obtained and met from donations and the Nadar Mahajana Sangam Fund.<sup>42</sup> Since the scholarship fund was not enough to clear all the application, W.P.A. Soundra Pandian donated hundred and eight rupees in 1925 in the name of Abiramiyammal Scholarship Fund. Of course it was the highest amount because others donated only thirty two rupees.<sup>43</sup> To get more fund, the plan of collecting fund through selling lottery ticket was inaugurated in 1926. An Educational Committee was appointed to deal with this programme. As a member of this committee, W.P.A. Soundra Pandian devoted his services toward education.<sup>44</sup> The purpose of this committee was to foster educational activity among the members of Nadar community, to promote undertaking for the spread of knowledge, to help the management of schools maintained for the benefit of Nadar children and to manage any schools that may be placed under its control by the council.<sup>45</sup> The Educational Committee took necessary steps to solve the problems of Nadar Girls High School of Sattur. On



14<sup>th</sup> June 1948, permission was granted to started M.S.P. Senthil Kumara Nadar Middle School at Mallankinaru. But on 24<sup>th</sup> June this permission was cancelled. So on 17<sup>th</sup> July this committee interfered in this matter and met the Educational Director to solve this matter. As a result of this meeting, permission was once again provided by the Educational Director.<sup>46</sup> The Madurai Nadars petitioned Nadar Mahajana Sangam to start a High School at Madurai. The committee took necessary steps to construct a school. This committee helped to construct many Elementary Schools such as Vathirayiruppu Nadar Elementary School, Sankara Vilas Primary School at Irulappapuram near Kottar in South Travancore, Arangulam Nadar Kshatriya Elementary School and Mangapuram Nadar Elementary School.<sup>47</sup>

Likewise, a Scholarship Committee was also created to device a scheme of scholarships for Nadar youths in schools and colleges. It secured financial aid to the scheme from the Scholarship Fund and Lottery Chit programme. It selected deserving youths and they were awarded money to pursue education.<sup>48</sup> W.P.A. Soundra Pandian served as a member of this committee from 1921 to 1951. This committee looked into the educational loan applications and school financial aid applications and decided who were eligible to get loans and financial aid.<sup>49</sup> The first lottery was conducted on 1926, second on 1930 and third on 1933. The net amount got from lottery chit was rupees seventy thousand three hundred and eighty six. The total number of students who got scholarships from 1920 to 1953 were five hundred and sixty three.<sup>50</sup> The scholarship was extended to the students of Madras, Thiruchirappalli, Madurai, Trivandrum, Palayamcottai, Coimbatore, Tirumangalam and Sattur.<sup>51</sup> Both W.P.A. Soundra Pandian and M.S.P. Senthil Kumara Nadar of Virudhunagar extended a loan amounted to twenty thousand rupees each for the purpose of conducting second lottery chit in 1928.<sup>52</sup> W.P.A. Soundra Pandian helped to sell all the lottery tickets. Only three series of lottery chits were conducted because Indian Panal Code forbade such kind of collecting fund by private persons and private associations.<sup>53</sup> W.P.A. Soundra Pandian advised to construct schools not in the heart of the city but in the outside town. W.P.A. Soundra Pandian agreed to donate three hundred rupees each year to poor students scholarship fund from 1952.<sup>54</sup>

### **The Construction of Senthil Kumara Nadar College**

In response to the generous offer of a sum of two lakhs of rupees announced by M.S.P. Senthil Kumara Nadar towards founding of a college at the Eighteenth Conference of Nadar Mahajana Sangam held at Kovilpatti on June-July 1947, Dr. A. Lakshmanasamy mudaliar, the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Madras announced the decision of the Syndicate authorising him to grant temporary affiliation to new collages in view of the plight of thousands of students who could not get admission in the then existing colleges for penalty of seats.<sup>55</sup> The leaders of the Nadar community conscious of the urgent need of starting a college at Virudhunagar not the Vice-chancellor immediately and began to make necessary arrangements to get sanction and approval of the University of Madras to start a college at Virudhunagar. An Executive Council Meeting of Nadar Mahajana Sangam was held under W.P.A. Soundra Pandian on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1947 to discuss the matter in detail. A Governing Body for the college was constituted with W.P.A. Soundra Pandian, as the president and M.S.P. Senthil Kumara Nadar as the patron.<sup>56</sup>

The Governing Body secured spacious grounds and the bungalow of Madurai Mills adjoining to Virudhunagar railway station for a nominal rent and put up thatched sheds for additional lecture halls and hostels and thus Senthil Kumara Nadara College Sprang into life with Prof. J. Franco, as the Principal of the College.<sup>57</sup> Later on M.S. Periyasami of Virudhunagar donated fifty acres of land in Aruppukottai road. On 10<sup>th</sup> September 1949, the foundation stone was laid down by P.S. Kumarasamy Raja, the then Chief Minister of Madras in a function presided over by the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee president K. Kamaraj.<sup>58</sup>

Since W.P.A. Soundra Pandian was the representative of Nadar Mahajana Sangam in the Legislative Council of Madras in 1928, he was nominated to the select committee which was established to discuss the bill inaugurating a new university near Chidambaram. This university came into existence due to the generosity of Sir Annamalai Chettiar the founder and manager of Sri Meenakshi College at Chidambaram.<sup>59</sup>

Sundaran and his wife Visalatchi of Pattiveeranpatti died leaving the properties amounted to forty thousand rupees without any heir. W.P.A. Soundra Pandian passed a resolution in the meeting of the Executive Council of Nadar Mahajana Sangam to build a High School by using those properties for the sake of education. Thus W.P.A. Soundra Pandian laid the foundation stone to Sundara Visalatchi Vidyalaya at Pattiveeranpatti,<sup>60</sup> and he also helped to establish a High School at Theni to educate the people.<sup>61</sup>

### W.P.A. Soundra Pandian's Role in Resolving Disputes

As it was decided in the Sixth Conference of Nadar Mahajana Sangam ten per cent out of the net profit of Nadar Bank of Tuticorin should be given to Sangam for educational purposes. W.P.A. Soundra Pandian, a member of this committee met the Bank Directors, and obtained for Sangam the proper share regularly.<sup>62</sup> W.P.A. Soundra Pandian was a Champion in resolving differences between the Nadars of Melapettai and Kilapettai Nadras of Madurai, between Nadras of Sinnayapuram,<sup>63</sup> between the Nadras of Nagalapuram Pallivasalpatti<sup>64</sup> and between the Nadars of Kalloorani,<sup>65</sup> and thus he promoted unity among Nadar community. He also established peace between the Nadars and other communities of Vaiyur Meenashipuram of Tirumangalam Taluk.

### END NOTES

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4. Robert L. Hardgrave, **The Nadars of Tamilnadu**, Bombay, 1969, pp. 99-101.
5. Mahajanam, dated 1 October 1953, p. 3.
6. The Proceedings of General Body Meeting of Nadar Mahajana Sanga, 1910.
7. Mahajanam, dated 14 June 1949, p. 5.
8. The Proceedings of the 1 General Body Meeting of Nadar Mahajana Sangam, 1910.
9. Rules and Regulations of Nadar Mahajana Sangam, p. 14.
10. The Proceedings of the General Body meeting of Nadar Mahajana Sangam, 1910.
11. Mahajanam, dated 13 April 1957, p. 1.
12. **Ibid.**, p. 170.
13. Letter written by S.A. Ramachandra Togo, the then General Secretary of Nadar Mahajana Sangam, dated 9 September 1974.
14. Nadar Kula Mitran, dated February 1920.
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16. Madras Legislative Council Proceedings, dated from 1920 to 1936.

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20. **Ibid.**,
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25. G.O. No. 785, dated 7 July 1921.
26. Nadar Kula Mitran, dated March 1931, p. 3.
27. Rules and Regulations of Nadar Mahajana Sangam, Madurai, 1919, p. 6.
28. **Ibid.**, p. 7.
29. Nadar Kula Mitran, dated March 1931.
30. Diary of S.A. Muthu, dated 6 July 1927.
31. A. Kesavamoorthy, **Op.cit.**, p. 72.
32. **Mahajanam**, dated 29 June 1937, p.1.
33. **Ibid.**, dated 17 August 1957, p.1.
34. **Ibid.**, dated 1 October 1957, p.1.
35. **Madar Kula Mitram**, dated 29 April 1932, p.3.
36. **Katatrivamitram**, dated september 1921, p. 34.
37. Rules and Regulations of Nadar Mahajana Sangam, Madurai, 1919, p.12.
38. A Booklet issued by the Nadar Mahajana Sangam, Madurai, 1932, p.12.
39. Annual Report of Nadar Mahajana Sangam, May 1929.
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41. **Ibid.**, dated 31 July 1951, p.3.
42. **Ibid.**, dated 16 July 1953, p.4.
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44. **Nadar Kula Mitran**, dated 29 June 1924, p.4.
45. **Ibid.**, p.9.
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49. Annual Reports of Nadar Mahajana Sangam.
50. Mahajanam, dated 16 July 1953, p. 4.
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52. **Ibid.**, dated 19 November 1928.
53. Mahajanam, dated 7 October 1928.
54. Mahajanam, dated 17 August 1951.
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56. Mahajanam, dated 17 July 1951.
57. V.V.R. Barattu Malar, p. 288.
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61. Mahajanan, dated 14 March 1954.
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63. Nadar Kula Mitran, dated 13 October 1930, p. 5.
64. S.A. Muthu's diary, dated 31 December 1929.
65. **Ibid.**, dated 23 August 1930.