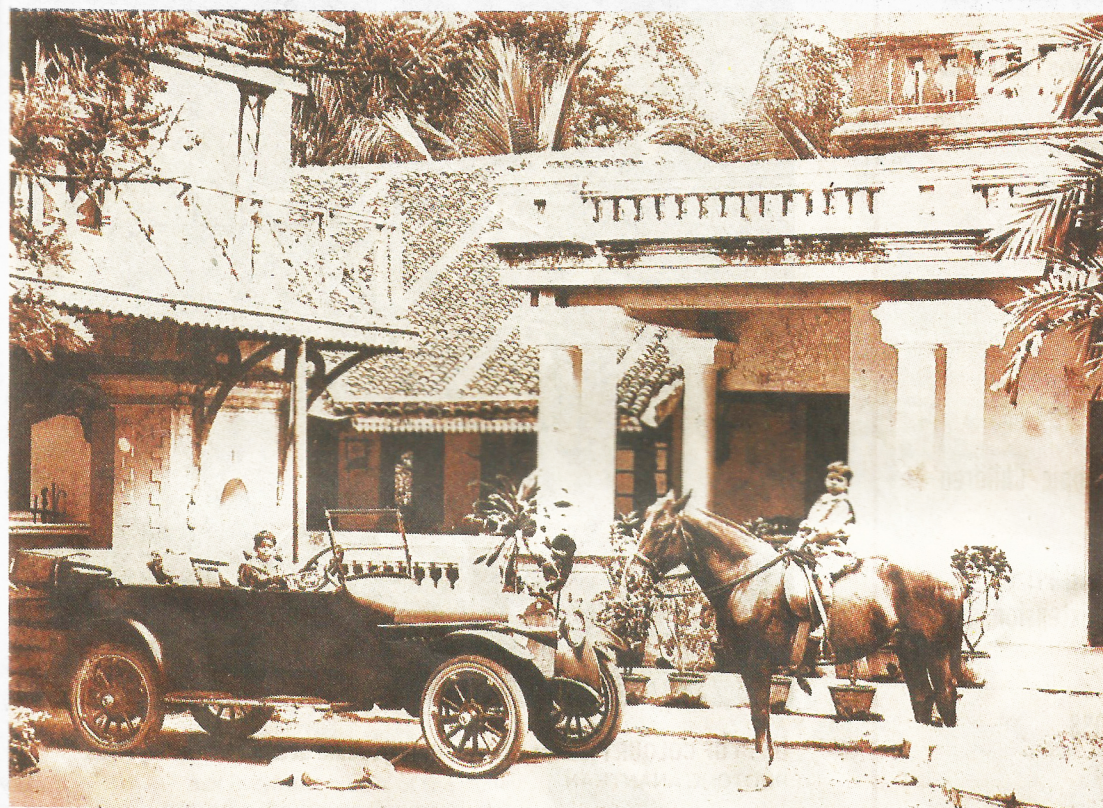




The Zamindar of Uthukuli

PERSONALITY Meet a ruler who started off playfully, but worked hard to acquire the skills to fit into his role



COLONIAL ENTERTAINMENT The Golden Grove. (below) Agathur Muthuramaswami Kalingaroyar and the insignia given to him when he became Diwan Bahadur PHOTOS: PRIVATE COLLECTION

This is the tale of a person who had greatness thrust upon him. Born in 1865, Diwan Bahadur Agathur Muthuramaswami Kalingaroyar led a carefree life for 18 years with pets being the great love of his life.

It was normal in those times to equip the heir from a very early age with all the qualities needed to govern and carry out the duties of a ruler. The young Kalingaroyar was neither groomed nor ready to take up the task ahead. As a child, he was playful and did not pay attention to the various private tutors he was placed under. The untimely demise of his older brother in 1881 changed all that.

Turning responsible

He was given the responsibility of managing the vast and ancient estate of the Zamindari of Uthukuli. He then realised his responsibilities. As Zamindar, he had to have the ability and skill to administer and govern the Zamin estate. He was placed under the tutorship of Mr. Wright, a Eurasian Inspector of Police who was a teacher earlier in his career. Under Mr. Wright, the young Zamindar acquired the needed knowledge in language and expertise in administration and the European ways of life and etiquette. One had to be versatile in the Western ways to work effectively with the British. Mr. Wright won the kindness of the family and was given a house in Ooty, which

even stands today. To this day, the descendants of the Uthukuli Zamin remember Wright Durai.

Rapid development

Under its new and dynamic ruler, the Uthukuli Zamindari was to have a phase of rapid development. The ancient Palace at Uthukuli, in which the descendants of the Zamindar live even now, was given modern additions.

He then built 'The Golden Grove', a beautiful colonial structure, to entertain eminent British and Indian visitors. The structure lives today only in memory and some pictures, but is said to have had a miniature zoo (his love for animals stayed intact), tennis courts and a billiards room. The zoo must have been one of the first in the region and the billiards table was later gifted to the Coimbatore Cosmopolitan Club. Soon, the Zamindari grew in size and wealth and its illustrious leader used the wealth to enrich not only himself, but also society.

Becoming Diwan Bahadur

The Zamindar was conferred the distinction of Diwan Bahadur in the year 1913 as part of the Queen's birthday honours in a public Durbar in Coimbatore for his skills in administration and for his role in "public movements".

"By being loyal to the Government, he achieved the best for his

estate and his tenants," recalls his proud and nostalgic 94-year-old granddaughter Maruthapushpambal, the Zamindarani of Samathur and Kottampatti. Muthuramaswami Kalingaroyar made liberal contributions for public utilities in Coimbatore - towards the construction of a hospital and later for a college and Rs. 1,000 for an operation shed in the Veterinary Hospital.

Educating the masses

He also established a school in his Zamin at the cost of Rs. 3,000 and collected money from his community for a public park. He also made arrangements to feed the children at school, probably a forerunner to today's mid-day meal scheme.

The Zamindar is said to have been part of the Lodge or Free Masons and held an important honorary position in the Jail administration during which he had donated land in today's Gandhipuram for building the staff quarters. The Kalingarayar Street in Ramnagar is named after him.

Agathur Muthuramaswami Kalingaroyar represented the District in the Delhi Durbar of 1911. Towards the end of his life, he turned spiritual and led the life of an ascetic in an ashram built for the purpose.

His memory still is alive in his Zamin and its environs.