CHAPTER - III

THANJAVUR DISTRICT :
A POLITICAL HISTORY
This chapter highlights on the following aspects: (i) Thanjavur: A Profile (a) Geographical factors and (b) Location of Thanjavur, (ii) Etymology of the name - Thanjavur, (iii) Political History of (a) Sangam Cholas and (b) Imperial Cholas of Thanjavur, (iv) Political History of Thanjavur Nayakas, (v) A brief Political History of Thanjavur Marathas, (vi) Economic Portrait of Thanjavur region, (vii) Cultural Background and (viii) Relationship between Polity and Economy to the study of Urban Centres.

I. THANJAVUR: A PROFILE

a) Geographical Factors

Thanjavur district has been one of the most important regions of the Indian sub-continent and has played a pivotal role in socio-economic developments in terms of urbanisation. The Thanjavur plain has settled since pre-historic times. This part has been one of the oldest settled part in India and it has been one of those regions where early civilisation has developed and flourished well.¹

The Thanjavur district owes its riches in no small measure to its natural characteristics. Geography and natural environment played a dominant role in moulding Thanjavur’s culture and civilisation and it was stated that "nature shapes a man was no

where displayed more truly than in Thanjavur". Besides, the whole district was uniformly flat and gently sloping to the Bay of Bengal helping the river Cauvery to stretch her hands through an innumerable canals and this delta region has for centuries produced food crops in abundance and fixed in it the seat of culture and civilisation.  

Thanjavur was more than ordinarily favoured by nature with regard to immunity from calamities like floods and droughts. As an agricultural region, it has to submit to the vagaries of the monsoon and the fury of the floods in the Cauvery. The great natural advantages of irrigation which Thanjavur possesses had been more or less improved upon many centuries, before the district became a British territory. So this condition has helped the study region to produce urban centres of political, cultural, social, commercial and other interests. Moreover, the area of Thanjavur is statistically described to be by far the richest and most fertile in Southern India. Most of the people have heard or read of the delta of the Nile, and of the delta of the Ganges, but very few of them know

---


anything of the delta of the Cauvery,\textsuperscript{5} and thus there is a necessity to give the details of the area. Since the delta region has abundance of water resources, it was cultivated with rice crops and groves of coconut trees.

The river Cauvery presents flourishing features all over its course at Thanjavur town. The South-West of the town of Thanjavur is somewhat more elevated at Vallam, and there is nothing that can be called as a hill in the whole district.\textsuperscript{6} Along the coastal belt there are huge sand drifts and low jungle areas which protect the lands from the sea. From Point Calimere to Adhirampattinam, there is a salt swamp of several square miles. No rock is found in Thanjavur district. Laterite soil which is abundant in the high grounds near the western frontiers is again found in the extreme south.\textsuperscript{7}

The river which rises in the Coorg mountains bifurcates about nine miles west of Tiruchirapalli into two branches. The northern one takes the name of Coleroon and the Southern retains the name of Cauvery. About seventeen miles below this point, the two streams very nearly unite forming between them the island of Srirangam, but thereafter the Coleroon takes a north-easterly direction skirting the district along its entire length on the north and enters the sea at Devikottai near Portonova and its volume of water practically undiminished. The Cauvery spread

\textsuperscript{5}William Hickey, \textit{Thanjavur: Maratha Principality in South India}, Reprint, Madras, 1872, p.6.
\textsuperscript{6}Ibid., p.7.
\textsuperscript{7}Ibid., p.7
over the whole alluvial delta and render it a scene of unmatched fertility.\(^8\) The Cauvery itself now reduced to an insignificant channel debouches into the sea at Kaveripoompattinam about eight miles north of Tranquebar.\(^9\)

Cauvery is the main source which supplies water to the entire district of Thanjavur and besides irrigational utility its waters are sweet and delicious. It is indeed the centre and sole existence of its province. It has a cultural significance to the people as the river is deified and goes by the name of 'Cauvery Ammah', a feminine term of endowment.\(^10\)

Another remarkable feature of the study region was the area under paddy cultivation. Thanjavur was the only district where more than a million acres were under cultivation, by far the largest extent of land in the entire Presidency. Such a district was also free from natural famine in the whole Presidency. Again, it was the only district in the Presidency where no hill or rock or mountain could be seen. According to William Hickey, the ancient Tamil kingdom of Thanjavur - "The land of the Chola" - was popularly called as "the eden of the south".\(^11\)

During the study period, the city of Thanjavur and its neighbourhood was styled as the "Rice-Bowl of the South".\(^12\)

---


\(^12\) *Ibid.*, Appendices, p.127.
the whole of the Presidency of Madras, Thanjavur was the only
district (excluding Madras) densely populated. A taluk in the
district, Kumbakonam, was by far the most densely populated. More
than 1000 people per square mile were living there. Nowhere else
in this (Madras) Presidency the population was even half of this
to the square mile. According to Hodgeson, "In no province,
except Thanjavur, was the population equal to the occupancy of
the whole arable land".

Cauvery, which waters more than a million acres was the main
source of irrigation. It waters probably a greater area than any
river in India. Rice was the stable crop of the district and
was grown chiefly in the delta of the Cauvery. Therefore, the
agricultural prosperity of Thanjavur region was well flourished.
No wonder the ancient and medieval rulers of Thanjavur had their
capitals at places sanctified by the life-giving and holy waters
of Cauvery. After the occupation of the British, the city of
Thanjavur was made a district headquarters.

The soil of the Cauvery delta region of Thanjavur was
entirely alluvial but varies greatly in quality. This land forms

---

14 Ibid., p. 54.
15 J. Hodgeson's Report on Tirunrlveli, 1807, p. 3.
16 G.D. Maclean, Manual of Administration of the Madras Presidency,
17 G.D. Maclean, Manual of Administration of the Madras Presidency,
Vol. II, Appendices, P. 127.
18 Ibid., p. 127.
a striking contrast to the rich lands near "Thiruvaiyaru" which forms what was called "the breast of Thanjavur" and which was famous even beyond the limits of the district.\textsuperscript{19}

Like other cultural processes, urbanisation also follows from definite sequential stages i.e., origin, dispersion condensation and saturation. These processes can be visualised in any part of the world.\textsuperscript{20} In order to comprehend the study period, a critical examination of political and socio-economic changes and sequential stages during the past seems to be unavoidable. Keeping this in view an attempt has been made in this chapter to trace out the historical background of Thanjavur district i.e., urban centres in the study region, and also to analyse the conditions that led to the process of their formation and their gradual refinement.

Thanjavur and its geography, society, art, architecture, culture, religion and also its economic, geopolitical and political aspects give a strong background to the study of urbanisation in this region. The district of Thanjavur played an important role in the history of south India from the later half of the 9th century A.D., down to the 18th century A.D.


Thanjavur district bounded on the north by South Arcot and Tiruchirapalli districts of which the latter surrounds the western border also. To its south lies the Pudukottai district and on the east was the Bay Of Bengal. Thanjavur district comprised of 16 taluks in 1981. Thanjavur district consists of two clearly marked natural divisions made up respectively of the natural delta of the river Cauvery- "the old delta" and of the upland tracts-"the new delta". The old delta region has been irrigated for centuries where as the history of the canal irrigation in the new delta since 1934 fairly recent. The distinction between these two regions also becomes important in explaining certain features of urban centres in Thanjavur district.

The Tanjore (vernacular Thanjavur) district, lies on the east coast in the State of Tamil Nadu between 9° 50' and 11° 25' of the northern latitude and between 78° 45' and 70° 50' of the eastern longitude. Thanjavur district bounded on the north by the river Coleroon which separates it from the Tiruchirapalli and South Arcot districts, on the west by Pudukottai state and Tiruchirapalli, on the south by the Zamindari of Ramnad (Ramanathapuram) and the Palk Strait and on the east by Bay of

23 Ibid.
The sea board was consequently made up of two sections, one extending 72 miles from the mouth of Coleroon to Point Calimere in the South and the other bordering the Palk Strait for 68 miles from Point Calimere to the Ramanathapuram district. The whole district was triangular in shape. About the middle of the former of these sections is situated a small bit of foreign territory, the French settlement of Karaikkal. Karaikkal became part of the Indian Union (1954) and later it came under the union territory of Pondicherry.

II. ETYMOLOGY OF THE NAME - THANJAVUR

The Thanjavur district gets its name from its head quarter town, but the etymology of the word is obscure. The original edition of Thanjavur district gazetteer gives a probable derivation - that it could have come from "Thanjan" - "refuge". It would make the name means "city of refuge". According to a legend, Thanjavur derives its name from a Giant or Rakshasan named "Thanjan", who once made his home and haunted the neighbourhood of the study region. As per the district gazetteer, he was killed by Anandavalli Amman and Vishnu

---

Sri Nila Perumal. Before his death, Thanjan's request was that the city might be named after him and this was granted. Thus, Thanjavur town was continued to be the headquarters in the same name under all the rulers.

In point of view of antiquity, Greece is the only European country that can be compared with Thanjavur. Just as Egypt was called the "Gift of the Nile" so also the Chola's culture and art can be called the gift of river Cauvery - "a glorious heritage" to the people of Thanjavur study region.

III) a) POLITICAL HISTORY OF SANGAM CHOLAS
(From Third Century B.C. to Third Century A.D.)

The Thanjavur region was for more than a thousand years the home of the Cholas. From the Sangam age, the Cholas made it the seat of their dominions, the heart of all their activities, alike in war and in peace. They carried their arms in the hey-day of their glory, from Cape Comarin in the South to the Ganges in the North. And also, under their patronage they cultivated fine arts, erected temples, constructed anicuts and built ports and cities that were the envy of both the East and the West.

---

29 A. Panchanathan, Guide Book to Saraswathy Mahal (with Illustrations), Thanjavur Saraswathy Mahal series, No.201, 1993, Thanjavur, p.28.
30 Ibid., p.28.
THE NAME - CHOLA

The name Chola is wrapped in obscurity. Some were inclined to make it, like Pandya and Chera, the name of a ruling family. Others attempt to connect the word with the Sanskrit Kala (black) and with Kola, which meant the black coloured pre-Aryan population of South India. Others again derive the word from the Tamil word "Cholam" (millet). Whatever the origin, it was very clear that the name Chola was from the earliest times used to denote the people as well as the area subject to the sway of the Chola dynasty of Kings. The kingdom which is the subject of study is the Chola Mandalam and hence the title of Coromandel was given to the Eastern Coast of Southern India. This Chola kingdom comprised the modern districts of Thanjavur and Tiruchirapalli.

The earliest references to the Chola kings were found in the Asokan inscriptions of 260 B.C. The Mahavamsa of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) records clearly points out that the conquest of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the middle of the second century B.C., by a Chola named Elara who ruled it for nearly half a century. The Chola kingdom was known to the Greek geographers and was mentioned in the periplus Maris Erythraci (about 70 A.D.) and by Ptolemy

---

33 William Hickey, Op. Cit., p. 3
who states that the capital was then at Uraiyur, which is now a suburb of Tiruchirapalli. The early Tamil literature (i.e. Sangam literature) which belongs to the first few centuries of the Christian era, gives a very clear picture of the early history of the Cholas than any other source.

KARIKAL CHOLAN (50 – 95 A.D.)

The first Chola king recorded in history was Karikal Cholan, who ruled Thanjavur from 50 to 95 A.D. The great dam at Kallanai, across the river Cauvery near Thanjavur was built by Karikal. He built Kaveripoompattinam, the present Poompuhar, the then port of the later Cholas with their capital at Uraiyur. The literary work "Pattinapalai" and "Chilapadikaram" of Ilangovadigal, the Tamil literary masterpieces gave clear description of the famous king. Karikala was the greatest among the Cholas of the sangam period. He seems to have derived the name "the man with charred leg" from a fire accident during his teenage days. He was well known as the possessor of numerous beautiful war chariots. He defeated the combined forces of the Pandyas and the Chera kings in the battle of Koilvenny which lies fifteen miles east of Thanjavur town. Besides, he seized Ceylon

---

36 Ibid., p.163.
38 Ibid., pp.24-26.
Such was the political history of Thanjavur during the Sangam age under the early Cholas. From the close of third century A.D. up to the middle of the ninth century, a sudden darkness sets over Thanjavur, which it was impossible to light up, except fitfully, with the aid of literature or epigraphy.  

The Chola kingdom seems to have been overrun by the Kalabhras and the Pallavas from the north and by the Pandyas from the south. The Chola rulers seem to have been consigned to a position of complete subjection. The Kalabhras seem to have been the first to gain control over Thanjavur and their chieftain Achyuta, a Buddhist, was reported to have kept in confinement all the three Tamil kings— the Chola, the Pandya and the Chera, but his glory was short-lived.

The Pallavas soon came and conquered the Chola Kingdom (Mahendravarman 600-630 A.D and Narasimhavarman 630-660 A.D.) till the Cholas of Vijayalaya line appeared on the scene in the ninth century. Meanwhile, Pandya kings wrested Thanjavur from the Pallavas. Then came the swift downfall of the Pandyas as well as the Pallavas. For more than five centuries i.e., from 300 A.D., the Kalabhras, the Pandyas and the Pallavas ruled the

40 Ibid., p.163.


42 Ibid., pp.118-119.
Thanjavur territory, and then a new star was raising in the firmament of South India.  

(b) POLITICAL HISTORY OF IMPERIAL CHOLAS (850-1279 A.D.)

VIJAYALAYA (850-871 A.D.)

The Cholas were once more becoming a mighty race of rulers and the revival of medieval Cholas started in the days of Vijayalaya, the founder of the new Chola dynasty who drove away all foreign rulers from Thanjavur, including the Pandyas, the Rastrakutas and the Pallavas.

Vijayalaya ruled from Palaiyari (neighbourhood of Uraiyur) and wrested Thanjavur from the Mutharaiyar, who held the town. He built many temples and chaturvedimangalam besides Vijayalaya Choleeswaram. He was reputed as a captor of Thanjavur.

ADITYA CHOLAN (871-907 A.D.)

Aditya Cholan was the son of Vijayalaya, the first of the Imperial line of Cholas. He distinguished himself in the battle at ‘Thiruppurambiam’(‘Sripurambiam’) near Kumbakonam in Thanjavur district, in which the Pandyas got a signal defeat. After a successful campaign in the war Aditya Chola re-established the lost-glory of the Cholas. He continued the family tradition of patronage of Saivism.

---

45 Ibid., pp.128-134.
PARANTAKA-I (907 – 955 A.D.)

Parantaka-I was the son of Aditya, who was one of the greatest conquerors among the Medieval Cholas. He defeated the Pandya king and burnt his capital Madurai, by which achievement he received the title 'Madurantaga' and was also called as 'Maduraikonda Parakesari'. He vanquished the Banas and raided the Vaidumbas and extended the empire up to Nellore. He was a powerful ruler under whose leadership the Cholas acquired dominion. In recognition of his war victory, he was entitled as 'Vira Chola'.\(^{46}\)

Parantaka was a staunch devotee of Nataraja of Chidambaram. He constructed the roof of the Nataraja temple with gold and acquired the title of 'Ponveinda Perumal'(one who covered god with gold). During his period, arts of peace received much attention as deeds of war; in particular the old brick temples were re-built of stone and enriched with a new one in stone.

RAJARAJA THE GREAT (985-1014 A.D)

Rajaraja has been considered to be the most illustrious and also the greatest among the Chola rulers i.e., what Karikalan was to the sangam Cholas, he considered to be for the imperial Cholas.

On the death of Uttama in 985 A.D., Arunmoli - the second son of Sundara Chola Parantaka ascended the throne with the royal title 'Rajaraja'. He was a 'Rajakesari', and his predecessor

\(^{46}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp.136-149.}\)
Uttama was a ‘parakesari’.

After Rajaraja’s accession, Thanjavur region entered upon a century of grandeur and glory for the dynasty of the Cholas. With the rise of Rajaraja I, the sky begins to clear and the day dawns on a new and brilliant chapter in the history of Cholas. He was a great soldier and Generals like Alexander and Julius Caesar were compared to him. He was a great conqueror and was also a great statesman and administrator. He endeavoured his best to establish his empire on a firm footing. He created a standing army and built a navy.

Rajaraja invaded Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and established his sway over parts of that island. He sent many naval expeditions; conquered many islands including Lakshadeep and formed the Federation of Malaya states, Indo-China and Burma (Myanmar).


With a colossal effort, paralleled only by the ancient Egyptian kings, he built the most magnificent temples of Rajarajjeswara at Thanjavur, the finest specimen of Tamil architecture. He encouraged his officials to built temples, not

\[47\text{A. Panchanathan, Op. Cit., p.3.}
\]
\[48\text{Ibid., p.3.}
\]
only to Siva but also to Vishnu and the Buddha and liberally endowed them with grants of land and money. There was a popular saying about the Chola king, the great Rajaraja of Thanjavur was that 'here was not only a man, but supreme leader of men'.

RAJENDRA CHOLA -I (1014 - 1044 A.D.)

Rajaraja was succeeded by his son Rajendra I, who was equally great as his father and was also among the greatest of Cholas. His period was considered to be the great naval strength of the Cholas. His period also witnessed the Chola empire becoming vast and wide.

Rajendra was associated with his father in the administration of the ever extending kingdom of Thanjavur. Rajaraja I and Rajendra I jointly ruled the Chola kingdom for more than three years from 1012 A.D. Rajendra improved his inheritance by waging extensively and fierce wars all along the borders of his kingdom and even beyond the seas. He strengthened his hold on Ceylon (Sri Lanka) fully with the help of an efficient navy. He ruled over a bigger empire than his father. Alike in war and peace, Rajaraja and his son Rajendra showed themselves as outstanding personalities of their time. His territory extended up to North India and hence he was called as 'Gangai Konda Cholan'. He formed a new capital called Gangai

---


Konda Cholapuram, outside the eastern borders of the Thanjavur district.\textsuperscript{51}

Rajendra invaded Sumatra, Orissa and Bengal. To signify his victories in Malaya (Malaysia), called as Kadaram, he named several villages as Kadaram Kondan in various parts of Tiruchirapalli and Thanjavur district.\textsuperscript{52}

According to K. M. Panikar, the history of the Cholas of Thanjavur was considered as a history of hundred years of overseas expansion and naval warfare.\textsuperscript{53} He further states that "Even the Imperial Traditions of North India at its 'hey day' has no parallel to this".\textsuperscript{54} One was astonished at the Bay of Bengal becoming a "Chola lake", for some decades and great rulers like Rajaraja and Rajendra holding sway all over South East Asia.\textsuperscript{55}

Rajendra bore many titles like 'Mudikonda Chola', 'Panditha Chola', 'Virarajendra', 'GangaiKonda Chola' etc.\textsuperscript{56} The temple he built was an imitation of the Brahadeeswara temple of Thanjavur at Gangaikonda Cholapuram and it was second only in beauty and artistic excellence to that of the original.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid. p.6.
\textsuperscript{53}K. M. Panikar, Geographical Factors in Indian History, Bombay, 1955, p.27.
\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., p. 28.
\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., p. 29.
\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., pp.36-42.
RAJENDRA SONS (1018-1070 A.D.)

Rajendra was succeeded by his warrior sons, Rajadhi Rajan, Rajendra Devan and Veera Rajendra and others whose reigns witnessed glorious naval victories and the consolidations of Chola power in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Burma (Myanmar) and Malaya (Malaysia) and other places.  

KULOTHUNGA - I (1070 - 1120)

The Chola throne passed to a new line i.e., the eastern Chalukyan line, which put a new life into the whole empire. Rajendra Kulothunga (1070-1120) or Kulothunga-I who ascended the throne was a remarkable personality. His rule begins the last phase of the imperial Cholas. Kulothunga ruled over an extensive empire and sent embassies to places like China, Kadaram (Malaysia) and Sumatra.  

Kulothunga was more a statesman than a warrior. During his long reign, he shunned all needless wars and showed no ambition to extend his empire. The wisdom of Kulothunga’s policy of looping off all turbulent Non-Tamilian parts of his empire ensured peace for another half a century. Peace reigned everywhere and the country enjoyed prosperity.

From 1120 to 1163, three Chola kings succeeded him. Vikrama Chola (1120 – 1135), Kulothunga-II (1136 – 1150) and Rajaraja-II

58 Ibid., pp.44-49.

(1151-1163) and under all these rulers no wars or invasions distracted the Thanjavur kingdom. Later Rajadhiraja-II (1163-1178) and Kulothunga-III (1179 - 1216) ruled over the Chola Territory.  

During the reigns of Rajaraja-III (1126 - 1246) and Rajendra-III (1247 - 1279), the Pandyas in the south and the Hoysalas in the north monopolised all the power. These were the last great legacies of a vanishing empire. Later Pandyas drove the Hoysalas from Thanjavur. This marks the end of the Chola rule and the beginning of the Pandyan supremacy.  

From 1279 onwards, there was hardly anything to be mentioned about Rajendra-III or about his successors. Later, Thanjavur and the whole Chola kingdom was absorbed by the Pandyan empire. A few of the Chola chieftains continued and it seems to be appeared during the later parts of thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and even up to the middle of the sixteenth century.  

To sum up this section, between ninth century and twelfth century A.D. covering the reigns of various kings from Vijayalaya (850 A.D) to Rajendra-III (1279 A.D.) the Cholas built up a unique system of government and administration.  

The army and the navy built up the grand edifice of the Chola empire and spread its fame far and wide, even beyond the

---

60 Ibid., pp.138-149.


62 Ibid.,
seas. The navy consisted of ships, great and small, which could command the respect of all the powers in the Arabian sea and the Bay of Bengal. It was more evident that the ships which in war time assailed Ceylon (Sri Lanka), captured the Maldives and the Nicobar islands and launched an expedition to Kadaram (Malaya) were also the ships which in peace time carried on commerce with the various parts from Arabia to Indo-China.

The Chola age characterised the most creative epoch of South Indian History. The Chola period classed the best specimen of Tamil literature in the Indian History.

To conclude, the Cholas were one of the greatest and most gifted dynasty which ruled over India. They held sway for the continuous period of about 430 years. In comparison with the Mauryas, who ruled for 137 years and the Guptas for 227 years and Vijayanagara empire which lasted for about 340 years, the Cholas as a political force played a significant role in the Tamil region for more than four and a quarter century. They were famous as conquering heroes, as upholders and promoters of Tamil culture especially the Tamil literature; besides their rule was noted for progress in art and temple architecture.

(IV) POLITICAL HISTORY OF THANJAVUR NAYAKS (1532-1675 A.D)

After the decline of the Cholas, the fortune of Thanjavur took a different turn. Various chieftains calling themselves 'Cholas' ruled in the south until about the end of the fourteenth century, when the Vijayanagar emperors, annexed a province called as 'Chola Mandalam of Thanjavur' to their kingdom. They ruled
Thanjavur through Viceroy. One of the Viceroy appointed in 1532 A.D by the Vijayanagar emperor Achyuta Raya (1530-1542 A.D) was Sevappa Nayak and he founded the dynasty of Thanjavur Nayak Kings.

SEVAPPA NAYAK (1532-1560 A.D)

Sevappa Nayak, son of Thimmappa Nayak (1521-1532 A.D) was a personal attendant of emperor Achyuta Raya. He married Murtiamba, the sister of the queen Varadambika, wife of Achyuta Raya, who became brother-in-law of the king and his loyalty with the emperor, was rightly rewarded with the Nayakship of Thanjavur. When Sevappa Nayak accepted the Government of Thanjavur, he was independent of the erstwhile over lordship of Madurai.

Sevappa Nayak started by ruling over the Chola Mandalam and Southern parts of Thondaimandalam. He ruled peacefully and his period of reign was not conspicuous for any important events expect for the transfer of Tiruchirapalli to the Nayaks of Madurai in exchange for Vallam. He made many charitable endowments among which a gift of land for the upkeep of a choultry attached to the temple in Muvalur in Thanjavur district. He was responsible for the repair works to the sivaganga tank in

63Vriddhagirisan, The Nayakas of Thanjavur, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, 1942, pp.3-7.
64Ibid., pp.8-15.
ACHYUTAPPA NAYAK (1560-1600 A.D)

Achyutappa Nayak was the son of Sevappa Nayak. He was a powerful ruler endowed with a keen intellect and facility for quick decision. He fought with the Muslims and the Portuguese. He interfered in the quarrels between the king of Jaffna and the Portuguese who were ruling over Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and gave shelter in his court to the Jaffna king, when he was driven out by the Portuguese. When Achyuta died in 1600 A.D, three hundred and seventy women of his harem (occupants) committed ritual suicide.

RAGHUNATHA NAYAK (1600-1634 A.D).

Achyutappa Nayak was succeeded by his son Raghunatha Nayak, the most talented and distinguished among Nayak kings. Raghunatha Nayak was the greatest king who ruled the southern part of Tamil Nadu. He was having similar activities of Krishna Devaraya who belonged to the early decades of sixteenth century, in all aspects. Raghunatha Nayak was a great warrior. He distinguished himself as an able general and sagacious ruler. He destroyed the Madurai and Gingee rulers in the 'battle of Toppur'. He crossed over the Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and drove the Portuguese out of Jaffna and restored the throne to the refugee king in his court. He served as "Yuvaraja", during the reign of

65 Ibid., pp.16-19.
his father Achyutappa Nayak and gained experience both as soldier and as administrator. Directed by his father, he led the forces for the defence of Penukonda, which was then besieged by Deccan forces and saved the city of Vijayanagar. In return for this signal service, emperor Venkata-I complied with his request for the release of Krishnappa Nayak-II from prison. He also led an expedition against Solaga of the coastal area (Solaga was the ruler of a territory situated north of the river Kollidam (Coleroon).

During Raghunatha Nayak’s rule, Thanjavur became a great centre of learning, art and culture and also the home of Carnatic music. Sanskrit and Telugu received encouragement, but Tamil was totally neglected. He made large gifts to the Brahmans at the expense of the defeated Tamils.

VIJAYARAGHAVHA NAYAK (1634-1673)

Vijayaraghava Nayak, the son of illustrious Raghunatha Nayak succeeded his father and ruled Thanjavur from 1634-1673 A.D. During his period, Thanjavur was repeatedly attacked by the Madurai king on the one side and the Sultan of Bijapur on the other. From 1653 to 1659 Thanjavur remained in subjection to Bijapur. Vijayaraghava had to flee from his palace. But, two unexpected forces came to his rescue. First, a serious famine

\[\text{Ibid., p.36.}\]

broke out in 1659 and forced the Muslim to run away from Thanjavur. Secondly, various armies of Kallars, operating from vallam, routed them and dislodged them from Thanjavur. But, the fate of the Nayaks were sealed when Chockanatha Nayak, King of Madurai, attacked Thanjavur by sending his ablest general Venkata Krishnappa Nayak. A fierce battle took place and resulting in a decisive victory for Chockanatha. Thanjavur was besieged and the Nayak of Madurai took possession of the kingdom of the Thanjavur.

(a) Alagiri Nayak (1673-1674 A.D)

Chockanatha Nayak of Madurai appointed his foster-brother Alagiri Nayak as his Viceroy in Thanjavur. Alagiri Nayak ruled over Thanjavur for just over a year i.e during 1674.

(b) Chengamaladas (1674-1675 A.D)

The Bijapur Sultan Sent an army to Thanjavur under the leadership of Venkoji alias Ekoji. He became a founder of the Maratha dynasty in Thanjavur. Ekoji thoroughly defeated chockanatha Nayak in the 'battle of Ayyampet' and placed chengamaladas on the throne on the year 1674.

To sum up, the Thanjavur Nayakship was founded, when Sevappa Nayak (1532 A.D) obtained Thanjavur as dowry, which his wife brought with her. During the rule of Achyutappa Nayak, the famous "Talikota Battle" (1565 A.D) was fought. Even the disastrous defeat experienced by Vijayanagar at the hands of the Muslim confederacy at Talikota did not diminish the Thanjavur Nayak's loyalty. So, the Thanjavur Nayaks had a reputation for being steadily loyal to the Vijayanagar rulers but opposed the
Nayaks of Madurai. This put them into constant conflict with the Nayaks of Madurai and led to the loss of Kingdom.

The Nayak rule which came to Thanjavur with Sevappa Nayaka continued for one hundred and forty three years. Vijayaraghava Nayak was the last of the Nayak kings of Thanjavur and the kingdom afterwards passed to the Marathas of Thanjavur.

V) A BRIEF POLITICAL HISTORY OF THANJAVUR

MARATHAS (1676-1799 A.D.)

The rise and growth of the Maratha power was one of the wonderful chapter in the long history of India. Founded by Sivaji the great (1627-1680 A.D.), son of Shahji Bhonsle, the Maratha state was a sharp thorn for the Deccan Sultans and the Great Mughal. The history of Maratha rule in the Carnatic begins with the occupation of Thanjavur.

In A.D.1676 Thanjavur passed into the possession of the Marathas. At the orders of Sultan Adil Shah of Bijapur, Ekoji, the Maratha general and the half-brother of Sivaji led an expedition in defence of Chengamaladas, the representative of the dethroned Nayaks. He defeated Alagiri Nayak, the ruler of Thanjavur, in a battle fought at Ayyampettai near Thanjavur and enthroned Chengamaladas on behalf of the sultan. This led to the establishment of Maratha influence in the kingdom. 68

68 K.R.Subramaniam, Maratha Rulers of Thanjavur, Madras, 1928, pp.1-5.
The political change that Ekoji effected in Thanjavur represented an extension of the influence of Bijapur to the Cauvery delta. However, in 1676 the Sultan passed away and Ekoji found it possible to assert his own authority. They deposed Chengamaladas and took over the possession of the State.\(^69\) This was of great significance, for the Marathas not only extended their influence to the Tamil Country but also secured possession of a fertile territory (i.e. Thanjavur) in the deep south.

Ekoji not only gained possession of the kingdom, but also consolidated his rule. He brought public servants from the Deccan and carried out the reorganisation of the administrative system.\(^70\) Though he promoted cultivation, he lost no opportunity in exacting as much as he could from the peasants. Father Britto, an eye witness to the developments, has stated: "Ekoji takes away four fifth of all produce. As if this were not enough, he enforces payment in cash and as he was careful to fix the price himself much above what the owner can realise, it happens that the sale of the whole harvest was never sufficient to pay the tax. Accordingly the cultivators were burdened with a crushing debt and often they were obliged to prove their inability to pay. However, they were made to pay by submitting


to barbarous tortures". This observation reflected upon the nature of Maratha administration that the inhabitants had to endure from the very beginning.

Influenced perhaps by Ekoji’s success in Thanjavur and encouraged by the support extended by Golconda, Sivaji decided on a similar venture. He led an expedition to the Carnatic in 1677 and occupied Gingee and Vellore. In view of the rivalry between the two half-brothers, Sivaji’s presence on the northern bank of river Coleroon presented a serious threat to Thanjavur. However, the death of Sivaji in 1680 removed the threat. Nevertheless, Ekoji sold his ‘Jagir’ of Bangalore for three lakhs of rupees to Chikkadeva Raya the ruler of Mysore and with that amount strengthened his army and improved the defences.

**TERRITORY EXPANSIONS**

The existence of Gingee in the north and Madurai in the west offered no scope for the expansion of the Marathas of Thanjavur in these directions. However, the kingdoms of Ramnad, Sivaganga and Pudukkottai appeared so weak that Thanjavur felt it possible to annex them. As a result, the successors of Ekoji, namely Shahji (1684-1712), Serfoji (1712-1728) and Tukkoji (1728-1736) made repeated attempts at expansion. The interventions that they

---

made in the affairs of other states, the expeditions that they sent frequently and invasions that they had to encounter from the Carnatic had their natural impact upon the administration. For forces were to be recruited, provisions were to be collected and taxes had to be increased. These developments imposed new burdens upon the inhabitants and strains to the administration.

In a bid to extend their sway, the Marathas interfered in palace intrigues and internal disorders, supported one side or the other and frequently changed sides, depending upon the exigencies. Taking advantage of the conflict between Ramnad and Madurai, King Shahji supported the former. Reinforced by the troops of Thanjavur, the Setupati of Ramnad invaded Madurai in 1698, but suffered reverses. Thereupon Shahji won the alliance of the Setupati and occupied a few villages from the Nayaks of Madurai. After the death of Shahji, his son Serfoji interfered in a civil war in Ramnad. While Thanjavur took the side of Bhavani Sankaran, Madurai took the side of Tanda Tevar. The successful Bhavani Sankaran ceded the northern area of Ramnad to Thanjavur in recognition of the assistance that he received.

However, when Katta Tevar appeared as a rival to Bhavani Sankaran, Serfoji supported the former in defeating the latter

---

76 Ibid., p. 68.
and acquired possession of more territory. Tukkoji, the successor of Serfoji, took up the cause of Bhavani Sankaran and sent an expedition against Katta Tevar but suffered defeat. As a result Ramnad regained possession of the territories which it ceded on earlier occasions. Because of the questionable tactics played by the Marathas, they became undependable to all the local powers.

A real challenge to the security of Thanjavur was the rise of Arcot. Emperor Aurangazeb conquered Bijapur and Golconda and created a new province in the South, with Arcot as Capital. The Marathas of Thanjavur incurred his displeasure because of their support to their fellow Marathas under Rajaram for the period was marked by a bitter struggle between the Mughals and the Marathas. In 1691 Zulfikar Khan, the Mughal Governor of Arcot, marched upon Thanjavur and levied a contribution of four lakhs of rupees. Henceforth Thanjavur was considered a tributary to Arcot. Sadat-ul-lah Khan (1713-1722) and Dost Ali (1722-1740) the Nawabs of Arcot sent frequent expeditions and collected tribute from

---

80 Ibid., p.15.
81 Fort.St.George, Diary and Consultation Book, 26 August 1791, p.41.
As a result, the Marathas were deprived of the needed resources either to support a large army or to maintain their administrative system in order.

CIVIL WAR

In addition to foreign invasions, internal disorders seriously affected the Maratha administration. King Tukkoji had five sons - Bava Sahib, Sahahuji, Anna Sahib, Nana Sahib and Pratap Singh. Among them Anna Sahib and Nana Sahib died during the life time of their father. On the death of Tukkoji in 1736 Bava Sahib succeeded to the throne with the name Tukkoji II. However, he passed away in a few months after succession. Thereupon Sujana Bai, the widow of Bava Sahib, gained the support of Seid Khan, the Commander of the forces and succeeded to the throne. This marked the beginning of internal disorders.

After two years, Sahuji deposed Sujana Bai and captured power. A pretender by name Sidhoji, who won the support of Seid Khan and occupied the throne. Driven to exile, Sahuji requested the French to extend their support in return for an offer to cede

---

83 Ibid., pp.136-138.

112
Bennoit Dumas (1735-1741), the Governor General of Pondicherry, accordingly entered into an agreement with the prince. He sent two war ships with troops and artillery. However, before the French landed on the shore of Thanjavur, Sahuji won over Seid Khan and drove Sidhoji out of power. As a result the French endeavour to gain a foot hold in the kingdom failed. The disappointed Dumas sought the aid of Chanda Sahib, the general of Nawab Dost Ali. Accordingly Chanda Sahib occupied the two places and forced Sahuji to cede them to the French. As the price of the two places, the Maratha prince received 50,000 pagodas. Thus the internal disorders invited Nawab’s intervention and loss of a part of the territory.

Since then more of troubles followed. Safdar Ali, son of Nawab Dost Ali, led an expedition to Thanjavur in 1739 and replaced Sahuji by Pratap Singh. As the situation appeared critical, Sahuji appealed to King Sahu of Poona. In response to this appeal and determined to assert their influence, the Marathas descended upon the Carnatic in strength. They defeated and killed the Nawab in the battle at Damalcheruvu in 1740. Taking advantage of this invasion Sahuji purchased his freedom

---

87 Ibid., pp.74-78.
89 Ibid., p.378.
and returned to power.

However, Sahuji did not prove himself an able ruler. In 1742 the nobles deposed him and elevated Pratap Singh to power. Deprived of the throne, the prince made entreaties to different powers for aid. Finally he succeeded with the British. Charles Floyer, the Governor of Fort St. David, agreed to extend support, in return for the cession of Devikottai, a place of considerable commercial potential. In 1749 Captain Cope led an expedition, but it failed. A second expedition too ended in retreat. Thereupon Major Lawrence took only the command and occupied Devikottai from Thanjavur. By a settlement with Pratap Singh, the Company retained possession of Devikottai, but withdrew their support to Sahuji. This marked the beginning of British influence in the Kingdom.

POLITICAL DISTURBANCES AND RULE OF INSTABILITY IN THANJAVUR DISTRICT DURING THE STUDY PERIOD

In 1762, the Nawab sent an expedition and forced Rajah Pratap Singh to accept his sovereignty and to pay an annual tribute of four lakhs rupees. A year later Pratap Singh passed away and his son Tulzaji came to power. As the new ruler engaged himself in a campaign against Ramnad and Sivaganga, the Nawab entered Thanjavur with the assistance of British in 1771 and

---

91 Ibid., p.27.
93 Ibid., Vol.17, 1749, p.188.
exact a war indemnity of eight lakhs of rupees and also annexed Vallam, Arni, Deivanur, Koilady and Elangad. After this victory, the Nawab coveted the possession of the rest of the kingdom too. In 1773, the Nawab forces, supported by the British, stormed the fort of Thanjavur, imprisoned the royal family and annexed the Thanjavur kingdom with the Carnatic. With the Marathas out of power, the Nawab brought his own servants and re-organised the administration with a view to improve the revenue collections.

However, the Nawab rule over Thanjavur did not last long. In 1776, the court directors of the English East India company (EIC) decided in favour of restoration of the Thanjavur kingdom to the Marathas and Tulzaji reinstated as the Rajah of Thanjavur. In protest, the Nawab removed the revenue records, causing dis-location in the administrative system. However, the Rajah was required to pay twelve lakhs of rupees every year for meeting the expenses of British forces which were stationed at Thanjavur. Besides, the British took possession of Nagore together with 277 villages. Though the British interfered and restored the kingdom to Marathas, the subsequent developments proved that it was with a view to establish their authority.

During the initial period, the Maratha Kingdom included Arni Jahir, Bangalore district and some other parts of Mysore.94 A place called Arni continued to be a nominal dependency of

---

Thanjavur till 1771. In 1773, the Kingdom was conquered by the English and made over to the Nawab of the Carnatic. But the Court of Directors did not sanction this and ordered the restitution of the Rajah’s Kingdom. The restoration took place in 1776, when a settlement was made, under which the East India Company agreed to protect the whole country on condition that the Raja paid an annual subsidy of four lakhs of rupees. Fresh treaties were entered into in 1786, 1793 and 1799. Under the last one (i.e. 1799), the British assumed the administration of all the Raja’s territories except the Fort of Thanjavur, and the Kingdom became a British Province, an allowance of one lakh of pagodas and one-fifth of the net revenues being settled upon Raja Serfoji. He was succeeded in 1824 by his son Sivaji, and upon the latter’s death on 29th October, 1855, the title and dignity of the Raj was declared to be extinct.

**THE MARATHA’S ADMINISTRATION**

The Marathas inherited from the Nayakas an established system of administration. The king was the head of the state. The power and authority of the ruler invariably depended on his personality; but very often the Maratha rulers were content to leave the administration of the land in the hands of their ministers, devoting their personal attention to the pursuit of learning and the promotion of literature. Moreover the influence which the Brahmans exercised over the king greatly circumscribed his activities and confined him to the palace.
There was a council to assist the king and it was composed of the heads of the chief departments, the chief justice and royal purohit (Brahman priest). The most important member of the council was prime minister, also called chief adviser or sirkle or chamberlain of the royal household at different periods. The office of the minister, later on, came to be coupled with that of the Dalaway or Commander-in-chief who was the commander of the army. The Killedar was another important official, who controlled the fort. There were arikars or spies to supply the king with all news.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The whole kingdom was divided into five subhas viz. Pattukkottai, Mannargudi, Kumbakonam, Mayavaram and Tiruvadi, each of which was under a subedar. The subedar was the most powerful man, for he was not only the controller of the administrative machinery of the subha but was also in-charge of the military department. For his assistance, Amins were appointed for the collection of revenue who had power even to imprison a ryot for non-payment of revenue.

VI. ECONOMIC PORTRAIT OF THANJAVUR REGION

Merchants and Markets

There were a number of merchants, having overseas trade, exporting a number of articles. Too many references to the corporate activities of "merchant guilds" in the Sangam literature shows that there was flourishing trade during the time
and continued during the Chola times through the Pallava Period.

The overseas trade and vigorous colonisation movement resulted in a large number of persons including Brahman and Buddhist scholars moving out from the Tamil country to places in South and South East Asian countries. The foreign trade of the Sangam age which was with the west especially Rome, during the Chola age, shifted its direction to the East – towards cathay (China), Burma (Myanmar), Malaysia and Indonesia. Merchants earned a lot of wealth from these far eastern countries and the money was spent in many places in Tamil Nadu especially Nagapattinam in Thanjavur district. These merchants made rich endowments to Buddhist vihars and Hindu temples in and around Thanjavur district.

The merchants of Medieval Tamil Nadu organised themselves into guilds and were affiliated to similar associations in other parts of India. Among the trade guilds, the "Nanadesis" were the leading and prominent guild organisation during the medieval "Nanadesis" group were widely spread throughout the Tamil country. The trade guilds maintained their own police forces to defend their caravans. They gifted part of their wealth to temples.\textsuperscript{95} They even controlled some temples and market towns.\textsuperscript{96}

Market in ancient and medieval Thanjavur territory was a centre of commercial activity, where agrarian and commercial

\textsuperscript{95}Ibid., pp.27-28.
\textsuperscript{96}Ibid., p.28.
goods were exchanged between traders and consumers. In the Sangam period a portion of the trade was regulated through markets situated in different parts of the Thanjavur region. The Sangam and the Chola periods, also show the proliferation of markets in different parts of the study region. Medieval Thanjavur witnessed about the details of the goods manufactured and marketed and also the functioning of the trade guilds.  

During the Chola period, market centres increased in number and many commodities were brought in these markets for sale. Some of those markets were established under the patronage of the Kings. The functioning of these markets were the main reason for the development of local crafts and trade.  

Trade and Commerce (Chola period)  

During the late Pallava and Chola period (i.e., between ninth and twelfth centuries), as far as international trades were concerned, coromandel coast was very significant emporia. South Indian kingship and urban development in the early centuries of Christian era was stimulated by international maritime trade.  

The stability of the local bodies like ur, nadu, nagaram and brahmadeya played an important role in the medieval South Indian

---

98 Ibid., p.151.
100 Ibid., p.604.
political system. The "Nagarams" were well established centres of trade and commerce during the Chola period and each nadu had atleast a nagaram. This may be intended to contain the commercial penetration of foreign merchants within the regions designated market.101

Rajaraja-I, by conquering the Chera and Pandya kingdoms had a firm control over the important commercial centres of these regions. One of his expeditions was directed against Kollam, one of the most important international ports of the Cheras,102 to have trade contacts with the Arabs. The occupation of Elam (northern part of Sri Lanka) by Rajaraja in 981 A.D., enabled him to have further control over international commerce. It became a province of the Chola empire under the name of Mummudi Chola Mandalam.103 The last of his conquests mentioned was Maldives. It was popularly called, "the old islands of the sea, numbering around 12,000 islands".104

Thus, the military exploits of Rajarajan and his son Rajendra enabled them to have a firm control over the internal and external trade and commerce from Tungabadra in the North to Kandy in the South. The Chudamani Vihara in the eastern part of the coromandel coast near Nagapattinam was used by the South East

102 Ibid., p.231.
103 Ibid., p.232.
104 Ibid., p.233.
Asian merchants. The Chudamani Vihara was built by Sailendra King during the Rajaraja’s period. To the maximum extent, the Cholas attracted the international trade to their ports. The duties collected from these ports filled the Chola coffers.

The Commodities of Trade

During the Chola period, the major exports were the flora, fauna and mineral wealth, which constituted the chief commodities of trade. The main imports were pepper, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, saffron, pearls, turmeric, sandalwood and certain animals and birds.

During the Chola times, the chief articles that entered into the long distance trade were necessarily goods that carried great value for small bulk.

The itinerant trades mainly concentrated on the following commodities viz., black pepper, arecanut aghil (waterceder) from Kerala and sandalwood from Mysore. Rice being a consumer good was rarely exported. Sugarcane, which was introduced to Tamil Nadu during the Sangam period, was one of the chief articles of trade during the Chola period.

Cotton cloth was distributed by the itinerant merchants both internally and also to the foreign countries. Thanjavur,

105 Ibid., p.234.
106 Ibid., p.234.
Kumbakonam, Papanasam, Thiruvaliyar and other places in the study region were the leading weaving centres and also the cotton cloth industry seems to have flourished well during the Chola period.\textsuperscript{108} From Chola coast, cotton cloth was exported to Rome during the days of Nero.\textsuperscript{109}

Silk was imported into India from China, and the same was exported to the West in the first century A.D. Warmington further says that silk yarn by the silk merchants frequented Kaveripoopattinam during the Medieval period. The silk trade by the silk merchants made huge profits. During the Chola period mulberry trees were grown in the Chola domain and coloured silk thread were woven in the cotton cloth and then it was exported to foreign countries.\textsuperscript{110}

Pearl and pepper which were among the most important articles of trade between Tamil Nadu and the West since Sangam age continued to be so in the Chola period too.\textsuperscript{111} Kaveripoopattinam was an important port which imported pepper from India in 10th century A.D.\textsuperscript{112}

Horses were imported to the Tamil country through the sea route during the Sangam age. The Arab trade should have risen to prominence in the ninth century and especially during the Chola

\textsuperscript{109}Ibid., p.212.
\textsuperscript{110}Ibid., p.213.
\textsuperscript{112}Ibid., p.608.
period. The Chola records contain frequent references to the "Kudirai chettis" (dealers in horses) who were from Malainadu (the chera country). \(^{113}\)

**Currency and Coins**

During the Chola period the commercial transactions were partly controlled by a currency system made up of gold, silver and copper. Due to Rajaraja’s conquest over a vast territory, his coins were in circulation throughout the Tamil country and was popularly called as "Kalayus" and "Kasus". Rajaraja’s records mention the prices of the commodities in "Kasu". The metallic currency entered only in transactions of foreign commerce. \(^{114}\) Besides Kasu, Paddy also served as a medium of exchange during the reign of Rajaraja. \(^{115}\) Rajaraja issued copper coins, \(^{116}\) which were found widely throughout his Kingdom. He also issued silver coins. \(^{117}\) Itinerant merchants quoted all market prices in gold "kasu". \(^{118}\) Probably the local exchange was transacted through paddy and itinerant trade was conducted through "gold coins". \(^{119}\)

---


Itinerant Traders Guilds

In the Chola period new ports developed which were dominated by itinerant merchants. The position of these itinerant merchants within the Chola coastal ports was very powerful unlike in the Pallava period. During the Chola period, itinerant trade became institutionalised and the nagaram merchants became members of a powerful supra-regional commercial organisation, which was involved in the administration of commercial activities in the ports. It also assumed the administrative control over major trade emporia of the hinterland designated as "eri vira pattinam" (place where the heroes of the roads conduct trade). These nagarams and erivira pattinams organised the efficient flow of indigenous commercial products into the ports. The suffix "pattinam" was attached in South India to towns where international commerce were conducted, for eg. Nagapattinam and Adhirampattinam in the Thanjavur district. It may be a port in the coast or an emporia in the hinterland. Itinerant merchants also had a distinctive title, "Eri Vira Pattinam" was suffixed to the name of their emporium.

The itinerant merchants enjoyed a very special status. In the hinterland, their position was more dependent on forming alliance with local institution. From the Chola times it was

---

122 Eri denotes "the road", Vira - "heroes" and Pattinam ' "a trading place". Together they mean " a place where the heroes of the road conduct trade".
clear that the "nagaram" provided the arena for contact between local and itinerant merchants. According to K.R. Hall, the level of itinerant activity, which are to be formed are as follows: (i) The Pattinam, (ii) The Coastal Ports and (iii) The Periodical Markets.

There were three stages of evolution in the itinerant merchant organisation. (i) Initially, there were many small groups of expeditionary merchants, who served the less wealthy or isolated communities of the Hinterland, (ii) later, they found it profitable to join together for their mutual profession and (iii) finally, they carried arms for their protection and often employed mercenary armed guards like Velaikkarar (Mercenary troops). Their troops were also rich enough to make many endowments to the temples. There are innumerable instances about their organisation of work and the one from Thiruvidaimarudur in Thanjavur district is worth mentioning here. Part of a Mandapa at Thiruvidaimarudur was contributed by the local mercenaries of the itinerant merchants.

Thus, during the Chola period, different types of commercial organisation were firmly established. There was an expansion and co-ordination in their activities through a net work of trading

---

123 Ibid., pp.142-143.
124 Ibid., p.143.
126 Ibid., p.504.
centres. The Chola emperors since Rajaraja seem to have keen interest in the internal and external trade and commerce, which mutually benefitted the King and the traders.

Transport of commodities was a problem in those days. Roads within urban limits were maintained by local authorities like "ur" or "sabha". Trunk roads were not officially the concern of anybody, but were maintained by their users especially the traders. Toll gates were there and accountants maintained the accounts of the tolls. The travelling merchants had guards with arms.127

VII. CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Claims are often made for high and distinctive early civilisation in South India in general, and Tamil nadu in particular. These claims are made based on literary evidences. The archaeological evidences and the recent researches show that Dravidian languages most likely spread through much of the South only with the iron age, roughly 500 B.C.128 Since 300 B.C. the Dravidian languages were imposed, either by a more efficient

cultural system, or a political-military system or both.\textsuperscript{129} Literary scholars claim that the Sangam period and the succeeding period represents civilisation in Tamil Nadu.

Civilisation can be defined as a grade reached by the well-known "primary civilisations" in other parts of the world. It was generally characterised by a) urbanisation usually supported by a fully developed present economy, b) monumental buildings, c) diversified economy, d) elaborately structured society, e) formalised religion, f) the state and g) writing.

Thanjavur is renowned for her great art, culture and literature for over ten centuries. The district rose to glory during the medieval (imperial) Chola reign between the tenth and the fourteenth centuries and it became a centre of learning and a seat of culture and civilization. Successive generations of the Nayaks and the Marathas have enriched its cultural heritage. The attractions of this district are its temple monuments which have been the special creations of the Chola kings. The Cholas contributed their magnificent temples, sculptures and paintings to enrich the culture of the Tamil.

The Sangam literature mentioned that "bulk of the population lived in typical iron age villages". Greek sources stated that there were over a 100 named towns and many of them were trade centres.\textsuperscript{130} The permanent buildings like forts, palaces and

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., p.8.
temples of the Sangam period were built of burnt bricks covered with a reddish clay. Moreover, wood was used extensively to construct these permanent buildings.\textsuperscript{131}

**External Trade (Economy)**

The Roman had trade contact with the Tamils as revealed by the Sangam literature. Similarly goods were imported from South East Asia. These traders were also responsible for the development of culture and civilisation in Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{132}

**Division of Labour (Society)**

The various Sangam works mention diverse occupations - kings, chieftains, scholars, priests, poets, warriors, shippers, foreign merchants, blacksmiths, carpenters, potters, salt makers, pearl divers, fishers, dancers, shepherds, hunters, weavers, leather workers and also robbers.

According to Maloney, other archaeological sources and the Brahmi inscriptions, people were having the following occupations like lapidary, charioteers, gold merchants, cloth merchant, copra merchant, iron merchant, salt seller and toddy seller. In addition to this there were a few Jaina and Buddhist monks.\textsuperscript{133}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{131}Ibid., p.14.
\item \textsuperscript{132}Ibid., p.265.
\item \textsuperscript{133}C. Maloney, Op. Cit., p.15.
\end{itemize}
The State

The Chola kings fought numerous battles on the sea and incorporated all the territories. This was described in the "pattupattu". Most of the states had their inland capitals as well as subsidiary coastal capitals. Thus Cholas had "Uraiyur" and "Kaveripooampattinam" as their capitals.¹³⁴ (Likewise, the pandyas had "Madurai" and "Korkai" and the Cheras had "Karur" and "Thondi").

Writing

There were a number of Tamil Brahmi inscriptions, which go back to the history from two to three centuries prior to the Sangam period. The language of the Tamil script alone belong to the 3rd century B.C.¹³⁵ Thus, the Tamil region was well populated even before the Sangam period.

Sri Lanka was said to be "the source of inspiration of much that was incorporated into the early civilisation of Tamil Nadu". According to Maloney, the Brahmi script spread from Sri Lanka to Southern Tamil Nadu and the North West.¹³⁶

The period of Imperial Cholas (850-1279 A.D.) has every right to be called the "Golden" or "Augustan Age" of Tamil Literature, in the matters of the abundance of literary output as well as literary excellence. This Chola period does not lag

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.23.
behind the Sangam period. The history of Thanjavur Cholas should be described as "politically great and must be naturally, intellectually and culturally great also". Economic prosperity and social welfare facilitated the production of literature in abundance both in quality and quantity.\textsuperscript{137}

The Nayakas, who succeeded them fostered and developed the study of literature, drama, music and its arts. The Marathas and their successors followed suite, conserved and improved the legacies of their predecessors.

VIII. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITY AND ECONOMY TO THE STUDY OF URBAN CENTRES

There is a close relationship between polity and economy and in the study of urban centres in any period of history. Polity signifies dynastic change, size of the state, its politico-administrative structure as well as administrative measures and policies. Economy encompasses the hinterland and its produce, trade and manufacturers as well as markets and the commercial and financial capital.

The size of an urban centre depends upon the diversification of its trades and skills which in turn are determined by its vertical and horizontal linkages. Vertically, it is linked up with its hinterland consisting of both rural areas and urban

\textsuperscript{137} From the paper published after the Fifth World Tamil Conference at Madurai, "The Age of Chola as the Golden age of Tamil Literature", published in the journal of Tamil Arasu, January, 1995, Madras, p.33.
areas, ranging from villages to the large city. The city is the apex of the vertical linkage in the region and is horizontally linked up with other such cities outside the region.\textsuperscript{138} The effect of polity and economy on the changing pattern of urbanisation, or the growth and decline of urban centres, is a sensitive index of socio-economic change, particularly in the case of average towns.\textsuperscript{139}

To conclude this chapter, \textit{Thanjavur District: A Political History}, the following points can be put in a nutshell.

(a) \textbf{Thanjavur from Third Century B.C. to Twelfth century A.D.}

The Tamil Chola Kingdom has arisen in Thanjavur’s delta by the third century B.C. from about 100 to 250 A.D., the famous Sangam age and it became a centre of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain civilisation and literature. During this period, the basic structure of royal Government, the systems of irrigation and land tax, the multi caste settlement patterns of towns and villages, the religious supremacy of the Brahmans and the presence of certain other castes such as the Pallars, Parayars were established much as in later centuries.

The socio-cultural background of the people in the region possessed many special features that they were well familiarised in and around Thanjavur district before and during the study period. Among them are the vedic ceremonies of the Brahmans and


\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., p.192.
the worship of Lord Siva as the bisexual "Ardanariswara", of his son Murugan or Subramania and of Lord Vishnu as Rama and Krishna. The kingship system of the prominent castes was already patrilineal. As in later centuries, aristocratic widows lit themselves on the husband’s funeral pyre. Reincarnation and the effects of ‘Karma’ in successive births were established beliefs.¹⁴⁰

During the peak time of the Cholas, the people’s lifestyle was characterised by a sort of luxury, pleasure and merry-making. This high life style was much evident in the dietary habits of almost all caste people such as eating meat, fish and other marine products like prawns, crabs, etc. People also used to consume alcohol and other varieties of liquor. The robust optimism of the period declined with end of the Sangam age, probably with the ascendance of Buddhism. Thanjavur’s literature and culture thereafter acquired its emphasis on the sin and sorrow of desire, the virtues of non-violent submission and the need to escape the chain of rebirths through repression of the will to live. Although Buddhism declined in the eighth century with the rise of the Advaita Philosophy of the Hindu Sankaracharya and the dominance of Saivism. Lastly, Thanjavur’s Bramanical Hinduism itself became permeated with the Buddhist themes of non-violence and elimination of desire.

In order to summarise the political background of the Thanjavur district, the following notable points are highlighted

here. The early Chola emperor of the Sangam age, Karikala, lost his legendary grandeur. So, the first Chola kingdom fell into a dark age in the late third century A.D. In sixth century A.D. it re-emerged as a tributary province of the Tamil Pallavas of Kanchipuram. It was several centuries later that Vijayalaya established a small kingdom around Thanjavur, which developed into a gigantic empire under his successors. So, the Chola regained their independence about 850 A.D., and reached the height of their expansion in the tenth and eleventh centuries. For about two centuries they commanded tribute from all the kingdoms south of the Tungabhadra and at times extended their sway north to the Ganges and south of the Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to Burma (Myanmar) and Indo-china, and to the Sri Vijaya empire of Malaya (Malaysia) and Indonesia. Thanjavur’s Brahman and Vellalar bureaucracy, many of its great temples and most of its towns and villages were established in this period.

(b) Thanjavur from Thirteenth Century to Sixteenth Century A.D.

The imperial Chola empire declined in the twelfth century and Thanjavur was conquered by the Pandya kingdom of Madurai in 1290 A.D. Later, Thanjavur became a tributary to the rising Tamil Pandya kingdom of in the early thirteenth century. In the early fourteenth century, Thanjavur was briefly attacked by the Muslim rulers from the Delhi Sultanate. After various ups and downs of fortune (vicissitudes), Thanjavur was invaded by the vijayanagar empire in about 1340 A.D. In the year 1365, Thanjavur became feudatory to the Telugu empire of Vijayanagar.
By 1534, the Chola dynasty had disappeared. The vast and mighty Chola kingdom reduced to the limits of the present district, came under the rule of Nayakas in 1620s and also Telugu Viceroyys (governors) were appointed by the Vijayanagar rulers. The Nayakas declared their independence of Vijayanagar in 1642.

When the Nayaka empire declined, the Thanjavur was again conquered, this time by Maratha armies from Bijapur in 1674, and a Maratha ruler was installed. In 1680, the Maratha king declared his independence of Bijapur. Thanjavur was invaded by Mughal armies in 1691 and its Maratha king became a tributary of the Mughal empire, except for brief invasions by Muslims from South Arcot (the south western most extension of the Mughal empire) in the 1690s and 1770s and from Mysore in 1781. The Maratha dynasty held Thanjavur until its annexation by the British East India Company. The kingdom was, however, feudatory to the Nawab of Arcot from the 1690s and indirectly to the East India Company till its annexation. Thanjavur was thus a small, dependent kingdom surrendering booty and tribute to larger powers for most of this period.

(c) Thanjavur from Seventeenth century to Eighteenth Century A.D.

By 1749, some institutions resembling feudal vassalage (one who holds lands from superior and homage to him) and others influenced by capitalist markets and concepts of private ownership of the means of production had begun to penetrate the theocratic irrigation region of Thanjavur district.

In the year 1749, Thanjavur was occupied by the Britishers. It was the first interference of the British in Thanjavur and was
reduced by the British East India Company in 1771. The ruler of Maratha dynasty of Thanjavur, King Serfoji.II (1799-1832), handed over the Thanjavur territory to the British. After Thanjavur’s annexation in 1799, the British pensioned the Maratha royal family. (The Genealogical Table of the Maratha rulers in the study region is given at the end of this thesis as appendix).

So, the transfer of power (administration) from the great Marathas to the British took place in the year 1799. The Maratha ceded Thanjavur to the British, received the fort as their residence and an estate for their support. Thanjavur was later annexed to the British empire under the "Doctrine of Lapse" (The last Maharaja of the Maratha kingdom left a heiress but no heir and there was a dispute surrounding the abolition of the kingship) in the year 1855 by Lord Dulhousie. This was declared very arbitrarily by the British and the Marathas extinct took place in the same year (i.e. 1855) at Thanjavur.

Later, Thanjavur became a revenue district of the Madras Presidency of the British India. With India’s independence in 1947 it remained part of the same multi-lingual region, named as the Madras Province, until the separation of the smaller, Tamil speaking Madras State in 1956. During the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam’s (D.M.K.) regime, in 1965, the then Chief Minister and the founder of the D.M.K. Party Chief, Dr. Annadurai named the Madras State as "Tamil Nadu".

---

142 Ibid., p.128.
Besides all the points mentioned above, Thanjavur district was especially known for its religious (temple) importance and the unique traditional and cultural heritage it carries till date. Thus this chapter highlights the historical importance of Thanjavur district in different aspects. The next chapter discusses about the socio-economic conditions in Thanjavur district.