

J/ Thondaimanaru Veeragaththippillai Maha Vidhyalayam



Centenary Celebration & Prize Giving

15th & 16th September 2012



Founder

S. VEERAGATHIPILAI

THE MERCHANT NAVIGATOR WHO UNDISPUTEDLY PROMOTTED EDUCATION

Vaana Oona Sithamparampillai was held as the pioneer Tamil Merchant Navigator of India. S. Veeragathipillai of Sri Lanka was his counterpart in Sri Lanka then known as Ceylon. He earned his wealth in accordance with the Tamil saying "*Thiraikadal odiyum thiraviyam thedu*" (work hard even beyond high seas to earn wealth). He also rendered a yeoman service to the field of education utilizing his wealth and secured a place among the pioneer promoters of education in the Tamil community.

Veeragathipillai Maha Vidyalayam of Thondamanaru is an indelible monument for the services rendered by Veeragathipillai. This School which renders high degree of educational service to the community today speaks to his fame and esteem thereby bringing pride not only to those of his family line but to all the Tamil people. He was second in rank of the five children of Sinnathamby and Theivanaipillai of Thondamanaru, who, along with his elder brother, had his own vessels and was engaged in merchant navigation locally. His younger brothers, Kandiah and Ramasamy went to Malaysia through India and worked there. They were the first in this village to go to Malaysia for occupation.

Veeragathipillai and his wife Walliammai had five sons, namely, Suppiah, Doraisamy,

Rajaratnam, Ratnarajah and Rajasegaram and a daughter, namely, Sellamutthu.

Unlike his brothers, Veeragathipillai shined very well in merchant navigation and trade. He was a partner of the then famous Pala. Soma. Somasundaram Chettiar and Aru. Somasundaram Chettiar of Naddukoddai. He was also the sole proprietor of his own ships, boats and vessels with which he expanded his business. He also built his own vessels.

Sivasubramania Puravi, Kokanada, Wallinayaki, Peranandavalli, Athipoorani and Theivanayaki are some of the sailing ships owned by Veeragathipillai. *Sivasubramania Puravi* was the largest of the sailing ships in India and Ceylon. It was the largest vessels with the highest carrying capacity. These

vessels were engaged in shipping from the ports of Rangoon, Arrican and Mole, several varieties of cargo such as paddy, rice, bran, teak and mats to the Ceylonese ports of Point Pedro, Valvettiturai, Kankesanthurai, Kayts and Thondamannaru.

The sailing ships of Veeragathipillai were used to ship bales of tobacco to the Indian ports of Kakinada, Kalingapaddinam, Nagapaddinam, Athirampaddinam and Thopputhurai. On the return voyage they brought roof tiles and bricks. In this process the business venture of Veeragathipillai developed very fast. In partnership with his sons, namely, Rajaratnam and Rajasegaram, Veeragathipillai floated a partnership business under the name style and firm of *Veeragathipillai & Sons*.

At that time they were about 113 massive sailing ships berthed in the Jaffna peninsula. Sixty of them belonged to outsiders while the majority of the balance 53 vessels, were owned by Veeragathipillai. On her voyage to Ceylon carrying 150,000 roof tiles from Kochin in 1926, *Wallinayaki* was caught in a storm and sank in the deep sea about 20 miles south of Ceylon with all her crew numbering 20. *Peranandavalli* – another sailing vessel belonging to Veeragathipillai was damaged on her return voyage from Burma due to rough sea.

Educational Service of Veeragathipillai

Veeragathipillai who was a successful international merchant navigator spent his wealth for educational advancement. He was in fact a Philanthropist who spent lavishly on education. The services rendered by him to the field of education is invaluable. The village of Thondamanaru had no schools at his time. The villagers made their children learn at *squatting schools* in the rural homes. In or about the year 1851 Pastors of the American Mission established a school in the village which had classes upto grade 5. The majority of the villages were Hindus. Their children who attended the said school fell prey to the conversion activities carried on by the Christian Pastors.

It was under these circumstances, selfless Veeragathipillai came to pay his attention to the field of education. He believed that providing knowledge to children was the highest of all merits. In order to promote education among children of his village and those of the neighbouring villages, Veeragathipillai opened a school in the year 1912 utilizing a house belonging to his brother Ramasamy. One Velupillai of Alvai was appointed as the Head Teacher of this school which had 20 students. With the increase in the intake of students, there arose lack of accommodation and this problem was resolved by Veeragathipillai Thambymuthu, Velupillai Elayathamby and Nagappan Vethavanam who volunteered to donate the land required for the school.

When the land was so donated on the 26th of June 1912, it was declared that Veeragathipillai and his successors in the family shall satisfactorily maintain the buildings which were to be constructed on the said lands. Following the retirement of Veeragathipillai's brother Ramasamy and his return home from Malaysia in 1914, Ramasamy donated his aforesaid house to the school. He also constructed a building for the school in another land belonging to him called "*Paruthiyaddaipu*" and the school was accordingly shifted to the new building. All the necessary furniture and the remuneration of the teachers were borne personally by Veeragathipillai.

At a time when the cost of running the school was on an ascending graph, Veeragathipillai

approached his friend Sabapathi of Thalaiyali West who was a Member of the State Council, Chief of Saiva Paripalana Sabha and Manager Vannarponnai Hindu College. He arranged for the school to be registered as one of the branches of Jaffna Hindu College and for Government grant to be paid to the school. The school thereupon progressed well under the continued care and devotion of Ramasamy (brother of Veeragathipillai). The school was shifted in or about the year 1935 to the present location with Sinnathamby of Karaveddy as the Principal.

At this stage Veeragathipillai departed this life in 1933. However, he left a last will in which he had bequeathed his one-third share in the said business, Veeragathipillai and sons, towards the development of the school and for certain other donations and also nominated

Rajaratnam as the executor of the said will. Accordingly Rajaratnam continued to monitor the said school and spent for the school from his late father's funds. During this time M.Rajendram – a grandson of Veeragathipillai was appointed as the Principal upon the retirement of Krishnamoorthy Iyar. Rajendram who held a Bachelor's Degree in Arts worked untiringly for the advancement of the school.

In terms of a change introduced by the Government in 1965, Thondamanaru English School and the American Mission School were amalgamated into one school on 28th January 1968. There was a strong protest against the amalgamation. However the members of the family of Veeragathipillai intervened in the matter, contacted authorities at high levels and made the amalgamation a reality.

The children of Veeragathipillai who continued to maintain the school very well following his father who had spent large sums of money for it, were not keen in gaining pride by naming the school after their father – Veeragathipillai.

Veeragathipillai Rajasegaram provided a science laboratory to the school, gifted a land containing 13 Lachchams in extent for a play ground for the school and appointed volunteer teachers and met their emoluments. Sivathas son of Rajaratnam gifted a land containing 1-1/2 Lachchams in extent for the school. The school was provided with two storeyed building during 1977/1978. On 13th September 1979, the school was re-named after a person who had no connection whatsoever with the village or with the school. When it was

so named as Balasingham Maha Vidyalayam, Rajasegaram his relatives and well-wishers of the school rose up against the re-naming.

Rajasegaram and his sons Vadivetkarasan, Sri Pathmanaban and Thondamanaban together with M. Tharmaratnam - a grandson of Ramasamy, demanded the Principal on 16th September 1979 to convene a General Meeting. Accordingly a General Meeting of the School Development Society was held at 3.00 pm on the 22nd of September 1979. At the said meeting which was presided over by the President, the Secretary S.Sathyamoorthy, on behalf of the Executive Committee, proposed that the name *Thondamanaru K.Balasingham Maha Vidyalayam* be changed back to the name *J/Thondamanaru Maha Vidyalayam*.

Mylvaganam who was a Member for Thondarmanaru in the Town Council Velvettiturai, retired Assistant Commissioner of Labour and an old boy of the school, put forward an amending proposal suggesting that the school be renamed as *J/Thondamanaru Veeragathipillai Mahavidyalayam* in memory of the late founder of the school. The amending proposal was seconded by P. Balasundaram – former Chairman Village Council, Justice of the Peace and an old boy. The proposal was adopted unanimously. There was a similar resolution passed by the Town Council Velvettiturai within the administrative limits of which, the school is located.

Accordingly the school was renamed as "*Thondamanaru Veeragathipillai Maha Vidyalayam*" on the 31st of January 1980 at a

renaming ceremony held on 21st January 1981 headed by K. Jeyarajah, the then Principal of the school when Professor Chandrasekaram formally declared the new name. Though the school was damaged during military activities titled "Operation Liberation" in or about the year 1986, yet the school was able to resume activities following renovations having been done with the assistance of S.K.Krishnasamy a well-wisher and Jeganathan Grama Servaka. The school is presently functioning successfully with a three storeyed building provided with the assistance of a non-governmental organization named Forut.

Rajasegaram who was a son of the founder Veerakathipillai along with Vadivetkarasan, Sri Pathmanaban and Thondamanaban who are the children of Rajasegaram have dedicated

themselves to the advancement of the school. There are several educationists and experts in several fields who had received their primary education at Thondamanaru Veeragathipillai Maha Vidyalayam. There is no doubt that all those who are presently studying in this school will upkeep the name of the school in the future.

The services rendered by Veeragathipillai who had made his mark as a merchant navigator, to the field of education deserve to be inscribed in golden letters.

All of us should congratulate the organizers of the Centenary Celebrations of the school which are under way, for their efforts in erecting a stature of the great founder and to have it declared opened so as to coincide with

the Centenary Celebrations of the School. We thank the organizers for this paramount task. Long live the name of the founder Veeragathipillai.



