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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**CONTRIBUTION OF K.K.PILLAI TO HISTORICAL WRITINGS**

**Dr Sivakumar S**

*Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of History, ThiruKolanjiappar Government Arts College  
Vriddhachalam – 606 001*

**Abstract**

K. K. Pillai was a Professor of History at the University of Madras until his recent retirement and is the author of several publications, including a Ph.D. thesis on the Suchindram temple. K. Kanagasabapathy Pillai popularly known as K.K. Pillai was born as the eldest son of Kolappa Pillai and Parvathy on 3rd April 1905 in an agricultural family in the small village of Aloor of Kalkulam Taluk of Kanyakumari district - the then Travancore State. K.K. Pillai was one of the Pioneers to encourage research in historical studies. Historical research is the process of systematically examining past events to give an account of what has happened in the past. It is not a mere accumulation of facts and dates or even a description of past events. His historical research works have paved the way to unearth many historical facts. He reiterated that historians should possess the basic qualities of honesty, sincerity, judiciousness, and impartiality and that a narrow-minded, one-sided, and emotional approach towards issues relating to caste, language, and issues should be strictly avoided. One of the goals of historical research is to communicate an understanding of past events. He also had the strong notion that historians should not rely totally on data from stone inscriptions alone to put forth their research findings but should be well informed about the fields of literature anthropology, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and politics to present their research findings in an effective and unbiased manner. K.K. Pillai said, 'In historical research, it is especially important that the student carefully defines his problem and appraises its appropriateness before committing himself too fully'. K.K. Pillai pointed out "Research is a highly focused activity that requires collecting information and processing the data. It involves the collection of information in a targeted fashion, which is further explored thoroughly to lead to answers to research questions and evaluate results".

**Keywords:** K.K. Pillai - Professor – Pioneer - Historical research – Honesty – Communicate – Inscriptions – Anthropology - Psychology – Sociology – Philosophy – Information - Research findings

## **Introduction**

History is an interpretation of the past in the words of a historian. It is a scholarly study of what happened in the past without being judgmental or subjective. The main job of a historian is to record the information and facts based on narratives of the past and recollect the entire sequence of events without getting biased.<sup>1</sup> K. K. Pillai was a Professor of History at the University of Madras until his recent retirement and is the author of several publications, including a Ph.D. thesis on the Suchindram temple. He is currently on special duty at the University of Madras. History starts from the time when writing was invented and people started to keep records of events occurring at that time. Events belonging to a period before history are termed prehistory and include events and people that are beyond the scope of history as they cannot be verified. History includes authentic information about the past as and when it happened.

## **Biography of K.K.Pillai:**

K.Kanagasabapathy Pillai popularly known as K.K.Pillai was born as the eldest son of Kolappa Pillai and Parvathy on 3rd April 1905 in an agricultural family in the small hamlet of Aloor of Kalkulam Taluk of Kanyakumari district - the then Travancore state. His father Kolappa Pillai was a village schoolmaster proficient in both Tamil and Malayalam, and Dr.Pillai used to fondly recollect his father as 'Thinnai Pallikooda Vathiyar'.<sup>2</sup> K.K. Pillai had his primary education in the village school and later joined the English High School at Kottar, Kanyakumari district. After School, he joined the Scott Christian College, Nagercoil. When Raw Eastaff and G.H.Horsdan were the principals as a student of History for his intermediate course with optional subjects such as Ancient History, Indian History, and History of Great Britain.

## **Education:**

He completed his Honours degree in history with distinction from Maharaja's Arts College at Trivandrum when Prof.K.V.Rengaswamyengar and Prof. C.V. Chandrasekaran were the Principals. He

started his career as a lecturer at Government Arts College, Kumbakonam in 1927 and subsequently became a Professor of History at the Presidency College Madras. In 1946, he received the D.Litt degree for his historical research publication titled 'The Suchindrum Temple' for the compilation of which he was motivated and inspired by Kavimani Desika Vinayagam Pillai to whom he dedicated the volume.<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly the book is a distinct contribution to our knowledge of South Indian history. In 1948, he obtained his D.Phil. degree from the School of Oriental and African Studies of Oxford University for his work. He was appointed as an Assistant professor of Indian History in 1954 in University of Madras and he became the professor of Area studies in the same university in 1961. After retiring from the university, he took up the directorship of the Institute of Traditional Culture of South and Southeast Asia, succeeding Prof.K.A.Nilakanta Sastri. Thus he had associated with the handling of problems of history and culture for all over half a century.

## **Contribution to Historical Research**

K.K. Pillai was one of the Pioneers to encourage research in historical studies. Historical research is the process of systematically examining past events to give an account of what has happened in the past. It is not a mere accumulation of facts and dates or even a description of past events.<sup>4</sup> His historical research works have paved the way to unearth many historical facts. It is a flowing, dynamic account of past events that involves an interpretation of the events in an attempt to recapture the nuances, personalities, and ideas that influenced these events. He reiterated that historians should possess the basic qualities of honesty, sincerity, judiciousness, and impartiality and that a narrow-minded, one-sided, and emotional approach towards issues relating to caste, language, and issues should be strictly avoided. One of the goals of historical research is to communicate an understanding of past events. Historical research is a type of analytical research. Its common methodological characteristics include identifying a research topic that addresses past events, review of primary and secondary data, systematic collection and objective evaluation of data

related to past occurrences with the help of techniques of criticism for historical searches and evaluation of the information and synthesis and explanation of findings to test hypotheses concerning causes, effects or trends of these events that may help to explain present events and anticipate future events.<sup>5</sup> He also had the strong notion that historians should not rely totally on data from stone inscriptions alone to put forth their research findings but should be well informed about the fields of literature anthropology, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and politics to present their research findings in an effective and unbiased manner.

### **Presidential Address**

K.K.Pillai delivered a presidential address at the Indian History Congress in Jabalpur 1970 and at the History Associations the Madurai Kamaraj, Annamalai, and Calicut Universities the Presidency College, Pachaiyappa's College and Christian College Madras. According to K.K. Pillai Historical Research is not a mere accumulation of facts and data or even a portrayal of past events. It is a flowing, vibrant report of past events that involves analysis and explanation of these occurrences to recapture the nuances, personalities, and ideas that influenced the events.<sup>6</sup> He pointed out that conducting historical research involves the process of collecting and reading the research material collected and writing the manuscript from the data collected. The researcher often goes back and forth between collecting, reading, and writing. i.e. the process of data collection and analysis are done simultaneously and are not two distinct phases of research. It deals with the discovery of data that already exists and does not involve the creation of data using structured tools. It is analytical in that it uses logical induction. It has a variety of foci such as issues, events, movements, and concepts. It records and evaluates the accomplishments of individuals, agencies, or institutions. As per K.K. Pillai's point of view, the selection of a topic in historical research depends on several personal factors of the researcher such as his or her motivation, interest, historical knowledge and curiosity, ability to interpret historical facts, and so on. If the problem selected involves understanding an event, an institution, a person, or a

past period, more clearly, it should be taken up for research.<sup>7</sup> The topic selected should be defined in terms of the types of written materials and other resources available to you. This should be followed by formulating a specific and testable hypothesis or a series of research questions if required. This will provide a clear focus and direction for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. i.e. it provides a structure to the study. According to K.K. Pillai, without hypotheses, historical research often becomes little more than an aimless gathering of facts.<sup>8</sup>

### **Scope of the Research**

The scope of the study can be determined based on the extent of emphasis placed on the four questions identified by K.K. Pillai i.e. the geographical area included, the number of persons involved, the period included and the number and kinds of human activities involved often, the exact scope and delimitation of a study is decided by a researcher only after the relevant material has been obtained.<sup>9</sup>

### **Identification of a Historical Problem.**

K.K. Pillai said, 'In historical research, it is especially important that the student carefully defines his problem and appraises its appropriateness before committing himself too fully'. Many problems are not adaptable to historical research methods and cannot be adequately treated using this approach. Other problems have little or no chance of producing significant results either because of the lack of pertinent data or because the problem is a trivial one." Beach has classified the problems that prompt historical inquiry into five types: Current social issues are the most popular source of historical problems in education. e.g. Rural education, adult and continuing education, positive discrimination in education, etc. These studies are often conducted with "the simple desire to acquire knowledge about previously unexamined phenomena".<sup>10</sup> For example, the history of educational financing and the history of the aims of education in India may be unrelated. However, a person reviewing these two researches separately may detect some relationship between the two histories and design a study to understand this relationship. A historical study aimed at synthesizing old data or

merging them with new historical facts discovered by the researcher.

### **K.K. Pillai's Outlook on Nanjilnadu:**

As per K.K. Pillai's point of view, the history of Nanjilnadu has not been yet reconstructed systematically based on the entire available data. Till now, it has received little more than a left-handed treatment at the hands of writers of Travancore History. The reason for this circumstance was that early historians of Travancore viewed Nanjilnadu as having been an integral part of that country even in the distant part. Writers like PachuMuthatu, Shangunny Menon, Nagamaiah and T.K.Velu Pillai.<sup>11</sup> That Nanjilnadu has all-time constituted a distinctly separated unit, socially and culturally different from the rest of Travancore has been woefully ignored. A systematic utilization and a proper interpretation of the Tamil sources, literary and epigraphic is essential in a scheme of true reconstruction of South Indian History. Nanjilnadu has played an important role in the history of South India for almost all the leading dynasties of South India have been associated with Nanjilnadu at one stage or another. Historical studies attempt to provide information and understanding of past historical, legal, and policy events.<sup>12</sup>

### **Hypothesis**

According to K.K. Pillai, "A hypothesis is a description of a pattern in nature or an explanation about some real-world phenomenon that can be tested through observation and experimentation. The most common way a hypothesis is used in scientific research is as a tentative, testable, and falsifiable statement that explains some observed phenomenon in nature". Historians more specifically call this kind of statement an explanatory hypothesis. However, a hypothesis can also be a statement that describes an observed pattern in nature. In this case, we call the statement a generalizing hypothesis.<sup>13</sup> He said "Hypotheses can generate predictions: statements that propose that one variable will drive some effect on or change in another variable in the result of a controlled experiment. However, many science resources promote the myth that a hypothesis is

simply an educated guess and no different from a prediction". Many academic fields, from the physical sciences to the life sciences to the social sciences, use hypothesis testing as a means of testing ideas to learn about the world and advance scientific knowledge. Whether you are a beginning scholar or a beginning student taking a class in a science subject, understanding what hypotheses are and being able to generate hypotheses and predictions yourself is very important.<sup>14</sup>

### **Sources of History**

All the material which has a direct bearing or can be any assistance in constructing the history of a particular period is called historical facts or sources. The historical sources can be of two types, i.e. Primary and Secondary Sources. A primary source is the evidence of an eyewitness or mechanical device that was present at the time of the occurrence of an event. It is the work of the historian to convert the scattered difficult primary evidence into coherent, intelligible secondary sources.<sup>15</sup> The secondary source is the evidence of someone who was not present at the time of occurrence of the event e.g., books written by historians. The secondary source is also of great historical importance to historians although secondary source is itself dependent on primary sources. A primary source may contain secondary information e.g., newspapers are usually considered primary sources but the information provided by newspapers is not all based on primary sources. Such as certain incidents reported by the paper may be such which the correspondent saw or in which he took part while certain offer information may be based on official information or sources considered reliable. The primary sources are in the form of instruction documents, stenographic and phonographic records, business and legal papers autobiographies, etc. The instruction documents may be in the form of an appointment notification, direction from a foreign office to the ambassador, etc. Generally, such documents have very little chance of error but it is essential to ascertain their authenticity.<sup>16</sup> The Business and legal letters consist of bills, journals, leases, wills, and tax records which give an insight into the working of the firms as well as the persons. The autobiographies are a credible source of history

because they are very close to the events with which they deal and are written by a person himself. These are non-prejudicial. The Suchindram Temple was Pillai's wonderful Monography. In this book, James H.Cousins points out many things about his monograph. He pointed out that 'A refreshing feature of K.K.Pillai's monograph is its freedom of mind and its exercise of the critical faculty. The confidential reports are not intended for a general audience and are less reliable than the contemporary sources. These types of reports are generally in the forms of military and diplomatic dispatches, Journals, diaries or memoirs, and personal letters.<sup>17</sup>

### **Drafting Synopsis**

K.K. Pillai's thoughts about the purpose of the thesis and how to plan to reach the research goals, and should prepare a synopsis. A synopsis is a short, systematic outline of the proposed thesis, made in preparation for the first meeting with your supervisor. It serves to ensure that your supervisor gets a clear picture of the proposed project and allows him or her to spot whether some gaps or things have not been taken into account. The synopsis will work as a kind of protocol for the further steps you need to take to ensure that the thesis reaches the required academic level and that finished on time. A rule of thumb is that the length of the synopsis can vary from two to five pages, but the precise length and exact requirements of the synopsis can vary from institute to institute and from supervisor to supervisor.<sup>18</sup> Most of the study programs will require that they present a final synopsis before starting data collection. However, the first version of the synopsis for discussion with the supervisor should not be an informal draft. Carefully performed work creates respect and motivation and saves a lot of supervisor's time. A good approach from the very beginning is to establish a practice of how to write headings, references, names of species, etc. And be consistent. This will help to save time and importantly, lead to a better overall assessment of final work.

### **Bibliography**

A bibliography is a list of books, articles, government documents, manuscripts, and

other publications on a subject, described and arranged in some systematic order. Bibliographies may be book-length and are also found as lists of publications in individual books, articles, and entries in encyclopedias, etc. Bibliographies are so useful in the research process because they are a means to locate material on a certain subject.<sup>19</sup> Bibliographies are often overlooked in the research process but they are a valuable tool. The compiler, in most cases, a professor or librarian, has gathered together a list of sources on a specific topic which means that a good deal of research has already been completed. As pointed out by K.K.Pillai, author of 'The Suchindram Temple', 'A Social History of the Tamils' the main advantage of a bibliography is that it reduces the more tedious and mechanical part of doing research- the process of pouring over many indexes and databases searching for relevant information. Unfortunately, there are too few subject bibliographies published, but look carefully and you may be able to find one of these "jewels". It has been argued that published bibliographies have become passé because they have been replaced by online searches of databases, library catalogues, and the Internet. Online searches can gather together a pool of relevant resources without the need for a bibliography.<sup>20</sup> While it is true the power of search engines makes this possible, it is a superficial argument.

### **Conclusion**

K.K. Pillay was one of the pioneers to inspire research in historical studies. His historical research works have flagged the way to excavate many historical facts. K.K.Pillai pointed out "Research is a highly focused activity that requires collecting information and processing the data. It involves the collection of information in a targeted fashion, which is further explored thoroughly to lead to answers to research questions and evaluate results". The choice of any social problem can be chosen by the researcher as the subject of research. However not all social problems are the subject of this research. The information is presented in a systematic form which means that it is easier to read the information. He analyzed the generalization and interpretation of the historical sources are the key components of the historical writings. Bibliographies can help organize

citations and make it possible to find relevant information quickly. He explained the best bibliographies provide subject grouping to give some indication of the schema of the discipline with a keyword index for quick access. The need for a bibliography is to organize information about materials on a given subject so that students of the subject may have access to it.

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