

## TRAVAILS OF A HONEST CHAIRMAN -Dr. M.VALLUVAN

KARKKAK KASADARAK KARPPAVAI KATRAPIN  
NIRKKA ADHARKKUTH THAGA.

‘Thirukkural’ transliteration

LEARN, WHAT WE SHOULD, WITHOUT BLEMISH  
AND DO STICK TO IT

‘HONESTY’ – is one of man’s primary traits: Alas it’s only on paper.

Corruption and bribe are ruling the roost. Rights and riches of the people are sunk deep in the ocean of corruption. Politicians and bureaucrats have jointly thrived to establish a rule of corruption. The illiterate as well as the elite have succumbed to the powers and pressures of the above unholy combine and have willy nilly come to accept corruption as a way of life. Those who dare to stand up to the injustice will have to face the ‘consequences’.

In such a fast world, we are content with getting our job done by whatever means. A honest man in public life or in Govt. service is considered an aberration. They face imminent change of place or loss of status This is the reward honest persons get at the hands of evil forces.

Corruption and bribe are diseases that have afflicted the mankind. They are not incurable though. The antidote is indeed with the people. That is ‘Awareness’ of and willingness to fight corruption.

There were quite a few conscientious people who have taken it upon themselves to fight and eradicate corruption from the society. Dr.VALLUVAN M.B.B.S. D.O., a successful Ophthalmologist who functioned as the Chairman of Virudhachalam municipality, in Cuddalore district of Tamilnadu from 2001 to 2005 is one committed to such a mission. His impeccable integrity, professed antipathy against corruption and relentless desire to serve the people were enough to earn the wrath of powerful coterie of political bigwigs. He had to face problems aplenty. This documentary attempts to describe how he fought with great determination, the evil designs of the corrupt forces and succeeded in realizing his dreams, and ambitions.

Dr.Valluvan hails from Neivasal, a village in Cuddalore dist. He has earned a niche in the hearts of the rural population in the town by his very cordial and humane approach to his patients for more than 20 years... He has a contented family with wife Tamilselvi, son Balaji and daughter Mala.

Virudhachalam is one of five municipalities in Cuddalore district. It was by a sheer turn of events rather than any burning desire for power that Dr.Valluvan found himself as a candidate for the Chairmanship of the municipality. His election campaign itself was note worthy in that he completely avoided pomp and vulgar show of strength to garner votes. On the other hand he took to a door to door campaign accompanied by a couple of friends, telling people that his only purpose was to serve the people of Virudhachalam in getting the civic amenities that were denied to them. The effect was electric and people plumped for him with full hope and trust. Dr.Valluvan was elected as Chairman of Virudhachalam Municipality on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 2001.

From day One in office Dr Valluvan avowed to give a clean and people friendly administration. Behind his seat in his room he had it written boldly on the wall that 'Giving and taking bribe was a crime' and 'People were the masters and that he was their servant.' He firmly believed that this would deter the Officials from demanding bribe and protect the public. Through out his tenure as Chairman, even in the face of trials and tribulations, Dr.Valluvan unswervingly stood his principles which was acknowledged in an article in the tamil weekly 'Ananda Vikatan' dated 8-10-2006.

When Dr.Valluvan assumed office the Municipality was in the red to the tune of Rs.50 lakhs and the staff had not been paid their salary for a good 5 months. Starting from this appalling financial position Dr.Valluvan was able to show a credit balance of more than Rs.2 crores when he demitted office. Besides he was able to show development and improvement in all the sectors viz. roads, school buildings, street lighting water supply, health facilities and many more. Why this was not possible in the earlier periods. The reason is not far to seek. It was due to an organized loot of municipal funds by a group of vested, so called people's representatives. Dr.Valluvan at once realized that judicial financial management with emphasis on putting down corruption and controlling bribery was the key to good governance and success. He planned it on three fronts.

- 1) Prudent control of expenditure.
- 2) curbing irregularities-plugging leakages in revenue
- 3) Identifying scopes for fresh revenue.

#### CUTTING TELEPHONE EXPENDITURE:

The municipal chairman and vice-chairman were eligible for telephone expenses as follows.

Chairman	Office & Residence	Rs.6400/-
Vice Chairman	Residence	Rs.2150/-

As a measure of economy, Dr.Valluvan did not avail of the allowance for the office telephone on the ground that he was spending only limited hours in the office which he was using for meeting the people in person and knowing their grievances. The vice chairman in the previous term continued to use the telephone even after he demitted office. He left an arrears of Rs.8337/- which was paid by the Municipality. No action was taken by the administration to recover this amount.

#### CURBING WASTEFUL EXPENDITURE ON STREET LIGHTS:

It is a common sight in almost all local bodies that the street lights are allowed to glow in daylight resulting in excess current charges besides wastage of electric power itself. Dr Valluvan issued strict orders that the street lights should be switched on and turned off at fixed hours by which as much as Rs.10, 000 per month was saved in power consumption charges. Action was taken on defaulting staff.

#### USE OF DIESEL

The consumption of diesel by the municipal vehicles was not properly monitored and no proper accounting was done resulting in pilferage of diesel and loss to the municipality. Dr.Valluvan exercised strict control on this streamlined the system of purchase and usage and took action against the errant drivers. Considerable reduction in fuel expenditure was effected due to this measure. The administration and the vigilance never initiated any action in the matter even after reporting.

#### IRREGULARITIES IN THE USE OF CONSERVANCY LORRIES.

The entries in the log book of lorries showed that the lorries were run even on Sundays and unauthorized trips to TVS Tiruchi were also made. Dr.Valluvan ordered a monthly recovery of Rs.2000/ from the officer in charge which would be returned in full if there was no audit objections.

#### PUBLIC HEALTH LORRIES

##### 1) TN 31 T 2568

Due to the lapse of the driver, payment could not be made to the petrol bunk and the petrol supply was stopped. The lorries could not be put into use. The salary of the driver was withheld for the month of August 2004.

##### 2)TN 31 S 2932

The log book was not maintained. Speedometer was not working. On the instructions of Dr.Valluvan this was rectified and the diver was mad accountable.

Resolutions of the municipal council relating to water supply were not carried out resulting in water scarcity. Actually this was a planned lapse to create the scarcity and deploy lorry for water supply. Dr.Valluvan issued orders to expedite the water supply scheme works, and also to recover the extra expenditure incurred in supplying water through lorry from the contactor. He also made a complaint to the Officers of vigilance and anticorruption.

#### IRREGULARITIES DETECTED AND RECTIFIED

##### 1) Purchase of electrical spares

A scrutiny of file no.E1/2855/2002 revealed misappropriation of Rs.65000/- in the alleged purchase of electrical spares. This was reported to the regional director of municipal administration and the vigilance officers.

##### 2) Purchase of water supply equipment

On a verification of register M.F.90, entries were found for the purchase of two pump motors, one 20 HP and the other 7.5 HP at a cost of Rs.39450/-. But the pump motors could not be found fixed any where. Obviously this was a blatant act of fraud. Besides for 10 sets of hand gloves at the rate of Rs.70/-per set 1400 rupees has been paid. This was an error in haste by some one who was making a false entry.

Municipality had proposed to install Mark II hand pumps from drought relief funds. Experts estimated the cost per pump to be about Rs.45000 to Rs.50000. But year after year a rate of Rs.1.00 lakh has been adopted with obvious intention of swindling money. Dr Valluvan made a complaint to the vigilance department about this irregularity.

##### 3) Purchase of mosquito repellent

With a view to ensure proper functioning of each sector of public service, Dr.Valluvan appointed various committees as follows

##### 1) Finance committee

##### 2) Drinking water committee

##### 3) Health committee

##### 4) Electrical committee

##### 5) Building planning committee

All the councilors were provided with details of the working of these committees. Some of the committees functioned creditably.

In the year 2002, an amount of Rs.1.32 lakhs was spent on the purchase of mosquito repellent liquid. As this amount was in excess of the amount sanctioned by the council, Dr.Valluvan asked a councilor in the Health committee to thoroughly look in to the purchases. File no.H1/2995/2002 revealed the following irregularities.

- 1) The vouchers were forged.
- 2) There was no way bill or lorry receipt for the consignments

Dr.Valluvan reported this to the vigilance officers, the Director of Municipal Administration, and the local fund audit dept.

In the light of the above revelation, purchase of mosquito repellent in the earlier period was verified.

It was startling to find that in a span of 14 months alone, (from 14-7-2000 to 28-8-2001) mosquito repellent liquid was purchased to a whopping value of Rs.25,24,485/-.When Dr.Valluvan asked for the register to verify the utilization, false entries were made in a hurry. This was obvious because there was an entry dated **November 31**, and the period between Sunday to Sunday was counted as 7 days as against 6 days, and issues were noted almost every day to the tune of 45to 90 litres. /day

All this go to establish that public money to the tune of Rs 25.25 lakhs had been siphoned off to vested hands.

Dr.Valluvan referred the matter to the DSP, Vigilance and Anticorruption, Cuddalore It is to be noted that in the earlier year 1999-2000 also audit had objected to the purchase of mosquito repellent to the tune of Rs.2, 39,304, on the basis of irregularities detected.

Because of the above bold steps taken by Dr.Valluvan to expose the improper use of public money by the municipal authorities, the general public became aware of the real situation and further misappropriation of funds was prevented.

**SIT IN STRIKE TO 'RECOVER PEOPLE'S MONEY'**

All this meant that the revenue of the municipality which came from the sweat and toil of the people through taxes, and intended for the welfare measures for the people was being swindled by a handful of money minded unscrupulous persons. In order to highlight this Dr.Valluvan arranged for a sit in strike in front of his own municipal office for the **"recovery of People's tax money"**. Dr.Valluvan exhorted the Govt, the higher officials, and the vigilance directorate to take severe action on the persons who were responsible for the misappropriation of public money.

**MARKET WALL**

In Virudhachalam town, the Palakkarai zone is notorious for frequent road accidents, with loss of human lives. There are a number of encroachments by traders who have put up shops. Because of the market in the temple lands near Palakkarai, there are heavy moving crowds. The problem is compounded by the haphazard parking of vehicles. This called for immediate remedial action.

In a meeting held at Cuddalore on 27-1-2001 under the chairmanship of the Collector it was decided to block the roadside entry to the market by putting up a wall, and providing a cycle stand

after removing the encroachments. For some reason the follow up action was delayed. This was pointed out with adverse comments in the newspapers like 'Dinamalar'. With Collector's orders the work was taken up on 8-3-2002. By about 2-00PM, removal of encroachments, construction of wall, putting up wire fence etc were all taken up smultaneouslyin the presence of the RDO, DSP, Dr.Valluvan, about 15 municipal councilors, the municipal commissioner, and over hundred municipal staff and more than 100 policemen. The traders objected to the construction of the wall and wanted entry points in three places. The talks continued till late in the night. Dr.Valluvan stood to his stand and stating that the people's welfare was paramount he stoutly refused to provide any pathway in the

wall. The work was finally resumed at 11-45 PM. and was completed by 4 AM. About 65 persons who had protested to the wall construction were taken in to custody. Dr.Valluvan stayed at the site throughout the night until the work was completed.

There were more interesting things to follow in this episode.

The temple management filed a writ in the High Court for removal of the wall. The court refused to comply. The petitioners went on appeal. On the other side the traders resorted to all means to get the wall demolished. 26 councilors asked the Chairman, Dr. Valluvan to convene a council meeting immediately to discuss the issue of removing the wall. As the matter was in court Dr.Valluvan refused to convene the meeting. On some advice that the meeting could be convened without the Chairman the councilors conducted the council meeting. This meeting had the support of the municipal commissioner which is unfortunate and deplorable. The meeting resolved to remove the wall and provide access to the market. The temple administration produced a copy of this resolution in the high court. Of the two respondents viz the Chairman and the municipal commissioner only the chairman objected to the resolution on the ground that it was passed without the chairman. The court directed the District collector to enquire the matter. The Collector summoned the Municipal chairman, the municipal commissioner, and the temple representative for an oral enquiry.

It became apparent to Dr.Valluvan that the municipal commissioner and some of the councilors had been purchased by the other side and that he had to wage a lone fight. He, however, was certain that justice and the people were on his side and he was determined to carry the fight to the end. He collected as many documentary evidences as possible and produced before the Collector. In the period from 1993 to 2002 there were 62 accidents at this location and as many as 12 deaths where as in the one year since the construction of the wall there was not a single accident. Besides the Tamilnadu municipalities Act expressly required that the municipality should abstain from doing anything detrimental to human life. The Police also vouchsafed to the fact of frequent accidents at the site in question. Where upon the district collector Thiru Gagandeep Singh Bedi ruled that the resolution of the council passed in the absence of the Chairman was not tenable and cancelled it.

It is a matter of grave concern that in a democracy elected people's representatives and an employee of the state, drawing salary from people's tax revenue, could collude with vested private interests and act against the interest of the Govt. and more so against the very people whom they are bound to serve. That they are able to go scot free without any action being taken against them

by the Govt is another matter for debate, to ensure the triumph of people's will in a democracy.

All credit to Dr.Valluvan for his relentless and fearless fight against injustice. The people of Virudhachalam owe him aplenty for this effort alone.

#### UNAUTHORISED DOMESTIC WATER SUPPLY CONNECTIONS

A complaint was made by a councilor that in Periyar nagar area there were many unauthorized water supply house connections. On verification this was found to be true and as many as 114 such connections were identified which included two councilors' residences also. Two engineers were suspended for this irregularity and one plumber's license was cancelled.

An over head tank is capable of 500 house service connections and 10 public taps. Because of the 100 plus unauthorized connections legitimate consumers are denied their due share of water. Besides, municipality is put to

heavy financial loss without any revenue by way connection charges or consumption charges. If the lost revenue had been realized two more water tanks could have been constructed and 1000 genuine consumers benefited.

DrValluvan reported this to the higher officials. The government, after careful consideration, issued detailed instructions for dealing with such unauthorized connections.

- 1) Immediate disconnection on detecting the irregularity
- 2) Imposing a penalty of Rs.5000/-
- 3) Obtaining fresh application for consideration
- 4) Providing connection on collection of deposit and water tax at a time.
- 5) Fitting flow control valve.

#### IF THE SUPPLY LINE IS FITTED WITH PUMP MOTOR

- 1) disconnecting the supply immediately on detection
- 2) forfeiting the pump motor
- 3) Imposing a penalty of s.7000/-
- 4) Examine restoration of connection
- 5) Fitting flow control valve

The G.O. delegated powers to the Director of municipal administration and the Director of Town panchayats to take appropriate action and issue suitable orders. The G.O. was recorded in the municipal records by suitable council resolutions. But no action was taken as per the G.O. Dr.Valluvan took up the issue with the directorate of vigilance and anticorruption.

Similarly DrValluvan wanted to put an end to the prevailing corruption in the sanction of new water supply connections. He printed and distributed notice to the public appealing to them not to pay any bribe money for the HSC and if any one made a demand, to report the matter to the DSP vigilance whose address and telephone number were also given. Thus the practice of collecting heavy amount as bribe by the municipal staff for sanctioning water supply connection was put an end to.

A complaint was received from one Ravichandran of Periyar nagar (South) that he had paid Rs.2000/- to the Junior Assistant Ammasi of the municipal office and he did not get the receipt nor the service connection. After detailed enquiry Ammasi was suspended. Another person from Vayalur who tried to give unauthorised connection was reported to the police.

In the past, no action was taken for planning water supply schemes with a long term perspective. Dr.Valluvan initiated schemes with 15 years projection and proposed construction of 4 OHTs to cater to a future population of 95000. He also improved the efficiency of distribution by increasing the number of fillings of the OHTs by adding another pump motor. By this measure the construction of an additional OHT was avoided resulting in considerable savings in the cost of construction and maintenance.

The municipality passed resolution no. 714 for taking action in respect of unauthorized connections. But no action was taken by the municipal commissioner, as he was not bothered to carry out any public welfare measure. Dr Valluvan wrote to the district collector informing of his intention to keep the non performing commissioner locked up in his room. All this go to expose the fact that the local bodies have no powers to take any kind of action against delinquent officials of the municipality be it the commissioner or even a lowly placed office assistant. It required the guts and determination of a honest and service minded Chairman to come down and fight with the support of the people to set the administration of the municipality in order. As a result the people got awakened and came to know of their rights and responsibilities. Corruption was eradicated to a very great extent in water supply and in other sectors also. In this scenario, the nefarious activities of corrupt officials were effectively curbed.

## PROPERTY TAX

Property tax is the back bone of a municipality. People are not aware that this is the major source of revenue. Staff in the municipalities who are responsible for the fixation and collection of property tax adopt all dubious means to make a few fast bucks for themselves rather than care for the municipality's coffers. Innocent public are also in complete dark about how to approach and who to contact when they have matters to be got done in the government offices. Procedures are kept so secretive and murky. Delays are purposely made with the sole intention of harassing and keeping the public at bay ultimately driving them to the inevitable point of paying speed money better known as bribe. Dr.Valluvan put an end to this practice. He caused the adoption of Patna model for the fixing and collection of property tax. This procedure introduced by one Mr.S.K.Singh and internationally acclaimed required the classification of the municipal area into different categories and fixing a standard rate of tax per square foot of built up area.

In Virudhachalam municipality the following rates were prescribed.

A zone	Rs.0.75/sft
B zone	Rs.0.55 /sft
C Zone	rs.0.40 /sft

Even though this system was in vogue from October 1998, no effort was taken to give effect to it and the people were kept in the dark. Dr.Valluvan took the initiative to educate the people and resorted to a door to door campaign with the help of the members of the Anticorruption Movement and various Residents' welfare Associations. He made the people understand that at the expense of both the people and the Govt, some intermediary people were getting illegally benefited by improper assessment of property tax. It was found that more than 1000 buildings were not assessed for property tax, resulting in a loss of Rs 5 lakhs per year for the municipality. The plain reason that could be deduced is that the staff in charge stalled of the regular collection of property tax but lured the people to pay them instead. There were also instances of wrong assessment with ulterior motive as in the case of a doctor's house in Krishnan nagar for which the amount of tax communicated was exorbitant and disproportionate. All these irregularities were eliminated and correct taxing ensured which prompted the people to voluntarily come forward to pay the tax, thus enhancing the revenue for the municipality. Dr.Valluvan made a comparison of the number of buildings given electrical service

connection by the EB and the number of buildings tax assessed by the municipality. This revealed that as many as 5000 buildings remained untaxed. The reason is not far to seek.

In the past the public services of the municipality were made so cumbersome that people dreaded to approach it for any service. Matters like issue of birth and death certificates, approval for building plans, name change, new water supply service connections all carried a price by way of bribe at various levels. Dr.Valluvan utilized the local private TV network to inform the people the procedures involved and the time limit for issue of such certificates making it clear that NO bribe money need to be paid and in case any one demanded it should be reported. He also telecast the information on the assessment and collection of property tax. All this closed the doors for the bribe mongers. They tried to stop the telecast by falsely using the name of a minister, but by then people had become fully aware and were in no mood to listen. These were the clear indicators of the enormous success of the honest efforts taken by Dr Valluvan. The following is a case in point.

One Thiru Ramasami residing in Tashkant nagar 3<sup>rd</sup> street, had paid Rs.1360/- to a municipal bill collector. For three months he did not give the receipt, and on 17-10-2003 he gave a receipt for Rs.351 only, which again was three days post dated. Thiru Ramasami reported this to Dr.Valluvan the next day.Dr.Valluvan made a complaint to the police which was not acted upon. He approached the Madras High Court with whose orders the bill collector was placed under suspension.

The municipal commissioner for his part did not cooperate with the Chairman. He did not help to convene the tax appeal committee meeting.

#### CHAIRMAN'S FAST

The predicament of a honest and public minded Chairman like Dr.Valluvan in the midst of corrupt and non responsive officials is not difficult to imagine. In the first two years alone of his office as many as 729 council resolutions were passed. But more than 100 remained uncomplied. Dr.Valluvan went on a hunger strike seeking the intervention of the District Collector in accordance with section 35 of the TN Municipalities Act. The members of the Anticorruption Movement also fasted for the same demand outside the municipal office.

#### D V & AC

In many cases of bribe and misappropriation, Dr Valluvan had earlier sought the investigation by the DVAC. On this basis Inspector Panneerselvam of the DVAC Cuddalore, sent an urgent communication that as per Directorate's instructions, enquiry was to be taken up on the former commissioner and two others and for that wanted to be provided with the following documents.

- 1) Files relating to the payment of telephone dues left unpaid by the former Vice Chairman, by the municipality.
- 2) Stock Register of electrical spares

- 3) Stock Register of Water supply spares
- 4) Stock Register of mosquito repellent
- 5) Receipt and issue register of mosquito repellent
- 6) Purchase register of electrical items
- 7) Tender register
- 8) Receipt for Rs.742/- towards supply of fuel to the jeep no TN 31 T 9931 of the Regional Director of municipal administration, Chingleput
- 9) another 26 documents including the diaries of the former commissioner and the municipal engineer.

All these documents were sent and Dr.Valluvan continued reminding the vigilance to expedite the enquiry.

#### NO RIGHT TO VOTE WITHOUT ENSURING THE RIGHT TO LIFE

There were a number of residential extensions in Virudhachalam town. People were continuously representing and indulging in dharna to provide basic amenities to these areas. The stock reply by the elected representatives and officials was that these areas were not approved and therefore were not eligible for development work. Dr.Valluvan took up the issue .He found out that the people in these areas were included in the voters' list. Dr.Valluvan felt that this was quite ironical. He announced to go on a hunger strike on 13-7-2000 in front of the tahsildar's office. He argued that when these people have not got the right to live why should they be given the right to vote? There was a meeting with the tahsildar, municipal chairman, residents' associations, inspector of police and municipal councilors. It was decided that orders regarding approval of house sites would be issued and communicated within 45 days. Having achieved his goal Dr.Valluvan called off the fast. By this special effort of Dr.Valluvan people in unapproved layouts became conscious of the necessity for approval of house sites. Dr.Valluvan arranged for discussions to explain the procedure for approval through the municipal staff.

#### NON COOPERATION MOVEMENT (NOT THE GANDHIAN TYPE)

No greasing of palms

No room for swindling

Why and what for should we work?

This was the attitude of the officials who had all along been enjoying such benefits in abundance without a worry about proper execution of works and the welfare of public.

They were not willing to cooperate in arranging and participating in the council meetings. Some councilors would refuse to attend the meetings if officers were not present. Even Some resolutions passed were not acted upon. The reason given was paucity of funds. For want of honest officials, particularly the commissioner, crucial public welfare measures could not be put on hand. A canard was spread by a vested group in the municipality that Dr.Valluvan was responsible for this stalemate. On top of this, the commissioner and some councilors indulged in character assassination by printing and distributing pamphlets imputing Dr.Valluvan with grossly false and unfounded accusations. A case of defamation is in court in this matter.

A honest Chairman is obviously a thorn in the flesh for the councilors and officials, whose only mission was to loot as much of the public funds as possible. There were open comments that 'Dr.Valluvan might be a saint but why should he stand on the way of others making some fast buck. Following this a conspiracy was hatched to remove Dr.Valluvan as chairman. Fourteen councilors prepared a signed memorandum. One of them filed a writ in the Chennai high court making false allegations against Dr.Valluvan and praying to issue directions for his removal. This case failed.

When the various frauds came to light Dr.Valluvan got hold of all the connected files and kept in his custody. These were all evidences in the complaints made by Dr.Valluvan to the vigilance and anticorruption department. The vested interests made a threat that if the files were not handed over to the municipality, they would make a police complaint. Dr.Valluvan requested the vigilance department to expedite the enquiry. It was surprising to find that the administration was always with the offenders and tried to provide protection. The adage that birds of the same feather flock together was well proved here.

The lessees of the bus stand and other shops of the municipality were not paying the monthly rent regularly. Their lease agreements were cancelled by the municipal council. But such defaulters were again granted lease. In a specific case, the lessee did not remit the dues for the month of 9, 10 and 11/2002 amounting to Rs.70, 251/-.. The Chairman wanted his lease agreement to be cancelled. But he was actually favoured with more lease contracts. This resulted in the accumulation of arrears to the tune of Rs.10.25 lakhs. This was the amount due for entering the bus stand. Had he been barred from competing in further tenders after falling due to the tune of Rs.70, 251, municipality would not have suffered further loss of Rs.10.25 lakhs. This defaulter is the husband of the former Vice-Chairman who herself did not surrender the official telephone after demitting office and had left dues.

Dr.Valluvan wrote to the then Chief minister to issue orders for the recovery of the above said dues. All he needed was a honest commissioner to cooperate with him. He wrote to the higher officials for the posting oh a honest commissioner. He echoed his frustration in 'Visu's Arattai Arangam' organized at Neyveli. He threw a challenge that if a honest and functional commissioner was appointed, he would make Virudhachalam municipality self sufficient, and the best governed municipality in Tamilnadu. Alas there were no takers. Perhaps finding a honest commissioner was like searching for a needle in the haystack. Those who were posted went on long leave as the pastures were not green. It appeared that the functioning of the municipality was wantonly brought to a standstill by vested elements. Dr.Valluvan continued his fight relentlessly. He made a request to the Cmmissioner of municipal administration to direct the officials on leave to join duty immediately. He followed up the request by sending as many as 20 reminder telegrams. The entire staff of the municipality clamoured against the Chairman – actually against justice and honesty – and entered on mass leave. Dr Valluvan sought the intervention of the Collector and requested him by FAX to issue show cause notices to the employees. The Collector referred the matter to the Regional Director of Municipal administration and there ended the matter.

Dr.Valluvan then sent a request to the Revenue Divisional Officer. He asked him to convene a meeting under his presidentship with the participation of the MLA, Regional Direct of Municipal Administration, the District collector, the Inspector of Vigilance and Anticorruption, and the vice chairman of the municipality for explaining in detail the corruption and irregularities detected in the municipality. The RDO's curt reply was that there was no provision in the

rules for convening such a meeting. The silent attitude of the higher officers, when apparent irregularities are brought to their notice, indicates that they are also hand in glove with the offenders and their intention is to protect them.

What is the punishment for the corrupt? What is the punishment for the abettors? They are bold in the thought that law is in their favour and nothing could be done to them? How does a honest and civilized society react to this sorry state of affairs? Dr.Valluvan did not give up. He wanted to find a way out, if only for carrying out the public welfare measure he had promised and committed to do as Chairman. He decided to approach the High Court for help.

#### WRIT IN THE HIGH COURT

On 28-11-2003 Dr.Valluvan filed a writ appeal in the Madras High Court (WP No.4153 / F 2004) praying for issue of directions to the authorities for implementing the council resolutions numbering more than 100, relating to water supply and electrification works which were not taken up in spite of his knocking at all doors. He explained in detail, how due to this lapse, Govt and the municipality were made to suffer revenue loss running into lakhs of rupees. The Secretary to Govt MAWS dept, the commissioner of municipal administration, the RDMA Chingleput, the commissioner Virudhachalam municipality were all cited as respondents in the case. He printed pamphlets listing some of the works not taken up and sought the cooperation of the people. He requested the people to be part of the fight by contributing Re.1/- each as donation for the case expenses.

The hon'ble court asked the Govt to explain the reasons for not carrying out the resolutions. No reply was filed by the Govt. In 2007 the High court directed that all the resolutions passed should be implemented within 3 months. This was a victory for honesty. The strategy of Dr.Valluvan in enlisting the support of the people, and involving them in the case with a token contribution was note worthy and a trend setter.

#### CONSTRUCTION OF AN OHT AT ALICHIKKUDI ROAD

In the year 2003, Govt sanctioned the proposal for the construction of four overhead tanks at a cost of Rs.137 lakhs. The council resolution was passed on 24-08-2003. The TWAD board engineers selected the sites for the tanks. Three tanks at Kattukudalur, Vayalur and Budhamur were nearing completion. For the fourth tank the site at Alichikkudi road which was already in the possession of the municipality as cattle shed was selected with a view to benefit the people in the bazaar street. In January 2005 foundation ceremony was conducted. When, following this, foundation digging work was started some trouble makers objected to the construction of the OHT at that location without any valid reason. But majority of the councilors were firm that the tank should be constructed only in the proposed place. The JD of municipal administration had planned to visit the site in question. The municipal commissioner informed him that an alternative location had been selected which was against the council resolution. Obviously he had acted at the behest of some mischievous elements. The TWAD board was informed of the decision. The chairman asked for an enquiry for the delay in the completion of the above work. Where upon the work was pushed through and completed and brought to beneficial use. Even though the scheme was subjected to small hiccups because of the blocks put up by certain evil elements, the ultimate victory was on the side of honesty.

## DENIAL OF PERMISSION TO FILE CASES AGAINST THE RECALCITRANT STAFF.

The municipal staff at all levels were stunned to see the impeccable honesty of the Municipal Chairman who avowed to provide a clean and people friendly administration. They were alarmed at the prospect of not being able to make money by way of extracting bribe from the poor public, nor in the execution of works. They, therefore, refused to cooperate with the Chairman. The Chairman as the elected representative of the people had an obligation to know the requirements of the people and fulfill them. All his queries to the staff fell on deaf ears. He however continued to seek the particulars. In the beginning the officials cited lack of funds as the reason for not doing certain works. But it was surprising that they maintained the same attitude even after the financial position improved.

Dr.Valluvan had sought the following information from the officials through countless letters.

- 1) List of people who have remitted deposit for WS connections.
- 2) Telephone bills and receipts for the years 2001-to 2003
- 3) Local fund audit report for the year 2000-2001 to be placed before the council
- 4) The reasons for not carrying on the official correspondences through the Chairman
- 5) The vouchers for the use of diesel for the vehicles for the years 2001 to 2004
- 6) The details of petitions received on the grievances days, disposals and pending cases
- 7) Resolutions creating revenue were sought to be introduced in the council meetings.
- 8) To take up property tax assessment for all Govt. buildings and issue demand notices
- 9) To take action on councilors of wards 32 and 33 who were found to have unauthorized water supply connections and not remitted the dues
- 10) The municipality had a W.S deposit of Rs.15, 30,403/- in Canara Bank. It was fetching a lower interest where as the municipality was paying a higher interest on the w.s. loans taken by it. Dr.Valluvan wanted to utilize the above money in the bank to repay the loan in order to clear the loan and minimize the expenditure. This was not acted upon.

Copies of these letters were sent to the Govt MAWS dept., Commissioner of municipal admn., and the Regional Director of municipal administration, Chingleput. There was absolutely no response. Dr.Valluvan then sought the permission of the Govt for filing writ in the court against the officials, who being corrupt were not performing their assigned duties, and knowingly caused loss to the municipality. Govt permission is required to file cases against govt employees in courts. Govt. refused to give the permission as requested in his letter dated 3-3-2005 and subsequent reminders. The reason could be nothing but some compulsion to protect the corrupt officials. Ironically, the local body authorities have no powers at all to deal with such careless and non performing officials.

## FASTING FOR LOCAL SELF GOVERNANCE

Dr.Valluvan got thoroughly disgusted with a faulty system where an elected peoples' representative finds himself chained in shackles, unable to provide the people who elected him, the required basic amenities. That, this was due to the unhelpful attitude of the officers who get paid from the peoples' tax revenue and drawing courage from obliging higher ups, is adding fuel to the fire. It is a ridiculously anomalous state of affairs driving conscientious public representatives to their wit's ends. Dr.Valluvan wanted to draw the attention of the authorities in the Govt. to these

stark facts. On 18-7-2006 he sat on a fast in front of the RDO's office, demanding power of self governance to the local bodies.

For political reasons and due to the lethargy of the haughty and uncommitted officials, the municipality was put to a loss of about Rs.3 crores. Dr.Valluvan had earlier gone on fast seeking the Collector's intervention for getting the council resolutions implemented but to no avail.

Legal remedies also were not effective. The basic problem is the lack of adequate powers to the local bodies. Where as the Govt have powers to initiate action against the Chairman and the councilors, the latter could not move even a little finger against an errant official. How could then the effective functioning of the set up be ensured?

This situation is not specific to Virudhachalam municipality alone. It is the same in every municipality and every panchayat in Tamilnadu. A majority of the representatives, not knowing or caring what to do, choose to float along the stream, being satisfied with the crumbs thrown to them. Some conscientious and public minded people bent upon doing sincere service, fret and fume finding the situation not conducive to their ambitions and spend their time counting the days in office. Only Dr.Valluvan has taken it upon himself to make an impact on the system by taking on the power centres single handedly. He is the only representative out of a lakh and forty who dared to draw the attention of the Government to the need for arming the local bodies with more powers in a democracy.

It is to be acknowledged that the resident welfare associations and the volunteers from the Anti corruption Movement were with him when he needed. But above all the people of Viudhachalam, who are the masters, have come to recognize the selfless and good work done by Dr.Valluvan, even sacrificing his precious and lucrative practice as ophthalmic consultant.

Every patriotic citizen would do well to do his bit to ensure the fulfillment of the principles and ambitions of Dr.Valluvan for which he stood steadfast in the face of most trying moments through out his term as the Chairman of Viudhachalam municipality.