

COLACHEL WAR (1741 AD) COMMEMORATIVE SEMINAR I

THE MUKKUA: HISTORY, LIFE & FUTURE

Chinnathurai, 25 July 2010, 2:00 p.m.

Organised By

TAMIL NADU PUDHUCHERY COASTAL ARTISTS' COLLECTIVE
ALL INDIA LATIN CATHOLIC FEDERATION &
enthurai.org

P R O G R A M M E

- ❖ Welcome Address: Mr. Benson Rosario
- ❖ Self Introduction
- ❖ Introductory Remarks: Dr. Vareethiah Konstantine
(Coordinator, TNP Coastal Artists' Collective)
- ❖ Presidential Address: Pulavar Saviour Bastin (CPO)
- ❖ Addresses
 1. **The HISTORY OF THOOTHOR PEOPLE**
Mr. GR Thoothoor
 2. **The MUKKUA HISTORY THAT HASN'T COME TO LIGHT.**
Dr. J. Albaris (Assoc. Professor, Alagappa Chettiar Govt. Arts College, Karaikudi)
 3. **THE VENAD MUKKUVAR**
Mr. S. Leo Pereira (Shanghumukhom)
 4. **THE COLACHEL WAR AND THE MUKKUVAS**
Mr. Melvin Vinodh (All India Latin Catholic Federation)
- ❖ Interactions
Vote of Thanks: Representative from Enthurai

You Are Invited

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Melvin Vinodh
Coordinators

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BACKGROUND

'Those who forget the past
will be condemned to repeat history.'
-Anon.

I am a first generation fisherman belonging to the ethnic group called Mukkuva who have over millennia settled in the south west coast of India. My research background is coastal aquatic science. I took to writing on community issues after 1998.

The post tsunami relief and reconstruction and the analysis thereof changed my perceptions about my own community. Ninety percent of tsunami reconstruction programmes met with colossal failure for the simple reason that the service organizations had little acquaintance with the life style ecology and unique ethnic culture of the target groups. The Indian traditional fisher folks, tribal in character, scarcely maintain contact with the rest of the world.

The Tamil Nadu Government availed 200 million rupee Asian Development Bank assistance to rebuild the tsunami affected coastal hamlets, but later the programme was extended to the whole of coastal districts and eventually shifted to all districts below poverty line. The Government machinery had poorly understood the needs of the fishing community. In the relief phase the Government supplied fishing nets instead of listening to what the fisher people were asking for. The officials had no idea of the regional and seasonal diversity of gears employed. Earlier, the service agencies who fed the tsunami victims soon started complaining that the fisher people are ungrateful and uncivilized when they couldn't accept curd rice and chapattis in place of their ethnic foods like fish curry, tapioca and rice. The Church that had claimed to know them stood stupefied. The enormity of funds that was pumped in from all parts of the world hardly served the purpose. . .

The treatment meted out to the fisher people disturbed me more than the damages caused by the disaster itself. It took two years for me to understand what went wrong. The fisher people must know their past and their heritage. They must trace their history. They must start the process of dialogue with their counterparts on land. This is more important to them than fishery resources in the sea or rehabilitation from the agencies. . .

The *Mukkuv*as are among the five major fishing communities known as *Theevaras* of the erstwhile Thiru-Kochi princely state.

The *Mukkuv*as of the South Travancore and the *Paravas* of the Pearl Fishery Coast have something in common. Both these ethnic groups were subjected to mass conversion to Christianity in the first half of sixteenth century by the Portuguese. However their ethnic identities date back to millennia. Unfortunately, in the name of religious faith, the cultural identity of this ancient ethnic group is fading away. Today the Mukkuv

roots impedes our efforts to address any of these issues. Like many other elites of my age, social activists and young entrepreneurs I feel its time the community begins its search for its history; document its culture as literary creations in its own dialect...

Three years back a small group of writers and artists from Kanyakumari coast organized themselves and met on a monthly basis at Carmel Higher Secondary School premises at Nagercoil. Researchers and writers were invited to share their writing experience. The Kanyakumari coastal Artists' Collective (KCAC) fructified in this attempt three years back and eventually expanded into Tamil Nadu Pudhuchery coasts.

The KCAC in collaboration with the All India Latin Catholic Federation (AILCF) Trivandrum and Neidhal Movement of Kanyakumari took a humble effort to commemorate the 267th anniversary of the Colachel War (1741 AD) at the Colachel War Memorial. In the next year the Indian Army conducted a special memorial programme marking the war anniversary and included this memorial pillar in the list of Indian War Memorials in their web site. It is believed that the Mukkuvas between Pillaithope and Vizhinjam took active part in the Colachel War between the Portuguese and the Travancore Princely state and then in the subsequent Ambalapuzha War (1743 AD) to which little reference is made by most historians. Perhaps the Mukkuvas of those days weren't affluent enough. Its time we reconstruct history- the history of the marginalized.

A one day seminar entitled '**THE MUKKUA: HISTORY, LIFE & FUTURE**' is being jointly organized by the KCAC, AILCF and the enthurai.org on 25th July 2010 against this background. The enthurai.org is a group of US employed people from the Thoothoor Island serving the cause of overall development of the eight coastal hamlets of Thoothoor through secular efforts. Future programmes will be planned on the basis of what transpires from this seminar. There are proposals to document the traditional wisdom of fishing avocation before technologisation, folklores and folk tales. The organizing team nurtures the hope that more human resources will join hands in this historic task.

For Organising Team,

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Coordinator