

Maria Lourthammal Simon of Kanniyakumari District (1911 - 2002)

Ashithakhosh.G.C, Dr. T. Lysammal

Abstract - Maria Lourthammal Simon was the first Woman Minister from Kanniyakumari District. She was elected to the TamilNadu Legislative Assembly as an Indian National Congress Candidate from Colachel Constituency in Kanniyakumari District. She was the Minister for Local Administration, Fisheries in the Madras State and Public Works Department during the Second Chief Ministership of Kamaraj, who remained in power from April 13, 1957 to March 1, 1962. She is the only Woman Minister in the Cabinet of K. Kamaraj. She built bridges across the Anantha Victoria Maharani (AVM) Canal in 1959 at Marthandamthurai and Thoothur. She also constructed Government Hospital and Guest House at Nagercoil in 1959. She created revolution in the field of fishing by introducing new innovations. She took steps to improve the welfare of poor students and fishermen. Her role was of great landmark in the history of women progress in Kanniyakumari District.

Maria Lourthammal Simon, the first Woman Minister from Kanniyakumari District. She was born on 26 September, 1911 at Melamanakkudi near Kanniyakumari. Her father's name was Alexander, a businessman engaged in exporting dry fish to Ceylon. She had her education at St. Joseph's Convent School, Nagercoil. Her husband, A.M. Simon worked in a oil company in Iran and later, in 1930's entered into TamilNadu politics. She had close touch with Marshal Nesamony one of the freedom fighters of Kanniyakumari District and a Congress leader worked for the merger of South Travancore with Madras State. She was the Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association, member of Maathar Sangam Committee and also High Schools Parent Teacher Association. She was considered as a product of Modern Democratic Society.

Indian Republic which was designed by Dr. Ambedkar came into existence on 26 January, 1950. Later, Maria Lourthammal Simon was elected to the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly on behalf of the Indian National Congress from the Colachel Constituency in Kanniyakumari District in 1957.¹ When Kamaraj was the Chief Minister, she became the Minister of Local Administration, Fisheries and Public Works Department and remained in power from April 13, 1957 to March 1, 1962.²

In the court, she gave importance to the Tamil language and appointed Tamil personnel. During her ministership, she introduced bills such as City Municipal Bill in 1958

and 1961 and the Municipal Counters Bill 1958³ and Local Authorities Financial Bill in 1961.⁴ She built Public Health Centres in the coastal areas and opened panchayat libraries at Ethamozhi and Rajakkamangalam. She built the bridges across the Anantha Victoria Maharani (AVM) Canal in 1959 at Marthandamthurai and Thoothur. AVM deals A stands for the Travancore deity, Ananthapadmanabha Swamy, V stands for British Queen Victoria whose representative was in Travancore and M stands for the Maker of Modern Travancore King Marthanda Varma. She built Government Hospital and Guest House at Nagercoil in 1959.⁵ In 1961, when she was the Minister of Local Administration divided Chennai into North Chennai and South Chennai for administrative convenience.⁶ She established a number of Tamil Medium Schools and made efforts to improve the primary and higher education. She also took steps to improve the health of the poor students. On those days, K. Kamaraj introduced "Mid day Meal Scheme" with the help American Company "Care" and she extended it in Kanniyakumari and fourteen lakhs students were benefited.⁷

Lourdammal Simon introduced power machines boats in the Manakkudi backwaters. Her interest in social activities made the women from fisher men Community to join together and fight for their rights. She made the facilities for them to learn embroidering, stitching and net weaving. She made a survey of fishermen, their needs and rehabilitation works for the affected fishermen by monsoon.⁸ She started a Research Centre at the Gulf of Mannar under the Indo-Norway Plan in 1957.⁹ In the same year, she established Marine Biology Centers at Thitisadai, Thoothukudi, Yennoor and Kanniyakumari. She also established the Fish Water Biology Centers at Chennai, Bhavanisakar, Thoothukudi and Kanniyakumari. She introduced a new type of boat called "Popelo" which was a light speed boat. These helped fishermen to go into the deep sea to capture more fishes. Her works in local administration and fisheries department enabled Tamil Nadu to reach high position.¹⁰ In 1962, she contested in the election on behalf of the Congress Party but, she met failure.

Lourthammal Simon was one of the prominent leading member in the Congress. She died at the age of ninety one at Chennai in 2002. She was the back bone for the growth of fishermen folk. She took steps to improve the welfare of backward and poor students. Her role was a

turning point in the history of women progress in Kanniyakumari District. In 2020, the government rebuilt a bridge in her name at Manakkudi near Kanniyakumari which was destroyed by the Tsunami of 2004.

Endnotes

- [1] Report of General Election, Election Commission of India, Legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu, 1957.
- [2] Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly Review, Chapter IV, 1957-1962, p.16.
- [3] Tamil Nadu Legislative Council Debates, Vol. XXVIII, 1958, p.377.
- [4] Tamil Nadu Legislative Council Debates, Vol. XXVIII, 1961, p.290.
- [5] Inscription, Government Guest House, Nagercoil, February 2, 1959.
- [6] Madras State Administrative Report, Chapter XI, 1961-1962, p.95
- [7] Tamil Nadu Legislative Council Debates, Chapter XI, 1961-1962, p. 93
- [8] Tamil Nadu Legislative Council Debates, Vol. XXVIII, 1958, p.507
- [9] Tamil Nadu State Administrative Report, 1973-1974, p. 280.
- [10] Madras State Administrative Report, 1956-1957, p.67.

Ashithakhosh.G.C, Research Scholar, Research Centre in History, Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam. Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University.

Dr. T. Lysammal, Former Professor and Head, Research Centre in History, Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam. Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar Tirunelveli. University, Tirunelveli.