

HISTORY OF VILAVANCODE THROUGH THE AGES

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Register number: 20113111091009

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ABSTRACT

Vilavancode Taluk is one of the four Taluks of present Kanyakumari District of Tamilnadu. Till 1956 it was under Travancore. After 1956 November 1st by the State Reorganization Commission this part of Travancore was merged with Tamilnadu. According to the 2011 census, Vilavancode taluk had a population of 587,924 with 290,860 males and 297,064 females. The Western Ghats add beauty to this Taluk. Coffee, tea, coco, cardomom, cloves, pepper, and rubber are cultivated in the hilly and mountainous tracks. Vilavancode Taluk gets the benefit of both the south – west and north – east monsoons. Rainfall in this Taluk is regular and steady. The Kothayar Irrigation Scheme, the Kothayar left bank scheme, Pechipparai Dam, Chittar and Pattanankal scheme, Vizathathurai lift irrigation scheme are some of the important schemes. The people of this Taluk belong to several castes such as Brahmins, Nairs, Nadars, Kurupus, Fishermen, Ezhavas, Muslims, Parayas and the Pulayas. Agriculture is the important occupation of the people of Vilavancode Taluk. Paddy, coconut, plantain and arcanut are the principal crops cultivated in the low land and pepper in the middle land. Vilavancode Taluk has no independent history of her own. Its history is mingled with the history of Travancore. There were numerous cottage industries in Vilavancode Taluk. The most important of them were handloom weaving, coir making, palmyrah based products. As bee-keeping became a profitable cottage industry, the Marthandam YMCA made a carpentry unit to make bee-hives with teak wood. The Christian missionaries too took effort to spread western education in their respective areas and they started many schools. The successive government of Tamilnadu have entrusted many welfare works to the Vilavancode Panchayat. The development of women and children's scheme was one of the important schemes. The Government introduced this scheme with an objective of developing women and children in the rural areas.

Key words: Vilavancode Taluk - Reorganization - Irrigation - Agriculture - cottage industries - Christian missionaries - community - programme - Kanikkars - Panchayat Raj.

Introduction:

Vilavancode Taluk is one of the four Taluks of present Kanyakumari District of Tamilnadu. It is situated on the western part of the present Kanyakumari district, bounded by western ghats in the North, the Arabian Sea in the South, Kalkulam Taluk in the East and Neyyattinkara Taluk of Kerala state in the west. During the administration of Maharaja Karthigai Thirunal (1758- 1798), he divided the kingdom into three divisions, of which Vilavancode Taluk formed a part of Southern division. Till 1956 it was under Travancore. After 1956 November 1st by the State Reorganization Commission this part of Travancore was merged with Tamilnadu. The total area of Vilavancode Taluk is 451.7 sq. K.M. or 145.1/2 square miles of which 141 square miles are cultivated. Nearly 37.3/4 square miles consist of hills and mountains, and remaining area covers an uneven surface principally overrun with forest. According to the 2011 census, Vilavancode taluk had a population of 587,924 with 290,860 males and 297,064 females.

Physiography:

The Western Ghats add beauty to this Taluk. Coffee, tea, coco, cardomom, cloves, pepper, and rubber are cultivated in the hilly and mountainous tracks. Teak, black wood, ebony, vengai, rose wood and Sandal wood are some of the important timber trees found in the hills. Arukani and Pathukani mountain ranges are the most important mountains in this Taluk and noted for the habitats of Kanis a group of tribals. Considerable portion of this Taluk covered with forest which though appears flat is indeed rugged and intersected by ravine and water courses forming the sources of the rivers running to the south. Small jungles are seen in this Taluk near Arukani, Patthukani, Kaliyal, Ambadi and Kattuva mountain ranges. The plains are filled with rubber plantations, jack trees that produces jack fruit, that the people enjoys as a substitute to food products at times. There are coconut groves and other costly woods that are used for building. The interior plains too, filled with paddy fields, plantain and tapioca makes the life of the people comfortable.

Climate:

South-west monsoon is known as Edavapathi in Malayalam brings rain to this region. It begins in May-June and lasts till August. Similarly the North-East monsoon is known as Thulavarsham after the name of third Malayalam month Thulam brings copious rain. It begins in October and lasts till the middle of November. Edavapathi and Thulavarsham are the two traditional words that the traditional agricultural population commonly uses. Vilavancode Taluk gets the benefit of both the south – west and north – east monsoons. Rainfall in this Taluk is regular and steady. In the months of June – July and October – November Vilavancode Taluk gets maximum rain fall. Generally, the climate of Vilavancode Taluk is neither cool nor hot. The South west breeze keeps the temperature normal throughout day and night. The south – west monsoon and the North – East monsoon provide a pleasant climate. A warm humidity is the prevailing characteristic of the climate in the low lands of this Taluk. Extremes of temperature are seldom experienced.

Irrigation Facilities:

River Thamraparani which flows through this Taluk is formed by the union of Kodayar and the Paraliyar. It divides this Taluk from Kalkulam Taluk and takes a bend to the south west and flows into the Arabian Sea near Thengapattanam and forms a lagoon that is useful for the people. Generally the river Thamraparani is a rainfed river. During south west and north east monsoons, it overflows and causes much damage to the lives and properties of those who live on the banks of the river especially at the northern part of Vilavancode Taluk. During the rest of the period the river is almost dry. Chittar dam I and II supply needed water for irrigation. The coastal area of Vilavancode Taluk stretches 40 km. The Kothayar Irrigation Scheme, the Kothayar left bank scheme, Pechipparai Dam, Chittar and Pattanankal scheme, Vizathathurai lift irrigation scheme are some of the important schemes that were introduced by the Government of Tamilnadu and the Central Government. These schemes not only supplied water to the water starved parts of Vilavancode Taluk.

Society:

The people of this Taluk belong to several castes such as Brahmins, Nairs, Nadars, Kurupus, Fishermen, Ezhavas, Muslims, Parayas and the Pulayas. The Brahmins held high posts in the social ladder. Next to the Brahmins the Nairs claimed high status in the society. The Ezhavas, the Nadars, Fishermen, the Pulayas and the Parayas formed the lower strata of the society. The Parayas and the Pulayas are engaged in agriculture. Fishing in rivers, streams and ponds are their past time. They use baskets and hooks for fishing. The Kanis or Kanikars are wild but inoffensive hill tribe found in Arukani, Kadayal, Patthukani and Orunooram Vayal. Their huts are made up of bamboo and reeds. Hunting and raising crops on the available plains in the hilly tracts is their main life. No other hill tribe has greater wealth as the Kanikkars do possess. Their colourful traditions have been transferred from generation to generation in popular songs. The fishermen form a considerable strength of the population. They go into the far and deep sea for fishing and eke their livelihood.

Occupation:

Agriculture is the important occupation of the people of Vilavancode Taluk. Besides agriculture, small scale industries like palmyrah fibre industry, jaggery, mat-making, brush making, weaving, copra-making, coir industry, embroidery, carpentry and smithy and fishing are carried on by the people. Paddy, coconut, plantain and arcanut are the principal crops cultivated in the low land and pepper in the middle land. In a few selected areas betel leaves are being cultivated. The major portion

of the dry land of this Taluk is suitable for tapioca cultivation. Besides this fruit bearing trees like jack, and mango are found here and there. The cultivation of pulses like horsegram, redgram, greengram and blackgram add to the economic stability of this Taluk. Kaliyal, Ambadi Estate, Kanthimathi Gardens, Palali Estate and Vaikundam Estates are some of the important rubber plantations in this Taluk and they improve the economic activities of the people of Vilavancode Taluk.

Political Background:

Vilavancode Taluk has no independent history of her own. Its history is mingled with the history of Travancore. The early history of Travancore traces its descendant from the Chera dynasty, one of the three great dynasties of ancient Tamil country. From the 11th to 16th century the Nambudiris ruled Travancore. The Pandyas and the cholas extended their sway up to Kuzhithurai, which was a part of Vilavancode Taluk. The accounts left behind by the foreign travellers in India and the Tamil Sangam works throw light on the ancient history of South Travancore. According Ptolemy, an European visitor, the Kingdom of the Ays flourished to the south of Chera kingdom and extended up to Kanyakumari. The important Ay Kings who ruled over Travancore were Ay Andiran, Titiyan, Atiyan, Titiyan II, Nanchil Porunan. The year 1623 A. D., was the advent of Thirumala Nayak. He came with his force to Nanchilnadu. In 1655 A. D., Padmanabhapuram become the seat of Thirumala Nayak. In later times Travancore was divided into a number of small states and principalities.

The Portuguese, the Dutch and the English established their commercial relations with the states. The authentic political history of Vilavancode began with Maharaja Marthanda Varma (1721. A.D. to 1758 AD). He consolidated the Kingdom by the conquests and dedicated the state to Sri Padmanabha Swami the tutelary deity and ruled as Padmanabhadasa. Karthigai Thirunal Rama Varma, better known as Dharma Raja (1758 AD to 1798 AD) succeeded Marthanda Varma. Balarama Varma succeeded Dharma Raja in 1798 A.D. He entrusted the administration in the hands of his evil ministers. Rani Lekshmi Bai (1810 A.D. to 1815 A.D.) was crowned after the death of Balarama Varma. When the political supremacy was established by the British, Colonel Munro, the resident suppressed the councils and organization of the Nairs so that they would not be a danger to the British political supremacy. She witnessed improvement in trade and she enforced market regulations. Gowri Parvathi Bai (1815 A.D. to 1829 A.D.) succeeded to the throne. She abolished export and import duties and issued a proclamation permitting the people to have tiled roofs for their houses. The reign of Swathi Thirunal (1829 A.D. to 1847 A.D.) represented a period of enlightenment. His successor Utharam Thirunal Marthandavarma (1847 A.D. to 1860 A.D.) issued a royal proclamation in 1853, for the emancipation of slaves. The next ruler Ayilyam Thirunal (1860 A.D. to 1880 A.D.) reduced the land tax, opened schools and hospitals. He also improved irrigation and communication facilities. Ayilyam Thirunal was succeeded by Rama Varma Visakam Thirunal (1880 A.D. to 1885A.D.) He re-organized the force and reformed the judicial department.

The period of Sri Mulam Thirunal (1885 A.D. to 1924 A.D.) witnessed remarkable developments in the field of agriculture, education, communication and medical services. The last ruler of the dynasty was Sri Chitra Thirunal Balarama Varma. While he was a boy of 12 years old his father Srimulam Thirunal died. So Maharani Sethu Lekshmi Bai (1924 A.D. to 1931 A.D.) was proclaimed as a regent. With the advent of the English East India Company, in the year 1600, Travancore attracted the attention of the foreign masters. In course of time the British exercised their influence over Travancore through the residents, who served as the channel of communication between Travancore and British India. Travancore came under the subsidiary system on July 1st 1949, the states of Travancore and Cochin were integrated and the new state was called Travancore Cochin. In February 1955 the congress ministry headed by Panampilli Govinda Menon assumed office. But the cabinet fell in March 1956. The fall of the Panampilli ministry was followed by president's rule in the state. In 1956 under the state re-organization Vilavancode Taluk along with Thovalai, Kalkulam and Agasteeswaram became a part of the Madras state.

Local Self Government:

From 1956 onwards Vilavancode Taluk became a separate Taluk under Kanyakumari District. This Taluk consists of five firkas, namely Vilavancode, Edaicode, Arumanai, Painkulam and Midalam. There are eight sub-divisions in this Taluk, such as Vilavancode, Pacode, Kunnathoor,

Painkulam, Kalia, Arudesapattu and Yeludesapattu. Total number of Villages found in this Taluk is 23. There are 18 Town Panchayats and 26 Village Panchayats covered by three Panchayat Unions viz. Melpuram, Munchirai and Killiyoor. The Mountainous region of Vilavancode Taluk is very extensive. The local self government or the Panchayat Raj was organised even from the early period of history. This system links every village with the national economy for the welfare of the people. The Panchayats and Panchayat Unions were formed only in 1956.

The Panchayat Unions concentrated on the implementation of community development programme and national extension service. After 1958, the government attached more importance to the programme. Vilavancode Taluk has three Panchayat Unions, viz. Melpuram, Killiyoor and Munchirai. The Block Samiti in the Panchayat Unions looked after school education in the lower level other than the schools run by the government, philanthropic organizations, and individuals. The sanitation work, fight against the contagious diseases and providing drinking water are some of the works done in the Municipality. Thus, the Panchayat Raj and the Municipality have done a good job to protect the welfare of the people. The administration is vested in the hands of an elected Council and they supervise the work. It is the responsibility of both the Municipal and Panchayat councilors to look after the schemes implemented properly. Thus, the schemes of the local self governments proved that India lives in villages. The Operation Enlightenment or Arivoli Iyakkam that was introduced in 1991 was an important programme introduced by the Government of India. The mantle of execution of this programme fell on the Unions and the Panchayats. This programme was meticulously carried out and successfully managed. Thus in enlightening the people the Panchayat Unions took keen interest and successfully completed the programmes and made the people hundred percent literate. In implementing welfare measures to the Panchayats and the Panchayat Unions did their job well.

Economic Development:

There were numerous cottage industries in Vilavancode Taluk. The most important of them were handloom weaving, coir making, palmyrah based products. During the early period, Palliyadi, Theruvukadai, Thengapattanam, Karungal were important centres of weaving. The average earning of a weaver was 8 to 15 per month during those days. The industry declined owing to the poverty of the weavers. Now the markets are flooded with machine made cloths and khadhar cloth. This work suffered for want of finance and labour force. Coir making also provided employment for many people along the coastal regions of Vilavancode Taluk. The Palmgur Industry was one of the important palmyrah based small scale industries carried on in Vilavancode Taluk. The government has taken steps for the improvement of this industry. The All India Village Industries Association had done a lot in the matter of resuscitation of palmgur as cottage industry.

As bee-keeping became a profitable cottage industry, the Marthandam YMCA made a carpentry unit to make bee-hives with teak wood. The industry started functioning with forty-seven carpenters who were given regular jobs. Unfortunately due to unavoidable circumstances, the carpentry unit was closed. It was an irreparable loss for the poor people and no steps were taken to revive the carpentry unit. Vilavancode Taluk and its surrounding areas are notable for cashew. But the villagers did not know how to fry the nuts without burning the ends. The Marthandam YMCA taught the village folk to separate the nuts from the shell without any damage. The YMCA made arrangements to purchase the cashew nuts from the rural people. Only the first quality of nuts was accepted. The nuts were sent to many cities of India and the villagers were paid through the co-operative society. The main product of export was coir because the hinder lands are fertile, producing coconut, palmyrah products, and tapioca.

Education:

Vilavancode Taluk was an educationally backward area. Traditional system of education was prevailing in this Taluk. The Christian missionaries too took effort to spread western education in their respective areas. They started many schools. Though the Catholics came earlier, the respect of the introduction to modern education goes to the Protestants. Before 1956, the Protestant Missionary, Rev. Mead, stationed at Neyyoor looked after the Missionary work at Marthandam. Afterwards Rev. Newport and Mrs. Newport, Rev. Emlyn and Mrs. Emlyn, Rev. Abbs and Mrs. Abbs, Rev. Sinclair and Mrs. Sinclair and a host of missionaries worked there and started many schools both for boys and girls. This enabled the Christians to start a College at Marthandam in 1962. Thus the Protestants

brought social awakening in Vilavancode Taluk. The Queens such as Rani Lakshmi Bai and Rani Parvathi Bai, along with the Resident Col. Munro gave encouragement to the Christian missionaries in their educational enterprises.

After India's independence, the government took many steps to promote the educational system. Article 45 of the Indian Constitution insists that the state should strive to provide free and compulsory education for all children upto the age of fourteen years. There are forty six government schools and thirty three government aided schools in these Unions. Above this thirty three schools and primary schools, thirty schools are middle schools, eleven schools are high schools and five schools are higher secondary schools. Thiru. K. Kamaraj, the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu did commendable service to the Development of education in Vilavancode Taluk. He was responsible for the creation of many government schools in the unions. He created Block Samiti to accelerate educational activities in Vilavancode Taluk. The educational endeavours of the Christians in general brought great changes in Vilavancode Taluk. Thousands of graduates and postgraduates of various disciplines have come up and that made a tremendous change in the social life of Vilavancode Taluk. Thus the educational programmes changed the people from rustic nature to angular nature.

Welfare Measures:

The successive government of Tamilnadu have entrusted many welfare works to the Vilavancode Panchayat. The development of women and children's scheme was one of the important schemes. The Government introduced this scheme with an objective of developing women and children in the rural areas. The Indian government felt that the upliftment of rural areas was given much importance because it felt that India lives not in urban areas, but in the rural areas. A group of fifteen married women are organized into a group and should be in the name of Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA). This group is given financial assistance and encouraged to start a small scale industry. Between 1994 to 2000 A.D., more than fifty centres were started in the Panchayat Unions. The women were encouraged to prepare garments making, fish pickle making, tailoring, and financial assistance was given to run ration shops in the rural areas. The Panchayat Unions started many other women's welfare schemes, such as Movaloor Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Memorial Marriage Assistance Scheme, Marriage Assistance Scheme to the daughters of poor widows, Anjuham Ammaiyar Memorial Inter-caste Marriage Assistance scheme, Dr. Muthulekshmi Reddy Memorial Matrimony Assistance scheme, Girl child protection scheme and Assistance to start tailoring units. The Panchayat Unions provide good drinking water, roads and street lights in the rural areas, protect health and sanitation of the people, looks after irrigation to the rural areas, train the physically challenged for self employment, encourage small savings and many other programmes for the welfare of the people of the rural areas in their respective areas. Thus, the welfare schemes, irrigational and educational schemes of these Panchayat Unions gave face lift to the Vilavancode Taluk. Besides these regular schemes, Member of Parliament Financial Assistance Scheme, M.L.A. Assistance Schemes are some of the important schemes of the Panchayat Unions of the Vilavancode Taluk.

Conclusion:

Vilavancode Taluk, one of the four Taluks of the present Kanyakumari district attained independence only after 1956. After 1956, Vilavancode Taluk experienced administrative changes. Consequently feudalism was abolished and the agricultural population began to feel free. The role of N.G.Os such as the Y.M.C.A., the Palmyrah Workers Development Society, the Centre for Rural Employment and Education Development have done commendable job for the rural development in the Vilavancode Taluk. The Panchayat Unions concentrated on the implementation of community development programme and national extension service. After 1958, the government attached more importance to the programme. In implementing welfare measures to the Panchayat and the Panchayat Unions did their job well. Providing good drinking water, forming new roads to reach villages without road facilities, protected health and sanitation, training the physically challenged, fight against contagious diseases are some of the works of the Panchayat Unions and the Union Councils.

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