

# HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NERKATTANSEVAL

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## Abstract

The aim of this article is to highlight the Historical significance of Nerkattanseval in Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu. Nerkattanseval, is traditionally recognized as one of the 72 palaiyams of Madura, already in existence in the days of Nagama Nayaka and his son Visvanatha Nayaka. It falls under the Sankarankovil taluk in Tenkasi District of Tamil Nadu. This Maravar palaiyam was located in the Sankarankovil taluk, in the former Tirunelveli province of the Nayak kingdom of Madurai. Puli Thevar played a significant role in Tirunelveli region. After the Independence of India, Tirunelveli District was bifurcated on 20 October 1986 to Nellai-Kattabomman district (Tirunelveli) and Chidambaranar district (Tuticorin). Subsequently, the Government of Tamil Nadu decided to name each district according to the name of the headquarters town, so the region's name changed from Tirunelveli-Kattabomman to Tirunelveli. On 18 July 2019 the district was again bifurcated to form a new Tenkasi district with Tenkasi as its district capital.

**Keywords :** Nerkattanseval, Puli Thevar, Palayam, Palayakars

## Introduction

Puli Thevar was born on September 1, 1715 in Puli Nadu, a part of Pandya Nadu to Chitraputra Thevan and Sivagnanam Nachiyar. Nerkattanseval or Avudaiyarpuram is situated Seven miles north of Sankarankoil, the head quarter of Sankarankovil taluk of composite Tirunelveli district in Tamil Nadu. Nerkattanseval literally translates to Rice tribute paying place but, after its ruler PuliThevars successful attempts to defying Mohammed Ali, the Nawab of Arcot, the name changed into Nerkattanseval. This Palayam declared its Independence in 1757<sup>1</sup>. Nerkattanseval is to be written with the read letters in the history of freedom movement of India for its was the head quarters of PuliThevar the first chieftain in Tamil Nadu to resist the British. Nerkattanseval is chiefly memorable as having been in the eighteenth century strong hold of the redoubtable PuliThevar who figured for many years as the leader of the Marava confederacy against the troops of Carnatic Nawab and East India Company. To the courage of Marava warrior H.R. Pate added the Wiliness of the Maharatta PuliThevar had a shrewd insight into the political situation of the time and was a veritable thorn in the side of the Nawab agents<sup>2</sup>.

PuliThevar was the tenth successor in the genealogical tree<sup>3</sup>. He constructed a strong stone fort at Nelkattumseval in 1744<sup>4</sup>. The area of this Palayam was to small extent but the influence of PuliThevar through his ability made the Palayam very Popular in the annals of history. The Palayakars in Tirunelveli did not pay tribute to the Mohamed Ali, the Nawab of Arcot. He wanted to establish his rule in Tirunelveli region and hence sent an expedition on 4<sup>th</sup>, February, 1755 under Colonal Alexander Heron, Kansahib and Maphuzkhan who commanded European local and Wallajah forces respectively. During this time PuliThevar was the Palayakkar of NerkattanSeval. He was exceptionally heroic and the first Palayakkar to take arms against the British in South. The army under Heron expelled the Nevayet troops in Tirunelveli and occupied their strong hold on 25<sup>th</sup>, March, 1755. The Nevayet Governors in Madurai, Mudamiah and Nabikhankattack field to Tirunelveli where they joined Pulithevar. The army of the Nawab and the Company advancing from Tirunelveli stormed the fort of Nattukotai, Several Palayakkars submitted clear part of their arrears<sup>5</sup>.

Col. Heron demanded the immediate Payment of 20,000 rupees or else he threatened that he would batter the Walls of fort to pieces PuliThevar refused to Yield. They launched a vigorous attack on the rebel strong hold and made strenuous efforts to storm it but in vain. The troop of PuliThevar by gallant sorties, repulsed the attack of Heron and Maphuzkhan abanded the Siege and retreated in humiliation. The army not only failed in suppressing the PuliThevar but suffered serious reverses at the hands of PuliThevar and the Maravas. After Mohammed Alis re-conquest of Madurai Maphuzkhan was appointed the Governor. In Tirunelveli Seemai the Western Palayakkars under PuliThevar extended their Sway over Nadumandalam<sup>6</sup>. Nerkattanseval become the centre of the rebel western Palayakkars.

In December, 1760 Khansahib began his operations against the western Palayakkars on 19<sup>th</sup>, December, he entrenched himself within three miles of Nerkattanseval. The next day PuliThevar attacked the forces of Khansahib but withdrew as hundred of his men fell in the battle. Khansahib continued the siege for about four months. When further forces arrived in April, 1761 Khansahib moved the trenches close to the walls of the fort. He captured a hill from the summit of which one could have a clear view of the fort. Khansahib posted batteries on hill tops and charged the fort with cannon for several days without interruption. He curbed the communication of the fort withoutside and made the garrison inside immobile. Unable to with stand the ordeal or to obtain reinforcement.

On 16<sup>th</sup>, May, 1761 PuliThevar escaped to Kadaladi in Ramnad. When three major forts of PuliThevar namely Nerkattanseval, Vasudevanallur, and Panayur came under the control of Yusufkhan<sup>7</sup>. After the death of Yusufkhan PuliThevar might have returned to his Palayam, PuliThevar was depending his forts including the fort at Kalakkad again in 1766 against Campbell and hence in 1767 captain Campbell laid siege PuliThevar forts with special force<sup>8</sup> and captured Nerkattanseval in 1767<sup>9</sup>. Local tradition hold that he became one with God at SankaranKovil after escaping from Campbell<sup>10</sup>. But it's probable that PuliThevar again went to Kadaladi and spent the rest of his life in distress<sup>11</sup>.

PuliThevar may be regarded as the foremost South Indian ruler who sowed seed by his gallant resistance to expel the foreigners from the soil. His services to the Nation is honoured in many respects and the

government of TamilNadu has erected a memorial for him in Nerkattanseval where there is the remnant of his palace. In short PuliThevar gave a lot of trouble not only to the British but also to Nawab and Khansahib during his career.

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**END NOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> Velmani, K.S.K., Gazetteers of India, Tamil Nadu state, Tirunelveli District Vol.I, Chennai, 2002, p. 226.
- <sup>2</sup> Pate, H.R., Madras District Gazetteers, Tinnevely District, Vol. I, Madras, 1917, p. 411.
- <sup>3</sup> Nagasamy, R., (ed.) Palayapattukal in Varalaru (Tamil), Vol. I, Madras, 1981, pp. 41 – 42.
- <sup>4</sup> Seeranjeevi. S, Panchalamkurichi Veerapandiakattabomman, Madras, 1958, pp. 287 – 288.
- <sup>5</sup> Military Country Correspondence, Vol. 5, pp. 127 – 128.
- <sup>6</sup> Military Country Correspondence Vol.3, Maphuzkhans letter to Arcot Nawab, dated 8<sup>th</sup>, November, 1755, p. 80.
- <sup>7</sup> M.C.C., Vol. 8, pp. 159 – 174.
- <sup>8</sup> M.C.C. No. 111 of 1761 Received 25<sup>th</sup>, May, 1761, Vol. 9, p. 58.
- <sup>9</sup> Pate, H.R., Op. cit., p. 420.
- <sup>10</sup> Notes Prepared by Kasinathadurai from Kollamkondan Zamin records.
- <sup>11</sup> Tamil Ballad on PuliThevar - PuliDurai Saritham.  
Ratensingh Thalaivar family records, Kadaladi.

