

TRADE AND POLITICS OF THE DUTCH IN GULF OF MANNAR

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to highlight the Trade and Politics of the Dutch in South India from 1602 – 1795. The Hollanders - the Dutch - came over to the Coromandel Coast when the trade system was well established. They had to face a strong European rival, the Portuguese. The originator *pi* Dutch commerce in India was lins Cotton who visited Goa in 1583.¹ In 1602 "The Verenigde Oast Indiche Compagnie" - (V.O.C.). The Dutch East India Company - sent two Dutch factors from Ache to Surat in 1605 to explore the commercial prospects.² The Dutch vessels commenced trading in the Coromandel from 1605.³ In the early years of their expansion, in 1610-20, their chain of factories extended from Masulipattanam in northern Coromandel through Pulicat in the centre of the coast to Tirupapuliyur (Cuddalore) in the south. Prosperous local merchants were their intermediaries. The attempt of the V.O.C. to set up factories from Cuddalore to Point Calimere met with limited success only. Masulipattanam and Pulicat became the centre of their Coromandel enterprises.⁴

Key Words: Dutch, Coromandel, Vijaanagar, Limson.

The Dutch appeared on the Coromandel when the native rulers were in search of a strong power to counter the Portuguese. They found it in the Dutch and invited them to their territories. A chronology of events about the relationship of the Dutch with the local powers, native traders, other European companies and its impact on the maritime trade of the region is briefly discussed below.

The central part of Coromandel was ruled by the Nayaks of Ginjee (Senji) when the Dutch appeared there. Krishnappa Nayak of Ginjee, treated the Dutch with hospitality and allowed them to build a citadel at Devanampattanam (Cuddalore) in 1608. He was hostile to the Portuguese. The Dutch trade brought large profit to the Nayak. But the Portuguese were influential in the court of Venkatapathi Raya, the Vijayanagar emperor and persuaded him to expel the Dutch from his subordinate state of Ginjee. Accordingly the Dutch were expelled from Devanampattanam and Krishnappa was forced to support the Portuguese.⁵ But the Portuguese were driven away by the Nayak. in 1609. The Dutch were invited to the Ginjee territory and trade concessions were offered. Meanwhile, the Raya himself became friendly to the Dutch and permitted them to build a factory at Pulicat in 1610.⁶ In 1617 Pulicat became the seat of Government of the Dutch under a governor. The Dutch and the Portuguese interfered in the civil wars of Ginjee in 1622.⁷ The Dutch gained some advantages over their Portuguese rivals in eastern trade. In 1638, the Portuguese Viceroy of India wrote to Libson that the trade had generally fallen in to the hands of the Dutch.⁸ The Portuguese suffered a series of loss at the hands of the Dutch. Baticola in Ceylon fell to the Dutch in 1638. The Dutch attacked Goa in 1639 and Malacca in 1641. In 1658 the Dutch captain Joan Van der Lean captured the Portuguese settlement of Nagapattanam without a shot being fired. Jaffinapattanam also fell in the same year.⁹

The Dutch were conducting their transactions with the traders of the region through Malaya alais Chinnana Chetty who was an influential merchant in Coromandel. He was a prominent figure in the politics and trades of the coast for over half a century.¹⁰

The Dutch were negotiating with the Nayaks of Thanjavur to build a factory at Thirumalairajanpattanam, where much was expected in cloth trade. Vijayaraghava of Thanjavur (1633-73) was at first not favourably disposed towards the Dutch, and even did not recognise their hold of Nagapattanam. Subsequently he had to acquiesce in their possession, when his army sent to oppose them was defeated.¹¹ At the instance of Chinnana Chetty, Vijayaraghava gave the Dutch a charter in 1658 offering valuable trade concessions. This deed permitted them to hold the port of Nagapattanam, along with ten villages on an annual tribute. The same charter was renewed in 1662 by Vijayaraghava with additional privileges of setting up of their own mint, the profit of which to be shared between the VOC and the Nayak.¹² About 1666 the Dutch got the ports of Thirumalairajanpattanam, Karaikkal and some other neighbouring places on lease. Thus Vijayaraghava who opposed the Dutch earlier, became more friendly to them as years passed on.

The Danes who settled at Tranquebar did not fare well and they were ready to part their trade right to the Dutch.¹³ Vijayaraghava was not in favour of the English till 1664, These were advantageous to the Dutch and they gained a comfortable footing in Thanjavur coast. They had factories at Adirampattanam and Thirumullaivasal. There was brisk trade from Nagapattanam.

An impressive fort was built at Nagapattanam and named as Narden. There is no trace of this fort at present. The only memory of the Dutch here, is, a street called Ollandar Saalal. Their indigo factory site of PortoNovo is called Ollandhar Thottam (garden). In 1690 the seat of Dutch government in India was transferred from Pulicat to Nagapattanam and it was in their possession until the English seized it in 1781.

When the kingdom of Ginjee was taken over by the Sultan of Golkonda, Mir Jumla, on behalf of the Sultan, granted a cowl in 1647, favouring the Dutch. They were given exemption from embarkation and disembarkation duties, in the port of Pulicat. The export and import duties collected in the port was to be shared between the Sultan and the VOC. They were also given the right to mint coins.¹⁴

The Sultan of Bijapur who captured the other parts of Ginjee, confirmed in 1654, the privileges that they were enjoyed from the Nayaks of Ginjee. They were permitted to purchase, cloth, Indigo, saltpeter in the Ginjee province and transport them to the ports of Devanampattanam, Pondicherry and PortoNovo on payment of half the embarkation duty. The liberal policies pursued by the Sultans of Bijapur and Golkonda to attract the Dutch to their coasts helped the Dutch to expand their trade. When the Golkonda possession of the Coromandel fell into the hands of the Mughals, the emperor Aurangzeb, in a farman, granted the Dutch in 1689 all the earlier concessions. His successor also followed suit. Maratha Shivaji who occupied some territories in Carnatic, also granted a cowl in 1677 confirming all the concessions enjoyed by them.¹⁵

The Dutch felt greater rights on the coast of Madura since they inherited it by conquest from the Portuguese. The Nayaks of Madurai were in constant wars with the neighbouring powers and also had to face the Mughals, and were in need of money. In 1690 the Nayak conceded the exclusive right of trade to the Dutch and also to keep away other European powers from the coast. The Dutch gave timely financial assistance to the Nayak and they agreed to help each other if attacked by the enemy.¹⁶ Again a treaty was contracted in 1669 granting many more trade concessions. Thus the Dutch enriched themselves in the coast of the Nayaks who had to remain idle spectators of their progress and sometimes tolerated their misdeeds.¹⁷

There was a good market for Madurai textiles (Cochai), rice and other food articles in Ceylon and areca in Coromandel. The printed cloth of Madurai was in demand in Batavia for which they bartered the leather of Japan and spices of Mollucos and earned considerable profit.¹⁸ Utilising the drought and famine conditions in the coastal belt during the third quarter of the seventeenth century, the Dutch engaged in large scale slave trade. They took full advantage of this to buy slaves for labour and settlements in the colonies of Ceylon, Batavia and South Africa. They purchased the slaves in Tuticorin, Nagapattanam, PortoNovo, Devanampattanam and Pulicat¹⁹. The Marathas in 1677, prohibited the slave trade in the Carnatic territory occupied by them.²⁰

Ekoji the Maratha general was installed in Thanjavur kingdom in 1675. He withdrew the concessions given by Nayak Vijayaraghava to the Dutch. But the Dutch got them back by force. Ekoji succeeded in recovering the ports of Thirumalairajanpattanam and Karaikkal. But the success was short lived. Ekoji granted a cowl on 30th Dec. 1676 and granted all the concessions given earlier by the Nayak and also restored to their possession the ports of Thirumalairajanpattanam and Karaikkal.²¹ The local Governor of Sirkali gave the Dutch a piece of land to build a factory at Thirumullaivasal.²² The successors of Ekoji were weak pressed by financial problems. They often approached the Dutch for advance payment of the tribute. In 1691, Sahaji Raja invaded Nagapattanam and was defeated by the Dutch and he sued for peace.²³

The Maratha Kingdom of Thanjavur grew weaker militarily and financially due to the attack of the Mughals, Madura and Ramnad. Though the Dutch were strong at Nagapattanam, they feared that other European powers will be admitted near Nagapattanam. Their efforts to get exclusive trade rights in Thanjavur coast failed. Karaikkal was given to the French in 1738. Thanjavur state was close to the financial collapse. The Maratha rulers mortgaged large parts of its coastal territories to the Dutch in return for a cash payment in 1741 and again in 1757. But by this time the Dutch themselves were too weak to take advantage of these opportunities to expand their political and economic hold in Thanjavur coast.²⁴

The Sethupathi of Ramanathapuram, the ruler of the pearl fishery coast, in 1658 contracted a treaty with the Dutch, declaring a common enmity towards the Portuguese. After establishing themselves at Nagapattanam and Tuticorin, the Dutch came close to the Sethupathi for more concessions. A treaty was again effected in 1660. By this, free traffic was granted for each other's subjects through the straits of Rameswaram and Manaar controlled respectively by the Sethupathi and the Dutch. The Pamban canal, in the Sethupathi's territory, was the most convenient waterway for ships with considerable burthen sailing

between east and west. The rightful share of the Sethupathi in pearl fishery was ensured. The Dutch trade in Sethupathi's territories increased.

In the course of time the Dutch grew greedy and in 1670 declared monopoly on essential articles of Indo - ceylon trade and imposed severe restrictions on the local traders. They wanted monopoly in the export of arecca from Ceylon and to control its sale in the Coromandel Coast. For this the Malabar areca was a hindrance. This was brought by the Coromandel Muslim boatmen and taken to all the ports through Pamban canal. The Dutch wanted to prevent it by fair or foul means. Similarly the Dutch desired to forbid the pepper trade through Pamban by private traders. All these ran counter to the interest of the Sethupathis and his subjects particularly the Muslim traders.²⁵

When the Sethupathi was in need of money due to the political turmoils, he turned to the Dutch. The Dutch took the opportunity to drive a hard bargain and the Sethupathi conceded to a treaty in 1674, on highly unfavourable terms. The treaty abridged privileges of the Sethupathi in pearl fishery. Chank fishery became the Dutch monopoly. Malabar areca was prevented from passing through Pamban canal. The Dutch became masters in areca trade.²⁶ The implementation of the treaty adversely affected the trade prospects of the Muslims of the coast.

Request for amendments to the provisions of the treaty was not heeded by the Dutch. Hence the Sethupathi began to follow a policy of flouting the provisions of the treaty., In this he had the active support of the Muslim traders of the coast, The influential, Periyathambi Marakkayar family of Kilakkarai, that was prominent in the trade of the region now got close to the Sethupathi. They were appointed by him to high offices in the state. With their help the Ceylon ports were blockaded by the Sethupathi . The Sethupathi's boats and Marakkayar boats with contraband goods like cloth frequented the shallow bays of Ceylon and returned with areca. The officials of the Kadiyan kingdom also helped the Sethupathi and Muslims. Sethupathi also assisted the flow of Malabar areca and pepper through Pamban and protected Muslim vessels from the Dutch cruisers. Chank was smuggled out to PortoNovo by Muslims to be sold to the English and French.²⁷

However the Dutch web caught hold of the Sethupathi. The loan given to him by the Dutch in 1674 was pending unpaid for a long time. In lieu of it, he was forced to mortgage all the ports of his coast to the Dutch. The Sethupathi's trade was ruined. The vessels of the Sethupathi and the Muslims were confiscated in Ceylon. Dutch cruisers and soldiers by effective patrolling prevented the Muslims from bringing Malabar areca and pepper through Pamban. The attitude of the Dutch, forced the Sethupathi to establish contact with the English and the French. Sensing the danger, the Dutch got revised the earlier treaty, in 1684. It modified some objectionable clauses of the 1674 treaty. The right of the Sethupathi in chank fishery was partially restored. The Sethupathi was permitted to confiscate the vessels with Malabar pepper and the value of the goods and vessels was to be shared between the Dutch and the Sethupathi.²⁸ Thus the Dutch tried to pacify the Sethupathi. However conflicts broke between the Dutch and the Sethupathi. The Marava army with the help of the local Muslims let loose in the area. Muslims began to

attack the Paravas who were now with the Dutch. Finding their authority threatened, the Dutch attacked the Sethupathi in January 1685, by sea. His ports were blockaded and the vessels anchored there were confiscated. The Sethupathi sued for peace and a peace treaty was signed in March 1685.

By this treaty the Sethupathi promised to remove from administrative positions Periathambi Marakkayar, and his relatives and as well as other Muslims.²⁹ This treaty was highly unfavourable to the interests of the Sethupathi and the Muslims of this coast. The treaty was flouted with the help of Periathambi Marakkayar. Hostilities broke again in 1690 but the Sethupathi, sued for peace and a fresh treaty was signed by which the Dutch took over the Pamban canal and other coastal areas. The Muslim traders of the coast did not take it kindly and connived with the Sethupathi's officials to flout them whenever possible.³⁰

Till about 1740, the Dutch were well placed in Madurai and Ramanathapuram coasts with great trade in Indian ocean. The local powers were engaged in civil wars and the Dutch supported one or another. The native powers took no notice of the trading activities of the Dutch. The Dutch had factories at Nagapattanam, Tuticorin, Vembar, Vaipar, Punnaikayal, Old Kayal, Manapad, Cape Comerine and an out station at Alwar Thirunagari.³¹

Even in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the Dutch had most favourable trade concessions down the Coromandel coast. They also had a number of ports well spread out for their import and export trade. Yet during the subsequent decades, they abandoned the factories in Devanampattanam, Thirumullaivasal, Karaikkal, Adirampattanam and greater power was concentrated in Nagapattanam. The hinterland powers were tottering militarily and financially and seeking Dutch help. But by that time the Dutch themselves became weak.

The English were emerging stronger in the Carnatic from the second quarter of the eighteenth century at the cost of the Nawabs of Arcot. The growing power of the English threatened the commercial interests of the Dutch. The Dutch also decided to enter the political fray of the region. During the Carnatic wars the policy of the Dutch was one of discrete neutrality, and began to side with the losing power. When the French were winning, they sided with the English and Nagapattanam served as a heaven for those who fled from the fury of Chanda Sahib and the French. The Dutch supplied sail cloth to the English ships and the wounded English soldiers were treated in their settlement.³² But when La Bourdonnais, the French Admiral, touched Nagapattanam in August 1746, the Dutch gave him a red carpet welcome and a banquet in his honour and promised to be friendly with the French. But by October 1746 the relationship between the Dutch and the French were so strained that the Dutch declared war against the French.³³

In 1758, Yusuf Khan the English governor of Madurai was in the process of suppressing the rebel Polygars. The Dutch drove close of the Polygars. They entered the coalition of the eastern Polygars of Thirunelveli.³⁴ Now the Sethupathi allied with the English and expelled the Dutch from the occupied territory of the Nawab.³⁵ The Dutch had to withdraw from the battle in 1761.

Again the Dutch were caught in the hostilities between the Sethupathi, the Marathas of Thanjavur and the Nawab. The Nawab complained to the English about the help of the Sethupathi to the Dutch, allowing their commercial activities without his consent.³⁶ The Sethupathi granted commercial facilities to the Dutch only after the English rejected a similar offer made to Colonel Heron. With the help of the English, the Nawab took over Ramanathapuram and the Dutch had to adjust with the Nawab. Thanjavur was annexed by the Nawab in 1771 and he wanted to acquire Nagore, which was mortgaged to the Dutch by the Thanjavur Maratha ruler. The Nawab sent his troops to Nagore assisted by the English. The Dutch withdrew from Nagore.³⁷ In consequence of the growing threat to their trading activities, the Dutch shifted their principal commercial centre from Nagapattanam to Colombo by 1792.³⁸

In 1782 when the English were facing the Mysore force, they sought the Dutch military help offering to cede the province of Thirunelveli. The Dutch readily accepted. But the arrival of additional British forces removed the need for Dutch help.³⁹ Then the Dutch began to swing on the side of the French. They supplied guns and gun powder to Hyder Ali when he invaded Carnatic.⁴⁰ They became hostile to the English and restricted their movement in their settlements⁴¹. The Dutch tried to use Hyder Ali and the French as a counterweight against the growing strength of the English. But when Hyder Ali demanded exorbitant sum of money from the Dutch, they again swung back to the side of the English. On the refusal of the Dutch to comply, Hyder Ali blockaded Nagapattanam.⁴² The Dutch prepared for a war with Hyder Ali.⁴³

But the developments in Europe affected the political scenario in Carnatic. In June 1781 England declared war on Holland. The English utilised this occasion to wipe out the decaying Dutch power from the Coromandel. Had this not happened, the Dutch would have stayed in Coromandel for a long period like the French. Consequent on the outbreak of war between the Dutch and the English on the Coromandel, Nagapattanam surrendered to the English in 1781. Tuticorin also fell to English in 1785. By 1783-84, V.O.C. was on the verge of bankruptcy. In 1795, the English occupied all the other Dutch settlements to prevent them from falling to the French.

The VOC was decaying on account of corruption and private trade among its employees. They could not match their other European rivals. Their troops declined in standard and fell to the English attack. Their naval power also declined and the number of vessels in their possession reduced considerably. Their ships became outdated. Their factory buildings ruined. They delivered Pulicat to the British on 16th July 1795 under an agreement. Their influence and the quantum of trade fell by the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Finally, the British took over in 1825, all the Dutch settlements in India.

Thus a brief account of events as discussed above from the entry to the exit of the Dutch in Coromandel will go to show that their commercial activities were closely linked to the politics and economy of the region. The economic strength and superior naval power gave them ascendancy.

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