

# **Did Chinna Marudhu's son return home from exile?**



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To study historical data is a most challenging job. When there are several pieces of data about a particular incident, we can come to some conclusion about the incident only after a fine-grained analysis based on comparisons and cross-checking. The matter involving Duraisamy, son of Chinna Marudhu, a chieftain of Sivagangai, is a case in point.

Duraisamy was one of 73 persons exiled to Penang. While there are no data and information about the banished people, there is a British document that says 11 of them were set to return home to Tirunelveli. Several conjectures are floated about the question if Duraisamy was released from exile in Penang and returned home to the country.

Prof. K. Rajaiyan, who was the first to come up with a research on the freedom-fighters in South India, said that Duraisamy died at Vandiyur on the way back to Madurai. S. S. Kamal noted that Duraisamy passed way in Sivagangai. Another researcher Jayaseelan Stephen said that Duraisamy died in Penang itself.

Having written two novels about the time before and after the Kalaiyarkovil battle, I have taken two different stances that Duraisamy died on the way back home and that his death happened in exile.

### **Confusion over age**

Major Welsh, who was friendly with Marudhu brothers, in his memoirs, said, "The young son of Chinna Marudhu Doraisamy was one of the people exiled." At another place, he remarked, "After 20 years when I was in Penang, an old man approached me with an application seeking help for his release. On enquiries I found out that he was none other than Duraisamy, son of Chinna Marudhu." Historians went by the word 'young' that Welsh used to describe Duraisamy and so guessed that Duraisamy was a small boy at the time of exile.

Lt. Colonel Agnew, who hanged 500 freedom fighters including Marudhu Pandiar, Oomaidhurai, Virupatchi Gopal Nayak, got permission from the Governor Edward Clive to get some fighters

exiled by way of showing clemency to them and sparing them the capital punishment. Agnew had recorded the fact that those not hanged for the reason of their young age included the polygar of Seven Thousand Farm and Chinna Mardhu's son Duraisamy.

Agnew who led the British India Company forces against Kalaiyarkovil had mentioned that Duraisamy was young when he was exiled. Hence, it was believed that Duraisamy was no more than 10 or 11 years old.

The question how old Duraisamy was when he was banished has not been cleared till now.

Way back in 1802 from the Thoothukudi harbour 73 freedom fighters were exiled to Penang by a ship named Admiral Nelson. Lieutenant Rocket and 22 soldiers escorted the prisoners. The ship, which would normally take 45 days to reach Penang, took 72 days. Why was the ship delayed? Three prisoners died during the voyage. An explanation in writing was obtained from Rocket who faced an enquiry later. From his explanation it was clear that Duraisamy was not among the three dead.

### **Not a boy**

I had an opportunity to read a letter ferreted out of the Tamil Nadu Archives in Chennai, which was written by Rous Peter, who was the Collector of Madurai for 17 years, to the government secretary. The letter shed light on the obscure history.

On May 19, 1821 Muthuvadugu aka Marudhu Pandian of Anuppanadi, Madurai submitted a petition to Rous Peter. The petition said: "In 1801 my father Duraisamy was banished to Penang by the honourable Company. (Muthuvadugu had probably not known the exact timing of banishment). The honourable company permitted him to return to the home country. On the

way back home, he was enquired with by Chengalpattu Superintendent of Police about his needs. In the petition submitted to the SP, my father sought the Company's support and permission to stay in Madurai. He was instructed to meet the Madurai Collector and explain his situation to him. Accordingly my father started off from Madras. When he came to Vandiyur near Madurai, he had his health deteriorating. After he came to Sivagangai, he made the Sivagangai zamindar write a letter to the Governor in order to ease our family's poverty. But before a reply came from the Governor, my father's health became worse and died in Sivagangai on Vaikasi 11. His body was buried amid rituals at Kalaiyarkovil."

Muthuvadugu finished off his letter with a request to the Madurai Collector for some help to his family.

From this letter it is clear that Duraisamy was not a boy at all when he was exiled. He had probably been a teenager and must have been married before exile in keeping with the customs of those days. Muthuvadugu must have been born after his father Duraisamy was deported to Penang.

### **Riddle resolved**

When Oomaidurai died, his wife had been pregnant for three month and she too was imprisoned at Poonamallee. Oomaidurai's son Durai Soodamani Kattabommu, who was born after six months of his father's death, was released from prison on Jan. 25, 1820. In 1819 his wedding took place. For his wedding expenses the Company announced 150 pagodas (pagoda was a unit of currency or a gold coin in those days). This incident is a case in point to prove that early marriage system was very much in vogue in the past centuries.

Coming back to Chinna Marudhu's son case, from the letter that Muthuvadugu wrote to the Madurai Collector it is clear that Duraisamy died in Sivagangai on Vaikasi 11 (22.05.1820) and buried at Kalaiyarkovil.

Thus, one of the historical riddles has been resolved thanks to a British era document which helps us understand how, where and when Duraisamy died after coming back from Penang where he had been exiled along with king of Sivagangai Vengai Periya Udaiyana Thevar. The document also sheds light on the plight of their families after freedom fighters died.

**Translated by V. Mariappan.**