

COIMBATORE

The Zamindars Of Uthukuli

The Kalingarayars are an ancient clan of rulers who ruled parts of Western Tamil Nadu from the times of the Cholas. Siddharth AMR Kalingarayar is a modern day businessman and aristocrat rolled into one and shuttles between Uthukuli which is located on the outskirts of Pollachi and the industrial city of Coimbatore. He is part of the 37th generation from the time his family made a mark in the history of the ancient Kongu country.

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Uthukuli has been under the control of the Kalingarayars for the last several centuries. Siddharth AMR Kalingarayar is the youngest grandson of the Zamindar of Uthukuli A.M.R. Kalingarayar. He did his schooling at the prestigious Lawrence School, Lovedale. Thereafter he took to organic farming, production of organic manure while also offering solid waste management solutions to local bodies and NGOs in Tamil Nadu. He has been associated with the famous green NGO in Coimbatore, Sruthuli and is also executive member of INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage).

Our ancestors ruled the Vellode part of the Kongu country and around the year 1282 they dedicated the Kalingarayar canal to the people of Western Tamil Nadu, creating a union between the rivers Bhavani, Anaravathi and Noyyal - the three tributaries of river Cauvery. The canal measures 56.5 miles and has been irrigating over 30,000 acres of land for the past seven centuries. We created our own strain of paddy which came to be known as the Kalingan paddy. Even today water flows through the Kalingarayar canal for 35 to 40 half months a year. The ruler of Vijayanagar bestowed the title 'Rayar' on us for perpetuity in recognition of our services and our family moved over to Uthukuli near



Pollachi in order to ensure that the benefits of the Kalingarayar canal were completely given to the farmers of the region. The grateful agrarian community continues to celebrate the 5th of the Tamil month of Thai each year as the Kalingarayar day," states the dynamic Siddharth.

The Kalingarayars fought wars on behalf of both the Nayaks of Madurai and the Wodeyars of Mysore in Tirunelveli and Coorg respectively. The Uthukuli Palayam came under the East India Company after the death of Tipu Sultan and the rulers were granted a Zamindari Sanad by the British Monarch during the 19th century. "Our zamin consisted of over 10,000 acres

of land during the time of the English and we began integrating ourselves with the industrialised society during the times of our ancestor Diwan Bahadur Muthuramaswamy Kalingarayar who belonged to the 33rd generation of Kalingarayars. Our family moved over to Coimbatore during the times of my grandfather A.M.R. Kalingarayar and has made substantial contributions to several institutions in this region," adds the ebullient aristocrat. The sprawling palace of the Zamindars of Uthukuli is spread over four acres and is vested with Siddharth and his cousin Vishnu. The palace has several bedrooms,



a library, sheds for bullock carts and cars, a large granary, a kutchery were the Zamindars held court during the yesteryears in addition to a large garden which provides produce for the palace and flowers for the twelve temples managed by the royal family. Large parts of the palace were restored by Siddharth and his parents Arunkumar and Seetha, who happens to be the grand daughter of the doyen of the Murugappa Group - AMM Murugappa Chettiar.

He shows a keen interest while describing the ancient palace, "The Pollachi region is close to Kerala and therefore the design and terminology have its influence. We have a Kottaram as in Kerala. A lot of wood and tiles are found in our palace. The second phase is a few hundred years old and has Indo-Saracenic influences in it. This was the residential portion

until the modern wing was added in the twentieth century. We have some nice pieces of furniture, curios, old pictures and records belonging to the different eras. As you move from one part of the palace to the other you will feel like you are moving through different time zones. The place is full of history. My ancestors were important rulers who had fought battles all over the South while also administering thousands of square kilometres of territory during their heydays and therefore much was witnessed by the palace," he tells.

"I spend my weekends off roading, working on my own breed of dogs - the toy boxer or spending time on a coracle in the large lotus pond in Samathur. Incidentally, my wife Shrinidhi is the daughter of Ramaraj Vanavarayar from the ancient Samathur Zamindari," shares Siddharth. Multi-faceted Siddharth has a large

collection of stamps and coins. He happens to be a member of the Madras Naturalists Society and also NASBA due to his interest in solid waste management.

He is authorised to train organic farmers by virtue of a programme that he participated in Uttarakhand some years ago. The World Tamil University has recognised him by conferring an Honourary Doctorate recently. Siddharth echoes positive sentiments while talking about the future. "My daughter Alankrutha just loves to be at Uthukuli. I want to bring the international traveller to our palace and usher in sustainable heritage tourism in the near future. Our first batch of visitors from Canada are due sometime in November. I hope that this will be a new beginning for our centuries old heritage at Uthukuli," he says, signing off with flourish.