

## APPENDIX I

### FURTHER NOTES ON POONJAR CHIEFTAINS AND KODIKULOM KARTHAS

The following additional notes on the Poonjar Chieftains and Kodikulom Karthas are prepared from material furnished by Mr.C.S.Parameswaran Pillai of Poonjar, on Poonjar Chieftains, and Mr.P.Velu Pilla of Thodupuzha, on Kodikulom Karthas. I met both these gentlemen in June 1953. Mr.Parameswaran Pillai, a venerable old man then in his eighties, is a profound Sanskrit scholar and well versed in the history and lore of the Poonayattu Perumals (Poonjar Chieftains), and his family are resident in Poonjar for many generations. He is related to the house of Poonjar through marriage. Mr.Velu Pillai was the then Field Officer for Backward Communities with his head-quarters at Thodupuzha town, the chief town of the taluk of that name. The ancestral seat of the Kodikulom Karthas is in Thodupuzha taluk, and not far from the town itself.

According to Mr.Parameswaran Pillai, the Pandyas, ancestors of the Poonjar Chieftains, left Madura at the time of the ascendancy of the Thirumala Naickens in the South. They left secretly at night with an only sister, and entered Travancore through Palghat and Edappally. At

Edappally, they accepted the hospitality of Edappally Raja, the local Chief who eventually married the Pandyan princess. The Pandyan Raja then moved southward, and arriving at Poonjar he saw that the land was good and decided to settle there. He bought the land from the then owner, the Raja of Thekkumkur, and built palaces and fortifications, and established himself as the Chief of Poonjar. Anjanad and Marayoor, hill-tracts in the north-eastern part of Travancore were acquired later through purchase from the then owners of those tracts, the Chongamanattu Devaswom. (Devaswom is landed property attached to temples).

The original Pandyan immigrant Raja had no male issues, and he was succeeded by the son of his sister who was earlier married to the Raja of Edappally. Since then, the Poonjar house adopted, and still continues, the matrilineal order of succession. This was also in keeping with local practice. In three or four generations, the original Pandyan line became extinct. The people of Poonjar then approached ~~the~~ Thekkumkur to send someone to rule the principality, but he refused to do so on the advice of his mother who said that it would be a sin to acquire ruling rights, even if offered, over lands which the Thekkumkur Karanavas (matrilineal male ancestors) had sold to the Pandyas. The Chief of the Vanjipuzha Madham - a Brahmin

ruler - then came to rule the principality, but before long he was discovered to play mischief trying to incorporate the Poonjar lands adjoining his boundaries to his own principality. The people rose in revolt <sup>and</sup> compelled the Vanjipuzha Chief to depart. Thereafter various neighbouring Chieftains tried, with only short-lived success, to rule the Poonjar principality as elected Presidents - Perumals. (Perumal - perum plus aal - means big person, literally. In ancient times, parts of the West Coast region, or Chera country, or perhaps the whole of it for some time, were ruled by Perumals who were elected to the office for twelve-year periods by common consent of the people. It is believed that the Chera Kings introduced the institution of Perumal.) The first Poonayattu Perumal was the younger of two brothers of Neithalloor Pandarathil. He was a despot, and very unpopular with the people; he died before completing his term of office. The elder brother, fearing revolt due to the despotism of his brother, did not seek to become Perumal.

Presumably, other men of rank and aristocracy continued to be Perumals, but their terms of office were undistinguished, and there is no record of them, except that they all assumed the title of Pandya Mandalam Udaya Kulasekkara Perumal, following the Pandyan tradition. Then came a Perumal from Venkidangu Sarkara Kovilakam who assumed

the title of Poonjar Udaya Kulasekhara Perumal. He ruled so well, and was so popular with the people that they decided to keep him for life, and, moreover, to continue succession to Poonjar Chieftainship by his matrilineal descendants. This Perumal was succeeded by his sister's son who was born in Poonjar and was therefore the first Poonjar Perumal born in Poonjar. The Poonjar line has continued to the present time in the matrilineal descent of the Sarkara Kovilakam Perumal. The present Valia Raja (Senior Chieftain) of Poonjar is of the seventh descending matrilineal generation from the first Perumal born in Poonjar.

It would seem from the above that the present generation of Poonjar Chieftains or indeed of several preceding generations, have no consanguinal bond with the Pandyan Kings, but due to the traditional association of the principality with the Pandyan dynasty, the popular assumption, at any rate, is that the Poonjar Chieftains are descendants of the Pandyas. (See also quotation from Nagam Aiya, p. 65 supra, according to which the then Valia Raja of Poonjar claimed to be a descendant of the Pandyan dynasty, in submitting a petition to the Governor of Madras in 1897, for the restitution of certain rights.)

Poonjar, the seat of the principality called Poonjar Edavaka, is a quiet, small town in Kottayam district. There are a large number of rambling buildings which are

the palaces and offices of the Rajahs, a high school and a Meenakshi temple in the town. I am told that the present extent of the Poonjar Edavaka is 40,000 acres, most of which are hills and forests.

During my visit to Poonjar, I had the privilege of calling on the present Valia Raja (Senior Chieftain) to pay my respects and to convey to him the respects of the Muthuvans. The Raja, an oldish, kindly gentleman of slight build, was attired in an astonishingly simple manner with only a plain white dhoti and shirt. He seemed to be a man of simple tastes and few words. He received me most cordially, and was pleased that I called. However, I was rather disappointed when I conveyed to him the respects of "his people", the Muthuvans: the good Raja had never heard of Muthuvans !

I tried to get some confirmation of statement of the eastern Muthuvans that they used to visit the Poonayattu Perumal once a year to pay their respects to him, by asking the knowledgeable Mr. Parameswaran Pillai about it. He did confirm that in his early youth he had seen the then Perumals receiving respects and presents from hill tribes; but he could not say whether or not they were Muthuvans, for he too had not known Muthuvans. In those days, the Perumals, in their turn, used to give pattu (silk), sword, ring etc., insignias of honour and authority, to the chief

men among the tribes. If this was the case, the Muthuvan statement of relations with the Poonayattu Perumals is substantially correct.

As regards Kodikulom Karthas, very little information was available. It would appear that they were once an influential family of landed aristocracy with extensive control over the hills and forests in Thodupuzha and nearby taluks. However, at the present time, they are impoverished, and a few extant descendants of the family who live just outside Thodupuzha town are ordinary citizens in rather difficult economic circumstances. It is ofcourse exceedingly probable that at the time of the settling of the western Muthuvans in the hill tracts of Thodupuzha taluk and elsewhere, the Kodikulom Karthas were the virtual rulers, and hence their claim that they are people of the Karthas.