CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION
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Thanjavur through Ages is a fascinating study - its geography, society, art, architecture, culture and religion. This study also comprises a survey of its economic, geopolitical and political aspects. To make it realistic and purposeful, certain issues like the cause for the shifting of capitals, maintaining more than one capital, the discrepancies in the interpretation of Sastras in regard to 'ordeals' etc., have been posed.

The Cauvery, known in legend and literature as Dakshini Ganga, may be styled as 'the river of Tamil history'; for ages it has been a silent spectator of rise and fall of mighty Empires and great civilisations. The Cauvery Delta has been the core of Dravidian life and culture since the Sangam Age, if not earlier. European historians are so much in love with Thanjavur as to describe it as 'the garden of Southern India', in fact the title is the gift of Cauvery. The river not only irrigates but fertilises and has earned for Thanjavur the proud title, 'the rice-bowl of the South'. The alluvium which it brought from the tableland of Mysore made it possible for the plains of Thanjavur to bear the cost of empire and civilisation. Thus the region owes its material prosperity

and acculturation to the waters of Cauvery. Therefore the very flow of Cauvery across the Thanjavur region may be said to be the most dominant geo-political factor that shaped the history of this part of Tamilnadu from pre-Sangam to post-independence days.

Uraiyyur, the earliest of the capitals of the Cholas, Puhar, an alternative capital of Karikala, Thanjavur, the capital of the imperial Cholas and Rajendra's Gangaikonda- cholapuram were all either on the banks of Cauvery or within easy reach to the river. It looks as though the kings considered Cauvery as an artery of the empire and wanted to be as close to it as possible. Cauvery, which waters more than a million acres, is the main source of irrigation, and therefore of the agricultural prosperity of the region. Living on its banks and watching the flow of its waters should have given them a sense of strength and satisfaction. But apart from this, the river had its own spiritual significance; bathing in Cauvery was not only an act of physical purification, but a performance of religious ritual. Tying the line of Hindu mythology, Encyclopaedia Britannica observes "even the holy Ganges resorts underground once in the year to the source of the Gauvery, to purge herself from the pollution contracted from the crowd of sinners who have bathed in her waters."  

2. Ibid., p.360.
No wonder the ancient rulers of Thanjavur had their capitals at places sanctified by the life-giving and holy waters of Cauvery. Thus, in the location of political capitals of the Thanjavur region one sees the influence of geography and religion.

Rulers like Vijayalaya realised the need for shifting his time-honoured capital from Uraiyur to Thanjavur so that he may have a strategic equidistant location from the Pallava and Pandyya capitals. Breaking all sentiments, Mahendra I transferred his capital from Thanjavur further north to Gangaikondacholapuram.

The proximity of the Thanjavur territory to the coromandel coast made the activities of the people orientated towards the sea. Maritime trade with countries beyond the seas appears to have brought untold wealth to the coffers of the empire. Puhār, where Cauvery empties herself in the Bay of Bengal, was an emporia of trade where Yavana merchants kept themselves busy importing and exporting a variety of wares. Thus the Tamils made full use of their coastal line - a geographical facility which the land locked people of the north did not enjoy. The commercial intercourse paved the way for cultural contacts as well. This is an instance where geographical features influenced the life of the people.

Geopolitical considerations determined to a good extent the foreign policy of Thanjavur. With their limited
requirements and an attitude of contentment, it was never felt

Hence to extend their power further north. They had not only ample
necessary for space in their own homeland, but adequate natural
resources to meet the needs of a medieval society. The geo-
political factors that determined the external affairs of
Thanjavur were thus different from those of other powers.
This would remind one as to how the vision of a Roman empire
extending over three continents was out of place in the history
of Thanjavur region.

The history of the Cholas of Thanjavur is also a
history of hundred years of overseas expansion and naval war-
fare. Even the imperial traditions of North India at its
hayday has no parallel to this. One is astonished at the
Bay of Bengal becoming a Chola lake for some decades and
great rulers like Rajendra holding sway all over South-East
Asia. K.M. Panikkar, the diplomat-historian of India, is
inclined to attribute these marine activities of their
interest in maritime commerce rather than political expansion. But it may be added that considerations of prestige also
weighed with them. It is a rare example of a country making
use of its coast to build a better image for itself among
its neighbours.

3. K.M. Panikkar - Geographical Factors in Indian History,
p.28.

4. Ibid., p.28.
Though the Chola conquest of Kadara gave them an overseas empire, it proved too heavy a burden and did not survive long. Unlike Greece and Rome, it was not a narrow sea that connected the mainland with the islands. This only goes to prove the fact that an empire which lacks geographical contiguity would be 'an unnatural agglomeration'. Further the mainland itself afforded enough scope for military enterprise and imperial ambition.

The geographical features of Thanjavur did not fail to influence the habits of the people. It was only natural that in such an atmosphere the people turned their attention towards intellectual pursuits. Art, literature, music and philosophy flourished. Thus, the contribution of Thanjavur to the culture of India has been due to nature's bounty - its agreeable climate and its fertile plains. But a terrain free from mountains, forests and deserts proved unfavourable to physical hardihood.

Its kings resorted to plundering expeditions to enrich their coffers. Part of the wealth was endowed to the temples and enshrined as trust property meant for social and economic uplift. As an agricultural region it has to submit to the vagaries of the monsoon and the fury of the floods in the Cauvery. Its indigenous industries are the manufacture of salt, brassware, musical instruments etc. Thanjavur has

5. K.M. Panikkar - Geographical Factors in Indian History, p.20.
been the nursery of Carnatic music with the illustrious
trinity and their school of musicians. One is even tempted
to construe music as yet another 'industry'. Pilgrims and
tourists to temples augmented its economic resources which
maintained hospitals and educational institutions.

Almost the entire Tamil country has been the cockpit
of political power. To the modern historian its political
history is all an obscurity before the Sanam Age. In the
2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. the Pallavas eclipsed the Cholas.
The first of the Imperial Cholas - Vijayalaya was a far-
sighted ruler and was followed three and a half centuries
later by Rajaraja I and Rajendra I. They were the
architects of the glory of Thanjavur. Their supremacy
in the Bay of Bengal is deemed an instance of a rare
indigenous naval power. They commemorated their victories
by monumental works. Rajaraja I called his extensive
empire as Rajarajeswaras in the world tradition of Alexandria,
Constantinople, Petrograd, Washington and the like. He
also built the Great Temple of Thanjavur. The empire of
Rajendra I was more extensive and included overseas terrri-
tories in South East Asia, Sri Vijaya kingdom and Ceylon.
He celebrated his achievements by founding yet another
capital "Gangaikondacholapuram" and adorning it with a
temple and a tank.
Some of the traditions of these ancient rulers seem to be in line with those of the British. The reigning king associated the crown prince with the mantle of administration calling him "yuvarāja" after a coronation just as the heir-apparent to the British throne is christened the Prince of Wales, though without ruling powers. The crowning of kings was in the temples like the British sovereigns at Westminster Church. The succession to the throne was also by primogeniture. Weddings were solemnised in temples as in churches. Matrimonial alliances were sought to ally hostilities as evidenced in European history too. This was infructuous in the case of Aditya I, while Raghunatha Nayaka succeeded in winning the hand of the daughter of a Madurai Nayak.

The incessant dissensions, betrayals and wars between the various dynasties resulted in the domination of the Moghuls who established the grand Munsabdari in the south. The European and British powers also took advantage of this to stabilise their position.

Many redeeming changes affected by the British have endeared them to the people. Perhaps these have created so much goodwill that even to this day India opts to continue in the Commonwealth of nations. The British democratic parliamentary system, its rule of law, equity and justice have captured the Indian imagination and gained its admiration.
Land reforms, initiated by Rājarāja I in 1002 A.D., were improved by Kulōthunga I and Kulōthunga III and later to a good extent perfected by the British with its ryothwary system of Permanent settlement Regulation of 1802 and patśa regulations. By a strange coincidence, the year of the Domesday survey of England (1086) is also the year in which Kulōthunga ordered a revenue survey. For the first time a census of Thanjavur was taken by the British in 1832. Again it is to the British rule that the people of this region owed the benefits of a sound administration like the standardisation of weights and measures, introduction of the rupee as the state currency, administration of impartial justice compatible with the doctrine of paramountcy, and the banning of inhuman punishments, slavery and servitude. Public works is yet another field through which the British improved the agricultural prosperity of this region by irrigation channels and embankments. Special mention may be made of the masonry dams and Upper Anaicut constructed across the Cauvery in 1836. Public health problems received better attention with regard to epidemiology, prevention of diseases and medical care.

The Chōla autonomous village dates back to Parantaka I (907 - 955 A.D.). It is an instance of decentralised democracy. This may be compared to the British administrative system, where the collectors and village officers
reached the rural areas. English education facilitated understanding of modern democratic concepts. The very fact that Raja Serfoji II was persuaded to learn English by the British Resident belies the belief that the British foisted their language to train up clerks. Protocol is something new which the British impressed on Serfoji II, he was told that he would not get an acknowledgement to his letter of condolence of King George IV, since it was a matter of protocol. When the last of the Maratha rulers Shivaji II, left only a daughter, there was a difference of opinion as to the propriety of a woman succeeding her father. The British ultimately ruled out the possibility, though England had accepted queens and witnessed even golden ages under them. Perhaps it was thought that the oriental climate was different, and that there was no parliament or constitution that was supreme.

Society, education and mathas centred round the temples. The mathas fostered education, Sanskrit learning and Brahmanical traditions, along with community service. This was the practice with all the dynasties of this region. Though the Thanjavur society has passed through several vicissitudes of fortune for over a millennium, having had the impact of the rule of various dynasties and foreign occupation, it has always maintained a unique social harmony.
This may be attributed to its cultural heritage fostered by the oriental language - especially Sanskrit.

Sati, the supreme sacrifice of the spouse on the funeral pyre of her lord, is an institution of unique sanctity. This is indeed the climax of marital love and devotion of medieval Indian womanhood. The building of temples, mosques, minarets and churches ingrained in high sense of secularism in Thanjavur society. This tolerance and cultural unity is but a part of what prevails from Badrinath to Cape Comerin, which is the beaten track of pilgrims from time immemorial. The great epics, the Vedas and the Upanishads are the custodians of the integrated national culture. India has been the cradle of religions and has tolerance for Islam, Christianity etc. It is these that have dignified the human personality and has endeared the Thanjavur region through the millennia.