

RISE OF THONDAIMAN DYNASTY IN PUDUKKOTTAI STATE

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ABSTRACT

Pudukkottai, as a modern political unit, is of a very recent origin. The history of the state begins with the foundation of the two independent principalities. Pudukkottai and Kolathur and their amalgamation in the year 1750 A.D.¹ Prior to the establishment of Thondaiman rule, different chiefs controlled different parts of the region. Early rulers of the Thondaiman line, through protection rights and a network of kinship, provided the embryonic base for the Pudukkottai kingdom that lasted up to 1948 A.D.

Key Word: Pudukkottai, Thondaiman, Sangam period, Vijayanagar rule,

INTRODUCTION

The inhabited land of Pudukkottai from the Sangam period to the Pandyas of the Second Empire, served as a buffer zone between the Chola and Pandya Kingdoms. Different parts of the state were ruled by different chieftains³ who were later incorporated into the Chola hegemony. The Chola period witnessed extensive peasant colonization⁴. Internal disputes destabilized the countryside and caused the decline of the second Pandya Empire. The subsequent muslim incursion had created uncertainties with regard to the security of person and property⁵. Inscriptions found at Adhanur and Rankiyam mention the menacing activities of the muslim rulers.⁶ Taking advantage of the confusion that prevailed local chieftains formed petty principalities. Their jealousies and wars threw the life of the peasantry into a pool of agonizing experience⁷.

The earlier institutions of village and local assemblies were weakened or at least lost importance. The void created by the decline of the local assemblies and the absence of a powerful ruler was filled up by the Araiars chiefs. They became powerful by appropriating padikaval (protection) right at the expense of the local community. They demanded their dues both in kind and cash for enforcing protection of a locality.⁸ they emerged as arasukkaval through kinship connection misappropriation of Padikaval right. They granted lands to their retainers. This was confirmed by the existence of a number of Padaip-parru (cantonment villages) at Kiranur, Virachilai, Kurunthenpirai, Kottaiyur, Lambalakudi, Pulivalam and Ilanchavur. The Araiars were often identified as belonging to a particular Padai-parru⁹

Kumara kampanna's re-conquest of Madurai and the hegemony of the Vijayanagar rule could not eliminate the varied Araiars chiefs. They included the Pallavarayars. Vanadhirayars, Thodaimans of Aranthangai chiefs of Parambur. Illuppur and Marunkapuri¹⁰. Their padikaval swathananthiram was more than mere payment of remuneration to them. Their arasukkaval was acknowledged by the dominant community of the locality. In fact the Araiars were none other

than the clan leaders of the respective localities and played role of 'little kings'. The Vijayanagar rulers permitted some measure of autonomy to the local chiefs. They began to assert themselves when the central authority of the Vijayanagar Empire was weak and unstable.

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The Thondaimans, one of the petty chiefs initially settled in and around Karambakkudi, consolidated their authority and position by appropriating padikaval rights. Their status of arasukkaval was acknowledged because of their physical might and ability to use corcen. It was reported that the offending chiefs and their mercenaries belonging to the kallar sect went to the extent of damaging public utilities like the bunds of tanks. The villagers were afraid of their vandalism. So instead of giving resistance they yielded and allowed the clan might of the Kallars to rule them¹¹. Their dominance does not mean that they were in a numerical majority in different parts of the state.

Early rulers like Avudai Raya Thondaiman (1641-1661) and Regunatha Thondaiman (1661-1730) strengthened their position of authority through matrimonial alliances, padikaval rights and wars. In other words. One of the little kings, the Thondaiman dynasty emerged as a dominant force in the region, by way of collaboration and marriage alliances with other chiefs and clans. This dynasty ruled the region from A.D. 1686 till it merged in 1948 with the Indian union.

It is claimed that the ancestors of the Thondaimans were migrants from Thirupathi¹³. Whatever may be their origin. It is a fact that they strengthened their hold over this region by alliances. As noted above and by their skill in controlling the kallar population. It is of interest to note that they also claim to be the members of the Kallar clan.¹⁴ Once established firmly, the Brahmins legitimized their rule with vamsavlls and attributed divine origin of kinship to them. The successive Thondaimans. Vijaya Regunatha Thondaiman (1730-1769), Raya Regunatha Thondaiman (1769-1789) and Raya Vijaya Regunatha Thondaiman (1789-1807) actively participated in the Carnatic wars,¹⁵ Anglo-Mysore wars¹⁶ and Poligar wars¹⁷ by taking sides with the British. As a reward for loyalty, the British gave them the tract Kilanilai¹⁸ Blackburne, the resident at Thangavur, a competent administrator, intervened as the guardian of the Rajah, Vijaya Regunatha Thondaiman (1807-1825) who was then only ten years old¹⁹. In 1812 the capital town Pudukkottai was rebuilt after an outbreak of fire. The attempted eviction of some amarakarars (militia members) from their lands by Anantaiya, the Karyasia in 1814 was not successful²⁰. In 1817 the Rajah was invested with full powers.

Regunatha Thondaiman, the next ruler (1825-1839) was awarded the title 'His Excellency' in 1830²¹. He maintained a buffer stock of paddy for public distribution. He took genuine interest in the welfare of the common people. His administration ushered in the trend to follow British regulations which were suited to local conditions of the state. The next ruler Raya Ramachandra Thondaiman was minor. So the Government was entrusted to the care of the Foudjar. The Sirkil and other officers of the state²². The British resident Balley forwarded an unfavorable report about the administration of the Pudukkottai state. An important event of his region was the riots instigated by Venkanna Servalkar²³. As result of the disturbances, the British intervened and reduced the authority of the state to a mere shadow²⁴. Besides, there was dead-lock in the administration resulting from the ill – will between the Rajah. The 'Sirkil' and the 'Carbar'. The political agent Hathway noticed Brahmin domination in the administration and stressed the desirability to appoint non-brahmin in future²⁵. The suggestion of the political agent Lee Moris to relieve the Rajah of all administrative powers in 1875 was not accepted by the Madras Government²⁶.

In 1878 Seshiah Sastri was appointed as Sirkil. He can be called the maker of 'Modern Pudukkottai State'. He extended the town, erected public buildings and restored tanks. He took measures to eradicate corruption in public offices and filled the treasury with revenue²⁷. In 1856 the title 'His Excellency' granted to the Rajah was withdrawn and later in 1870 it was restored as 'His Highness'²⁸. Seshiah Sastri's zeal in the resumption of inams and in the abolition of Amani system (sharing crop between the state and the peasantry) had far reaching consequences²⁹.

At the time of Martanda Dairava Thondaiman's accession in 1886. He was only eleven years old. During the minority of the Rajah, Seshiah Sastri was the Diwan Regent. He was retired on the termination of Regency in 1894 and was followed by Vedantacharly as diwan³⁰. According to Venkatarama Ayyar, the administration of Vedantacharly was characterized by weakness and laxity of control over finances³¹. The Rajah attended the coronation of king George V. the visit of Imperial Majesties provided an opportunity to remit some minor taxes³². On the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Rajah, a number of boons like the remission of the Village Karnam's Cess, commonly known as kanakku vari amounting to twenty five thousand rupees for a period of three years were granted. Mohurteba tax on household trades and occupations amounting to five thousand rupees and a tax on bangle makers were also granted remission. During the first world war, the princely state and her people liberally contributed³³ to the cause of the allies³⁴.

The marriage of the Rajah with an Australian lady Molly Fink was not liked by the people. The darbar conciliated the people by the remission of kanakku vari and grant of a lakh of rupees each for town and village improvement. Finding his position unfavorable, the Rajah decided to reside out of India. The liberal allowance of twenty laths of rupees from the surplus fund of the state and another one lakh sixty thousand rupees from the marriage fund to the Rajah was not relished by the people³⁵. In the absence of the Rajah, the state was administrated by Vijaya Regunatha Durai Raja as regent and Kunhunni Menon as the Diwan. In October 1923 the state was brought under the direct control of the Government of India through an agent to the Governor General with headquarters at trivandrum³⁶.

The Rajah's decision to reside permanently outside India was received with a shock in the state. The birth of Sydney Thondaiman created another problem of succession. The people feared that British would choose Sydney Thondaiman to rule their Dharma Samasthanam³⁷. Satyamurthi the political activist appealed to the people not to accept Sydney Thondaiman as their Rajah³⁸. The local press, janamithran and Desa Uliyan kindled anti-Rajah propaganda³⁹. Satyamurthi declared that Sydney Thondaiman was not a Hindu and as such he should not be allowed to become the ruler of the Hindu state⁴⁰. The Tamil translation of his speech in this regard was published by Desa Uliyan and Consequently its editor was transported out of the state⁴¹. Martanda Bairava Thondaiman died in Paris.

The British government finally installed Rajagopala thondaiman (1928-1947) of the western palace Jahir as the ruler in 1928 A.D⁴². As the new Raja was a minor, the administration was carried on by the Regent SahibVijaya Regunatha Durai Raja. In 1929 a council of administration with the British Administrator the Diwan and the Chief Justice as the ex-officio member was constituted. In 0931 B.C. Holds worth became the administrator. The present day Gandhi Park was named after him originally, A dam constructed at kadayakkudi⁴³. For irrigation purposes was also named after him.

Satyamurthi, the freedom fighter was declared as a seditionist because of his attempts to express the short-comings of the ruler⁴⁴. The peace of the state was disturbed but Andakulam riots in which the kallars and muslims fought each other

concerning wastes for agricultural work. The Kannangudi dacoity was followed up by town riots in 1931 which resulted in the damage of public properties amounting to Rupees Twenty Two Thousand Six Hundred and twenty four⁴⁵. These disturbances were crushed with British military help. The Darbar could not take important changes which would adversely affect the finances of the state⁴⁵.

CONCLUSION

The great economic depression and the second world war created untold miseries like inflation. Rising prices and black market in the state. The Darbar was not very active towards social reforms like temple entry by the harijans or upliftment of women and the abolition of devadasi system. Throught these turbulent years. Sir Alexander Tottenham⁴⁷ managed the state with strict discipline, keeping a vigil on Indian freedom movement Political activist Muthuswamy Vallatharasu advocated the cause of merger of the princely state of Pudukkottai with the Indian union. The state voluntarily merged with the Indian Union in 1948⁴⁸.

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7. Chopra, P.N., Ravindran T.K., Sunramanian, N., History of South India, Vol.III S. Chand and Company Ltd., New Delhi, 1976, p.147.
8. In Tamil 'Padi' means village 'kaval' means protection. Padikaval denotes the watchmanship-right of a village.
9. Padaiparru is a Military Contonment or a settlement of soldiers.
10. Radhakrishna Aiyer, s., A General History of the Pudukkottai State. Sri Brahdambal State Press, 1916, p.94.
11. Gopalapuram Gandhi, Tamilnadu District Gazetteer. Pudukkottai, Madras, 1983, pp. 127-131.
12. Appendix I, chronological Table of the Thondaiman Rulers.
13. The Clan of Kallars, it is believed, came from the region from around Tirupathi and Kanchipuram during Vijayanagar times. Venkannas Telengu Manuscript Thondaiman Vamsavali (Genealogy) gives an account of the legendary origin of the early Thondaiman. The valour and strength of the Thondaiman helped to subdue elephants. The elephant episode was the subject matter narrated in the Tamil Poems of Raya Thondaiman Anuragamalai and Trattaimanimalai which were referred as sources. (Chapter I, References 8 and 9)
14. The Kallar groups have well developed conceptions of their settlement in Pudukkottai. They have settled in the area now known as alangudi eventually extending themselves into Kolathur taluk. Ammachatram Copper Plate grant dated 1733 speaks of the spread of kallars to the north-eastern part of ths state. More details are given in

- Copper Plates. See Raju., S., (Ed), Pudukkottai thondaiman Copper Plates, Tamil University, Thanjavur, 1991, p.85.
15. There were three Carnatic wars. The first Carnatic war was 1747 to 1749, the second Carnatic was from 1749 to 1754 and the third Carnatic wars from 1754 to 1763, put an end to the French influence in the Carnatic.
 16. The first Anglo – Mysore war from 1780 to 1784, the Third anglo-Mysore war and the Fourth Anglo-Mysore war from 1790 to 1792 had put an end to the challenge offered to the British by Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan.
 17. The Poligar Wars (1797-1801) were mainly fought in the southern district against Kattabomman, Umaithurai and Marudhu Pandya of Sivaganga. The role of Thondaiman in the capture of Kattabomman has been viewed as ‘un-patriotic’- such a view emerged from the ethno centricism of the previous century. Nationalism and Patriotism were alien concepts in those days. Every native ruler wanted to prolong his rule at any cost. The political landscape of Tamil Nadu was governed by the balance of power strategy that ultimately led to the paramountcy of the British and subordination of native rulers.
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 28. For the Withdrawal of the title, His Excellency, see Venkatarama Ayyar, K.R., Op.cit., p. 852 Restoration of the title, His Highness, Ibid., p. 857.
 29. Kameswara Aiyar, B.V., Op.cit., pp.308-316.
 30. Venkatarama Ayyar, K.R., Op.cit., p.879.
 31. Ibid., p. 881.
 32. Ibid., p. 888.
 33. For the purpose of War. A sum of Rs. 29,400/- was contributed by the state, apart from a sum of Rs. 500/- per month contributed for Madras Hospitalship.
 34. Venkatarama Ayyar, K.R., Op.cit., p. 892.
 35. Ibid., p. 899.
 36. Ibid., p. 899.
 37. Gopalakrishna Gandhi, Op.ct., p. 187.
 38. Ibid.,
 39. Ibid.,
 40. The Hindu Madras, 22.06.1927; Gopalakrishna Gandhi, Op.cit., p. 188.
 41. Ibid.,

42. T.N.S.A., Madras Under Secretaries, file No.2 of 1946.
43. Vide Plate 15 and 16.
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