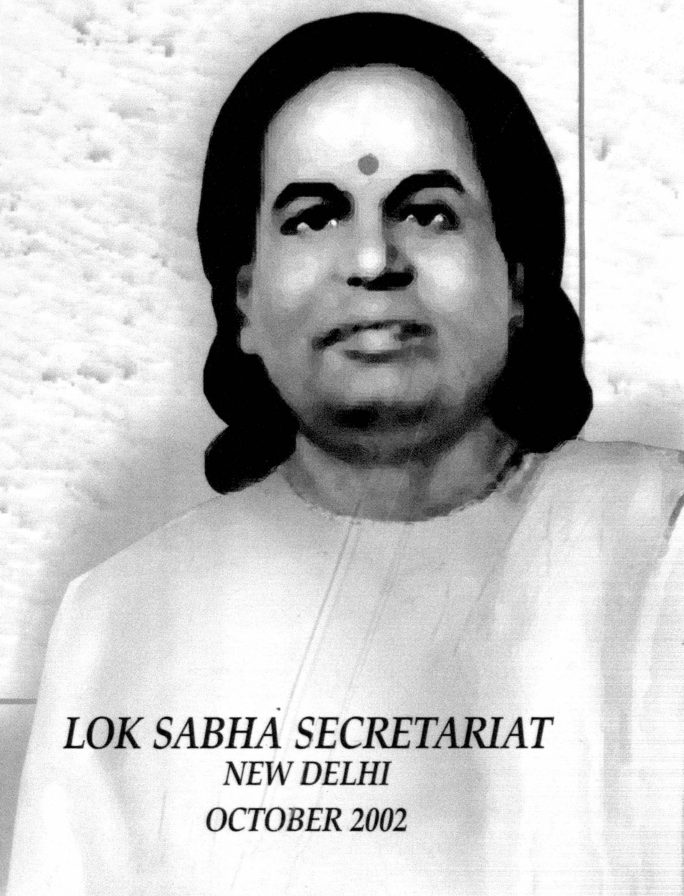




*Pasumpon
Muthuramalinga
Thevar*



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI
OCTOBER 2002**

PASUMPON MUTHURAMALINGA THEVAR

**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
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PREFACE

An outstanding leader of modern India, Shri Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar was a versatile personality. He was a renowned freedom fighter, political activist, parliamentarian and social and religious reformer. A grateful nation honours the memory of Shri Thevar on 1 October, 2002 when the Hon'ble President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam will unveil his statue in the Parliament House Complex. The statue, sculpted by the eminent sculptor Kishore J. Nagappa, has been donated by the former Union Minister, Dr. Subramanian Swamy. We are grateful to him for donating the statue.

To mark the occasion, the Lok Sabha Secretariat is also bringing out this booklet containing the Profile of Shri Thevar. We hope it will be found useful and informative by all.

NEW DELHI;
18 *September*, 2002

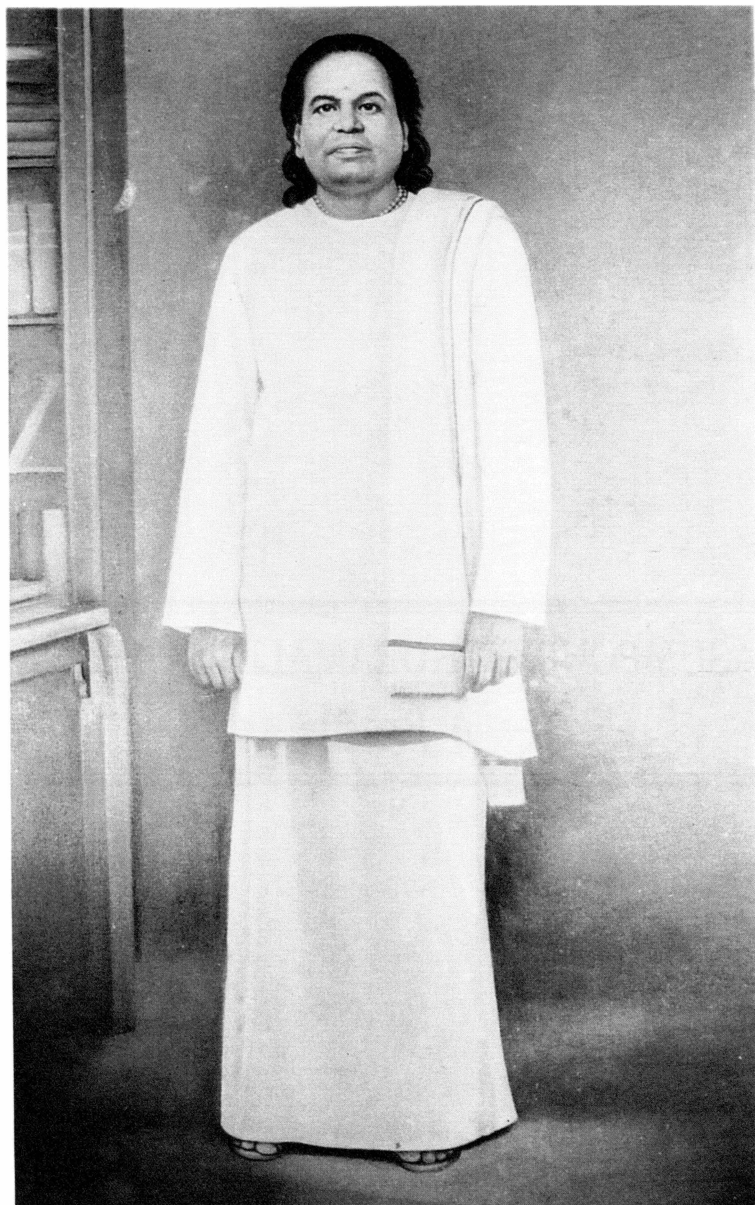
G.C. MALHOTRA,
Secretary-General,
Lok Sabha.

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PASUMPON MUTHURAMALINGA THEVAR

— A Profile —



PASUMPON U. MUTHURAMALINGA THEVAR
(30 October 1908—30 October 1963)

Pasumpon U. Muthuramalinga Thevar was an outstanding son of Mother India. A versatile personality—freedom fighter, political activist, parliamentarian, social and religious reformer, trade union leader and orator—Thevar was a legend in his own life time and continues to be so even after nearly four decades of his death. Thevar was an active political worker for whom nationalism was an article of faith. He also symbolized the best of Indian spiritual and cultural traditions. Thevar was, indeed, a model for any human being to follow and emulate. Though born in a very wealthy family who could afford to live in luxury, he preferred to lead a simple life. He was an embodiment of virtue, service, truth, sacrifice, wisdom, courage, charity and nobility. More than anything else, he steadfastly practised what he preached and preached what he practised.

Early Days

Born on 30 October 1908 in the small village of Pasumpon near Kamuthi in Ramanathapuram District of Tamil Nadu, Muthuramalinga Thevar was the son of Ukkirapandia Thevar and Indirani Deviyar. His father had obtained a vast area of about thirty-two villages from the Raja of Ramnad. The great grandfather of Thevar, Athi Muthuramalinga Thevar was also a recipient of appreciation and bounty of the Raja of Ramnad. Thevar's forefathers were all known for their personal valour and heroism. In fact, the Marvars, the community to which Thevar belonged, are historically an ancient warrior community of the South. Thevar was brought up by a Muslim lady after his mother died when he was just six months old.

After he finished his primary education in the elementary school at Kamuthi run by American missionaries, Thevar was admitted to the Pasumalai Mission High School near Madurai. Though he did not step into the corridors of a college, his school education widened his scholastic powers. With wide scholarship in English and Tamil, he studied with great interest biographies of great revolutionary leaders and religious treatises, besides

contemporary political problems. At this juncture, Thevar was fascinated by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and the noted Tamil savant Ramalinga Adigal. He learnt the role of his family and began to acquaint himself with public life. He was available to all castes, to everyone's social and cultural problems, and the problems of all in the area. Soon, he earned the affectionate epithet *Chinnaiah* for his services to his people.

His Political Affiliations

At the early age of nineteen, Thevar entered politics and was associated with the Congress party. His political guru was Shri S. Srinivasa Iyengar. He was greatly influenced by revolutionary leaders like Tilak, Savarkar, Chittaranjan Das, Lala Lajpat Rai and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. For about a decade, he remained in the Congress party, worked vigorously and organised the party in the southern districts of the then Madras State. At the young age of 27, he became one of the frontline leaders of the Congress party. In the year 1935, at a political conference held in Coimbatore which was presided over by the veteran leader of the Congress party, Shri C. Rajagopalachari, Thevar, on the request of his guru Shri Srinivasa Iyengar, delivered a very inspiring and forceful speech with all his rhetoric power and made the thrilled audience listen to him with rapt attention. From then onwards, Thevar's name became popular throughout Tamil Nadu as a popular leader and a brilliant orator. He toured throughout the State and brought about an awakening among the people on the ideals and goals of the Congress through his oratorical skill and strengthened the Congress party and the freedom movement. He was the chief architect of the progress of the Congress party in places where the party had not gained strength. People praised him as the saviour of the Congress party which was a testimony to his political conviction and commitment to the party.

Thevar's legislative career began in the year 1937 when he was elected as a member of the Madras Legislative Assembly. Elections were conducted in 1937 under the Government of India Act, 1935 for the provincial Legislative Assemblies. The Congress party decided to field the young Thevar, who was well known for

his progressive thinking and oratorical skill, from the Ramanathapuram constituency. The Congress party thought that it could win the election only if it fielded a candidate who was popular among the people with progressive thinking to be followed by youngsters and also a courageous one with oratorical capacity. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel spoke to Shri Srinivasa Iyengar, and requested him that it was his responsibility to make Thevar agree to contest the elections. The Government came to know of this and also the fact that Thevar would campaign for the Congress party in other constituencies also. It thought that if Thevar was prevented from speaking in election meetings, the Congress party would lose the chance of winning the elections. Being afraid of Thevar's oratorical ability, the British Government passed an order prohibiting him from addressing the public. Though Thevar's public speeches were banned, he greeted the people with folded hands and eventually won the election. The Congress party also recorded a tremendous victory by winning in 125 constituencies. Thevar was praised for the significant electoral victory of the Congress party which was celebrated in Madurai. In that function, Mahatma Gandhi spoke profusely praising Thevar for his courageous actions. Shri Rajagopalachari showered praise on Thevar stating that the victory of the Congress party was a result of his heroic and courageous actions as he undertook a whirlwind tour of the area in spite of the order preventing him from speaking in any meeting and awakened the leaders of the party as well as the voters.

Thevar's speeches and thoughts echoed his strong desire for freedom. He wanted India to be completely independent. Unlike the moderates, he championed the cause of freedom by advocating revolutionary methods. "Freedom must be by achievement and not by adjustment," he stressed.

During the year 1938, Shri Jayaprakash Narayan came to Madurai. The moderates in the Congress party opposed his visit. But Thevar welcomed him. The visit of Shri Jayaprakash Narayan helped the Socialist Party to take roots in Tamil Nadu. When elections to the All-India Congress Committee were held in Tripura, Shri Pattabhi Seetharamaiah contested the election for Presidentship with the support of Mahatma Gandhi. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose also contested the election. While veteran leaders

like Shri C. Rajagopalachari and Shri Satyamurti supported Shri Pattabhi Seetharamaiah, Thevar supported the candidature of Netaji for Congress party's Presidentship.

His Affiliation with Forward Bloc

Thevar's emotional fervour and revolutionary tendencies caused him to clash with the moderates in the Congress party. He differed from their espousal of achieving freedom through *Ahimsa*. Even when in the Congress, he had affiliations with the Forward Bloc founded by Netaji. Incidentally, his association with Netaji went as far back as 1928 when he met him during the Indian National Congress Session at Madras. He was very much impressed by the personality and speeches of Netaji. His attachment to Netaji continued to grow over the years, and later Thevar left the Congress and organised the Forward Bloc in Tamil Nadu in 1939.

Thevar was a man of the masses and leader in his own right not only in Southern India but a key figure in the whole of India after the formation of the Forward Bloc. Both Netaji and Thevar had the capacity of enthraling the audience for hours together with their fiery oration and uncompromising attitude as far as their policies and ideals were concerned. They were highly critical of the then Anglo-American axis and adhered to an unflinching advocacy of revolutionary methods to achieve freedom and militant uprising against the suppression let loose by the British. During the freedom movement, Thevar was closely associated with leaders like Dr. Varadarajulu Naidu, V.V. Giri, Rajaji, N.G. Ranga, Satyamurti and many other stalwarts. Since he was a vocal leader of the freedom struggle and an associate of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, he was arrested in 1939. On 22 June 1942, the Forward Bloc was banned and Thevar was once again arrested. Thevar, along with his followers, was released from the Vellore prison on 5 September 1945. In 1948, Thevar became the President of the State Unit of the Forward Bloc.

In May 1955, at the All India Forward Bloc Party Conference, Thevar was elected as the Vice-President of the party. However, in 1957, Thevar along with like-minded people, founded a new

political organisation by name the Indian National Democratic Congress.

Thevar was closely associated with Netaji and his views and continued to believe that Netaji did not die in Japan. When a Commission was constituted to conduct an enquiry into the mysterious disappearance of Netaji, Thevar was called upon as a prime witness by the Enquiry Commission. As Thevar was not satisfied with the capability of the Enquiry Commission to ascertain the truth of the matter, he walked out of the Commission.

His Political Philosophy

Thevar was indeed a leader of the masses who was an epitome of knowledge, magnanimity, service-mindedness, and leadership qualities, and a sage who refused to become a Minister. He used to say that he had the capacity to rule but the inclination and craving for power did not come to his mind. He never thought that he only should be the leader, but had the broadmindedness to sponsor many others and shape them as future leaders of the country. Shri K. Kamaraj who became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and later the President of the Indian National Congress was one among such leaders who was initiated into politics by Thevar.

Thevar was against the philosophy of 'from each according to his capacity' and 'to each according to his need'. He made it clear by saying that this "...is a principle which I cannot accept. I do not stand for that principle." Thevar was of the view that politics without divinity is a body without soul. He believed in clean politics, coupled with a spirit of self-sacrifice. In his own words:

Politics certainly needs brain...But shoulder and head must combine. Without shoulder if the head is to proceed, there will be quixotic programmes which will end in disaster. To work in politics, a man must have broad shoulders, a good heart and he must be in a position even to lay down his life at any place and in any moment. Then only he will have some peace. By mere intrigue, a man will not succeed and the country that follows him also will go wrong with him.

According to Thevar, nationalism is loftier and can be likened to the body of a man. No man can live without a body, nor can any society survive without a feeling of nationalism. He stressed that Indian nationalism is neither narrow nor aggressive. It is inspired by the highest ideals of the human race namely, *Satyam* (Truth), *Sivam* (God of Knowledge) and *Sundaram* (Beauty of Cosmic Order). Indian nationalism has inspired into us truthfulness, manliness and a spirit of service and sacrifice. At the same time, our nationalism will never be a hindrance to internationalism, Thevar emphasised. According to Thevar: "Our nationalism implies not merely emancipation from political bondage from the British but also equal distribution of wealth, abolition of caste barriers and social inequalities, destruction of communalism and religious intolerance". Nationalism is a two-pronged strategy for India—it defies imperialism at the global level and it fosters a spirit of achievement in the Indian context, he emphasised.

Thevar wanted to unify the country through a strong central government but at the same time putting the provinces and the minorities at ease by allowing them to have a large measure of autonomy in cultural as well as in governmental affairs. In his scheme of democracy, Thevar stood for an independent Federal, Socialist Republic. He wanted Hindustani written in Roman script as the national language; but he also insisted that one should learn English and nurture one's mother tongue. Thevar did not like the method of constructing democracy through economic reforms with doses of socialistic contents. He wanted to have a political system which will bring about speedy socio-economic change. He was for establishing socialism before practising institutional democracy.

Thevar, a nationalist to the core, was a democrat in every sense of the term. While participating in a debate in the Madras Legislative Assembly, he made his idea about democracy very clear by saying that "as far as my knowledge of democracy goes, if anything untoward happens in the Legislature, the proper course is to appeal to the electorate outside and get their verdict". He believed in unity in diversity and considered India as one nation and one people. As Netaji said, Thevar believed that all power belonged to the people. He was vehemently critical of the British

rule in India and he was not for any sort of compromise with the British rulers. In all, Thevar spent nearly 4000 days in jail during the freedom struggle. Being anti-imperialistic, he was not in favour of India maintaining any connection with the Commonwealth. "Nation is first, next only internationalism", he believed.

Thevar felt that the salvation of India as of the world depended only on socialism and for this India need not import socialism from any other country. Thevar considered that Subhasism (based on Netaji's ideology) was the only way out for the problems faced by India. He defined Subhasism thus: "Uncompromising revolution until the achievement of full blooded socialism to suit the Indian national system, culture and civilization is Subhasism."

According to Thevar, a person who is a true socialist would also be a true Subhasist and *vice versa*. Thevar did not like those who waver and vacillate in their struggle against imperialism and rejected them as "compromising rightists". In a practical sense, Thevar wanted the following to be carried out as essential first steps to found the socialist state of India: (i) the right given to property in the Constitution must be replaced by the right to a living wage for every citizen; (ii) all means of production and distribution and all trusts and connected institutions should be taken over by the State; (iii) ceiling on income and expenditure should be enforced without any adjustment or compromise; (iv) foreign exploitation in the name of trade and friendship should be curbed in a phased programme by huge production of local commodities; and (v) the socialist theory must be inculcated in the minds of all children.

As mentioned earlier, Thevar was first elected to the Madras Legislative Assembly in 1937. He was re-elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1946. In the General Elections held in the year 1952, Thevar contested simultaneously from the Mudukulathur Assembly constituency and also from the Aruppukottai parliamentary constituency and won both the seats with a sizeable majority of votes. However, he resigned from his Lok Sabha seat. In the 1957 elections, he was again elected to the State Legislative Assembly from the Mudukulathur constituency and to the Lok Sabha from Srivillaputhur constituency. This time he retained the Lok Sabha

seat and resigned from the Assembly. In the elections held in 1962, he contested only from Aruppukottai parliamentary constituency and as usual won with a comfortable majority. Thus, he was elected thrice to the Lok Sabha in 1952, 1957 and 1962. Even when he was in jail, he was returned to both the Assembly and the Parliament on more than one occasion. Such was the tremendous power and sway he had over the people.

As member of the Madras Legislative Assembly, Thevar raised many local issues like mal-administration of the Rameswaram Panchayat Boards, conversion of the Aruppukottai and Rajapalayam Panchayat Boards into municipalities, etc. He also raised the issue of the Criminal Tribes Act. As a member of Parliament also, he voiced people's concerns and sought the redressal of their grievances.

In 1957, Thevar was arrested under the Preventive Detention Act and was detained in prison till his release in 1959. An attempt was made to attribute to him the responsibility for a communal riot but the Judiciary vindicated him as far from being communal and acquitted him honourably. In fact, the Chief Justice of Madras, who conducted the trial, paid glorious tributes to Thevar.

The ability and prowess of Thevar in rallying the masses to his viewpoint were all the more remarkable. The unflinching faith in him of the people was vindicated in all the General Elections he had contested. Likewise, Thevar's faith in his people was unshakable.

Perhaps this mutual faith was the culmination of his search for the removal of a social disease, his desire for the welfare of the region to which he belonged, and his keen desire to set certain qualitative standards for socio-political life. Nobody had disputed the principles of Thevar and his people had gone one step ahead in reposing their faith in him time and again. Thevar was ever willing to devise more and more new rules of the political game but he was also willing to abide by it. He had never broken his own convictions at any point of his political career.

A Social and Religious Reformer

Being the son of a local chieftain, Thevar was almost a royal personage, though without any arrogance, selfishness and ambition. His parentage had imbued in him a sense of honour, generosity, benevolence and kindness. It is said that even today his house is almost like a *choultry*, feeding the depressed and the poor, wayfarers and others. He was very simple in his habits, dress and appearance and was easily accessible to both the poor and the rich. Though he could easily afford to lead an ostentatious life, he never had any taste for it. In his younger days, to befit the status of the family he wore a spotless white *dhoti* and silk *jibba* with lace-bordered long *angavasthram*. But once he entered politics he wore pure khadi. He never married and remained an ascetic.

The people of the Thevar community who considered self-respect and honour as the most precious things in their life not only fought against the Englishmen but also against the local chieftains to live free and without being subjugated by any one. The Englishmen ridiculed such people by categorizing them as 'Criminal Tribes' for the only reason that these respectable people refused to act at the bidding of the Englishmen and live as slaves under their control, doing whatever menial jobs were assigned to them. Therefore, the Englishmen branded them as 'habitual criminals' and brought forth an unjust and infamous Act called the Criminal Tribes Act in 1934. The Act required the menfolk belonging to the Thevar community to appear in the police stations of the concerned areas every day which greatly hurt the self-respect of the entire community. Thevar who was only in his late twenties at that time decided to fight against the Act and the entire Thevar community stood solidly behind him in this fight. In pursuit of achieving his objective, he convened a Conference on 12 and 13 May 1934 in Abhiramam which was presided over by Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu. A resolution was passed at the Conference condemning the enactment of the Criminal Tribes Act which was handed over to the then Governor, Sir Mohammed Usman. Due to the continuous and persistent efforts of Thevar, the infamous Act was scrapped. For this, the grateful people of the Thevar community worship Thevar as their God: he was the redeemer of their honour, dignity and self-respect.

Thevar also worked hard to remove the hardships of the poor agriculturists. With this in mind, he formed the Tamil Nadu Zamin Agriculturists Association and worked for the abolishment of the Zamindari system. Under the Presidentship of Shri T. Prakasam, a Committee was formed to examine the issue and the Zamindari System Abolition Act was brought into force. Thevar also stressed that the agriculturists should have the liberty to fix the price of their agricultural produce on their own.

Thevar founded and led the Pasumalai Mahalakshmi Mills Workers' Union and the Meenakshi Mills Textile Workers' Union and wielded great influence among the labourers. He was closely associated with Shri V.V. Giri, himself an eminent labour leader. He whole heartedly fought for the cause of labourers and workers. In 1938-39, he participated in the labour agitation as the leader of the Mahalakshmi Mills Workers. He was arrested on 15 October 1938 for mobilizing the workers. In 1945, Thevar founded the TVS Worker's Union at Madurai and was its first President. He continued his campaign for labour welfare in the later years also.

Thevar was a reformer in every sense of the term. As mentioned earlier, he led a simple and saintly life. Amassing wealth was never his passion; instead whatever land he had, he had leased out to the poor people who enjoyed the fruits of their toil. He was tall and erect and was impressive and majestic in appearance. For hours together he would lecture untiringly. His resonant voice and ringing tone never failed him. His spontaneous flow of words, rich in meaning and punctuated by quotations, would impress a layman and an intellectual alike. He was at his best both in political speeches and philosophical and religious discourses. Spiritually, the influence came from Saint Ramalingar, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. Thevar's mastery of Saiva Siddhantha was widely acclaimed as of a high order. During his visit to Benares, Thevar spoke extempore in English on Saivism at the Benares Hindu University. Dr. C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, the then Vice-Chancellor who was in the chair, is said to have highly commended the discourse.

If his political orations were emotional and even pungent, Thevar's religious and philosophical discourses were lucid and

thought-provoking. In both of these, he made himself easily understood even by a layman. He was a devout Hindu with his forehead always fully covered by the holy ash and an ardent worshiper of Lord Muruga; at the same time, he respected all other religions. Born a Hindu, nursed and nurtured by a Muslim lady, and educated in a Christian school, Thevar imbibed the best of all the religious faiths and emerged a true secularist. In fact, he had a very deep understanding and knowledge about all other religions as well.

Thevar considered that the human body is composed not only of atoms and molecules but also something known as the spirit which creates circumstances and conditions to enable the body to act for the attainment of a higher self. Thevar suggested that spiritualism is training the spirit by meditation (*tapasya*). Just as he likened nationalism as the body of a man, Thevar likened spiritualism as the life process of a man, thus implying that nationalism and spiritualism should always go together for proper order in public life. He believed: "The psychological aspect of *tapasya* in the cause of our country consists in making our mind more and more sensitive to social humiliation and discrimination and in intensifying our desire for freedom and economic emancipation".

Thevar also stressed: "But spiritualism is not state interference in religion. The state should not interfere with the individual's right to religion and their connected habits and modes of living, but religious intolerance and social inequality should be eradicated". For Thevar, spiritualism remains active in three ways: (i) it trains the mind of the individual to assume responsibilities of personal life and discharging them in a simple fashion; (ii) it also trains the mind to assume responsibilities of public life and discharging them consistently and in a simple fashion; and (iii) it trains the collective mind to assume responsibilities of the public life and discharging them in a simple fashion, but without disturbing the basic essentials of personal life.

Thevar's spiritualism in the personal and public life stood as a model for others to emulate. From his ever simple food and dress habits down to his personal qualities in all walks of life, he was a spiritualist to the core. Thevar expected that a public

personality should be a perfect spiritualist than an ordinary person. In fact, Thevar did not hesitate to draw inspiration from religion to enhance his spiritual personality.

Thevar was always quick to emphasize that spiritualism need not necessarily mean a non-violent attitude to issues and problems. He commented: "One should have the equanimity to win an elephant and to smile at a biting ant". He also used to quip: "Wisdom without might is cowardice and might without wisdom is brutality."

During his lifetime, Thevar addressed hundreds of public meetings and gave religious discourses. Thevar travelled to Burma and Ceylon in 1936 and he is said to have visited Korea and China *incognito* in 1949. Wherever he went and whomsoever he met, he was the true representative of the Tamil language and literature. He is said to have presented to the President of Burma a copy of *Thirukkural*.

Thevar started a Tamil journal *Netaji* through which he spread the message of patriotism among the people and he continued it till he was arrested in 1942. He also started another Tamil weekly *Kannagi* in which he used to write till his death.

In 1955, when he visited Burma a second time, Thevar delivered lectures on Buddha and Buddhism in Rangoon city. He explained the basic and intricate tenets of Buddhism in such a simple language that the Buddhist monks and scholars who attended the lectures were surprised at the clarity with which Thevar explained the concepts to them. A special reception was arranged for him where Buddhist women were to receive him by lying down on the floor. Thevar refused to accept such a reception saying that he being a Hindu saw in every woman a Goddess and worshipped her. This incident is clear proof of the high esteem in which Thevar held women and the respect he had for the ideals of the Hindu religion.

Inspired by Gandhiji, Thevar travelled all over the country campaigning for temperance, women's liberation, emancipation of the Dalits and communal harmony. Thevar's revolutionary beliefs and reformative ideas made him enter the Meenakshi Amman

Kovil at Madurai along with some Dalits which was till then closed to the Dalits. When Shri A. Vaidyanatha Iyer made attempts to have the Dalits enter the temple, some people planned to use even dangerous weapons to prevent them from doing so. Without any fear whatsoever, Thevar helped Shri Vaidyanatha Iyer in making the Dalits' entry into the temple. Such was his influence that the Madurai Meenakshi Temple was saved from becoming a battlefield.

In Thevar's opinion, the Western system of education was lacking in character-building qualities. To inculcate a sense of discipline, he advocated an education based on Indian culture and civilization coupled with modern science. He was, thus, an advocate of the ancient *Gurukula* type of education in a modified manner to suit the requirements of the time.

Death and Tributes

Thevar gradually sank into a decline during the couple of years prior to his death. He could not recoup his failing health in spite of diet control and rest. He rejected allopathic treatment and relied on indigenous medicine. He breathed his last on 30 October 1963. Glowing tributes were paid to him throughout the country. In the Lok Sabha, the Speaker, Sardar Hukam Singh made a reference on 18 November 1963 on the demise of Thevar.

Paying rich tributes to Thevar, veteran parliamentarian Prof. N.G. Ranga said that he was one of the boldest freedom fighters of the country. In his death, India as a whole and India's socialists and freedom fighters had lost an eminent personality.

Shri M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, former Speaker of Lok Sabha and Governor of Bihar, praised Thevar and said: "he was an ardent patriot and a nationalist.... He was a great freedom fighter. He was an orator who would easily influence the masses by his speeches.... I wish many more such leaders will arise in India to maintain the freedom that we have won and the democracy that we have established".

Thevar's house has been declared a Government Monument. Every year, people perform *Guru Puja* at this place in a grand way.

In Madurai, on behalf of the Forward Bloc, a bronze statue of Thevar was erected in 1974 which was unveiled by the then President, Shri V.V. Giri. In 1976, in Madukulathur in Ramanathapuram District, a statue of Thevar was unveiled by Shri Mohanlal Sukhadia. In 1994, a full size statue of Thevar was erected in Madras city also by the State Government. The Central Government released a postal stamp on Thevar in 1995.

Thevar was born on 30th October; incidentally he also died on 30th October. Lakhs of people throng Pasumpon village on the 30th of October every year, the *Jayanthi Day* of Thevar, to pay homage to this outstanding son of India.

PASUMPON MUTHURAMALINGA THEVAR

— **A Pictorial Profile**

(Photographs taken during his
visit to Burma in 1955-56)

