CHAPTER - II
POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Pudukkottai, as a modern political unit, is of a very recent origin. The history of the state begins with the foundation of the two independent principalities, Pudukkottai and Kolathur and their amalgamation in the year 1750 A.D.\(^1\) Prior to the establishment of Thondaiman rule, different chiefs controlled different parts of the region. Early rulers of the Thondaiman line, through protection rights and a network of kinship, provided the embryonic base for the Pudukkottai kingdom that lasted up to 1948 A.D.\(^2\)

PRE-THONDAIMAN PERIOD

The inhabited land of Pudukkottai from the Sangam period to the Pandyas of the Second Empire, served as a buffer zone between the Chola and Pandya kingdoms. Different parts of the state were ruled by different chieftains\(^3\) who were later incorporated into the Chola hegemony. The Chola period witnessed extensive peasant colonisation.\(^4\) Internal disputes destabilised the countryside and caused the decline of the second Pandya Empire. The subsequent muslim incursion had created uncertainties with regard to the security of person and property.\(^5\) Inscriptions found at Adhanur and Rankiyam mention the menacing activities of the muslim rulers.\(^6\) Taking advantage of the confusion that prevailed, local chieftains formed petty principalities. Their jealousies and
wars threw the life of the peasantry into a pool of agonising experience.7

The earlier institutions of village and local assemblies were weakened or atleast lost importance. The void created by the decline of the local assemblies and the absence of a powerful ruler was filled up by the Aralyar chiefs. They became powerful by appropriating Pāḍikāval (protection) rights at the expense of the local community. They demanded their dues both in kind and cash for enforcing protection of a locality.8 They emerged as arasıkkāval through kinship connection and misappropriation of Pāḍikāval rights. They granted lands to their retainers. This was confirmed by the existence of a number of Pāḍai-parru (cantonment villages) at Kiranur, Virachilai, Kurunthenpirai, Kottaiyur, Lambalakudi, Pulivalam and Ilanchavur. The A rayars were often identified as belonging to a particular Pāḍai-parru.9

Kumara Kampanna’s re-conquest of Madurai and the hegemony of the Vijayanagar rule could not eliminate the varied Aralyar chiefs. They included the Pallavarayars, Vanadhirayars, Thondaimans of Aranthangi and chiefs of Parambur, Illuppur and Marunkapuri.10 Their pāḍikāval swathanthiram was more than mere payment of remuneration to them. Their arasıikkāval was aknowledged by the dominant community of the locality. In fact the A rayars were none other than the clan leaders of the respective localities and played the role of 'little kings.' The Vijayanagar rulers permitted some measure of autonomy to the local chiefs. They began to assert
themselves when the central authority of the Vijayanagar Empire was weak and unstable.

THE THONDAIMAN DYNASTY

The Thondaimans, one of the petty chiefs initially settled in and around Karambakkudi, consolidated their authority and position by appropriating pādikāval rights. Their status of arasukkāval was acknowledged because of their physical might and ability to use coercion. It was reported that the offending chiefs and their mercenaries belonging to the kallar sect went to the extent of damaging public utilities like the bunds of tanks. The villagers were afraid of their vandalism. So instead of giving resistance they yielded and allowed the clan might of the kallars to rule them. Their dominance does not mean that they were in a numerical majority in different parts of the state.

Early rulers like Avudai Raya Thondaiman (1641-1661) and Regunatha Thondaiman (1661-1730) strengthened their position of authority through matrimonial alliances, pādikāval rights and wars. In other words, one of the little kings, the Thondaiman dynasty emerged as a dominant force in the region, by way of collaboration and marriage alliances with other chiefs and clans. This dynasty ruled the region from A.D. 1686 till it merged in 1948 with the Indian union. An accepted list of rulers is furnished in the appendix.
It is claimed that the ancestors of the Thondaimans were migrants from Thirupathi. Whatever may be their origin, it is a fact that they strengthened their hold over this region by alliances, as noted above and by their skill in controlling the kallar population. It is of interest to note that they also claim to be the members of the Kallar clan. Once established firmly, the Brahmins legitimised their rule with vamsavalls and attributed divine origin of kinship to them. The successive Thondaimans, Vijaya Regunatha Thondaiman (1730-1769), Raya Regunatha Thondaiman (1769-1789) and Raya Vijaya Regunatha Thondaiman (1789-1807) actively participated in the Carnatic wars, Anglo-Mysore wars and Pollgar wars by taking sides with the British. As a reward for loyalty, the British gave them the tract Kilanallai. Blackburne, the resident at Thanjavur, a competent administrator, intervened as the guardian of the Rajah, Vijaya Regunatha Thondaiman (1807-1825) who was then only ten years old. In 1812 the capital town Pudukkottai was rebuilt after an outbreak of fire. The attempted eviction of some amarakārars (militia members) from their lands by Anantaiya, the Karyasta in 1814 was not successful. In 1817 the Rajah was invested with full powers.

Regunatha Thondaiman, the next ruler (1825-1839) was awarded the title 'His Excellency' in 1830. He maintained a buffer stock of paddy for public distribution. He took genuine interest in the welfare of the common people. His administration ushered in the trend to follow British regulations which were suited to local
conditions of the state. The next ruler Raya Ramachandra Thondaiman was a minor. So the government was entrusted to the care of the Foujdar, the Sirkil and other officers of the state. The British resident Bailey forwarded an unfavourable report about the administration of the Pudukkottal State. An important event of his reign was the riots instigated by Venkanna Servaikarar. As a result of the disturbances, the British intervened and reduced the authority of the state to a mere shadow. Besides, there was dead-lock in the administration resulting from the ill-will between the Rajah, the 'Sirkil' and the 'Darbar'. The political agent Hathway noticed brahmin domination in the administration and stressed the desirability to appoint non-brahmins in future. The suggestion of the political agent Lee Moris to relieve the Rajah of all administrative powers in 1875 was not accepted by the Madras Government.

In 1878 Seshiah Sastri was appointed as Sirkil. He can be called the maker of 'Modern Pudukkottal State.' He extended the town, erected public buildings and restored tanks. He took measures to eradicate corruption in public offices and filled the treasury with revenue. In 1856 the title 'His Excellency' granted to the Rajah was withdrawn and later in 1870 it was restored as 'His Highness'. Seshiah Sastri's zeal in the resumption of inams and in the abolition of Amani system (sharing crop between the state and the peasantry) had far reaching consequences.
At the time of Martanda Bairava Thondaiman's accession in 1886, he was only eleven years old. During the minority of the Rajah, Seshiah Sastri was the Diwan Regent. He was retired on the termination of Regency in 1894 and was followed by Vedantacharlu as Diwan. According to Venkatarama Ayyar, the administration of Vedantacharlu was characterised by weakness and laxity of control over finances. The Rajah attended the coronation of King George V. The visit of Imperial Majesties provided an opportunity to remit some minor taxes. On the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Rajah, a number of boons like the remission of the Village Karnam's Cess, commonly known as Kāṇakku varī amounting to twenty five thousand rupees for a period of three years was granted. Mohurteba tax on household trades and occupations amounting to five thousand rupees and a tax on bangle makers were also granted remission. During the first world war, the princely state and her people liberally contributed to the cause of the allies.

The marriage of the Rajah with an Australian lady Molly Fink was not liked by the people. The darbar conciliated the people by the remission of Kāṇakku varī and grant of a lakh of rupees each for town and village improvement. Finding his position unfavourable, the Rajah decided to reside out of India. The liberal allowance of twenty lakhs of rupees from the surplus fund of the state and another one lakh sixty thousand rupees from the
marriage fund to the Rajah was not relished by the people. In the absence of the Rajah, the state was administrated by Vijaya Regunatha Dural Raja as regent and Kunhunni Menon as the Diwan. In October 1923 the state was brought under the direct control of the Government of India through an agent to the Governor General with headquarters at Trivandrum.

The Rajah's decision to reside permanently outside India was received with a shock in the state. The birth of Sydney Thondalman created another problem of succession. The people feared that British would choose Sydney Thondalman to rule their Dharma Samasthanam. Satyamurthi the political activist appealed to the people not to accept Sydney Thondalman as their Rajah. The local press, Janamithran and Desa Uliyan kindled anti-Rajah propaganda. Satyamurthi declared that Sydney Thondalman was not a Hindu and as such he should not be allowed to become the ruler of the Hindu state. The Tamil translation of his speech in this regard was published by Desa Uliyan and consequently its editor was transported out of the state. Martanda Bairava Thondalman died in Paris.

The British government finally installed Rajagopala Thondalman (1928-1947) of the western palace Jahir as the ruler in 1928 A.D. As the new Rajah was a minor, the administration was carried on by the Regent Sahib Vijaya Regunatha Dural Raja. In 1929 a council of administration with the British Administrator,
the Diwan and the Chief Justice as the ex-officio member was constituted. In 1931 B.C. Holdsworth became the administrator. The present day Gandhi Park was named after him originally. A dam constructed at Kadayakkudi\(^43\) for irrigation purposes was also named after him.

Satyamurthi, the freedom fighter was declared as a seditionist because of his attempts to express the short-comings of the ruler.\(^44\) The peace of the state was disturbed by Andakulam riots in which the Kallars and the Muslims fought each other concerning wages for agricultural work. The Kannangudi dacoity was followed up by town riots in 1931 which resulted in the damage of public properties amounting to Rupees Twenty two thousand six hundred and twenty four.\(^45\) These disturbances were crushed with British military help. The Darbar maintained that no constitutional change is possible during the minority regime of the Rajah. As trustee of the ruler the Darbar could not take important changes which would adversely affect the finances of the state.\(^46\)

The great economic depression and the second world war created untold miseries like inflation, rising prices and black market in the state. The Darbar was not very active towards social reforms like temple entry by the Harijans or upliftment of women and the abolition of devadasi system. Throughout these turbulent years, Sir Alexander Tottenham\(^47\) managed the state with strict discipline, keeping a vigil on Indian freedom movement.
Political activist Muthuswamy Vallatharasu advocated the cause of merger of the princely state of Pudukkottai with the Indian Union. The state voluntarily merged with the Indian Union in 1948.48

ADMINISTRATIVE AND CONSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS

The political relations between the British and the Thondaiman was characterised by the absence of any treaty defining their relations. With the elimination of the hostile native powers, the British treated Pudukkottai as a subordinate non-tributary state. A Kotwal or police officer was permanently stationed at Pudukkottai to assist the Rajah. Blackburne, the resident at Thanjavur was responsible for the creation of the civil court, Nyaya Sabha with four judges, and a criminal court Danda Sabha with three judges. The Mudra Sabha was a lower civil court which was subordinate to the Nyaya Sabha.49 He was instrumental in the introduction of Marathi as the language of administration.50 He issued orders that the transaction of government affairs should only be in the public Katcheri and that the remittances of public money should be only in government treasuries.51

Raja Regunatha Thondaiman upheld that the right to try British subjects on criminal offences should be exercised by state courts. In 1868, Lee Moris the political agent sanctioned revision of pay scales of the government servants. He was responsible for the appointment of officers with the new designation, Joint
Magistrate. Seshia Sastri the renowned administrator reformed the judiciary, the revenue department and the general bureaucracy. Between 1880 and 1894 Seshiah Sastri reorganised the whole set up by eradicating corruption and filled up the treasury with revenue.

During the Silver Jubilee of the Raja Martanda Bairava Thondaiman in 1913, an elected representative was associated in the legislative advisory council. Besides, the privilege of electing two members to the Pudukkottai Municipality and the grant of Rupees Ten thousand to complete the Town Hall were extended to the people. On 22.9.1921 some members of the representative assembly visited Karaikudi and presented a welcome address to Mahatma Gandhi. Immediately the Darbar cancelled their membership in the municipality and assembly.

In 1924, the Darbar issued an order for the creation of legislative assembly with limited franchise, and it was inaugurated in September 29. The assembly was neither representative nor responsive, because the franchise was limited. It had a right to be consulted and a right to warn. The cut motions introduced were often withdrawn. The Heads of Departments answered the various questions raised by the members. Generally the members competed with one another in exhibiting their loyalty to the state.
The Viceregal visit to the state provided an opportunity to release the prisoners who had participated in the riots. In the second Round Table Conference (1931-1932), Raghaviah pleaded on behalf of the state, to grant co-equal powers between the princely state and the presidencies. Muthuswamy Vallatharasu complained about the unchanging monotonous administration. He wanted substantial changes in the constitution and a change of mind of the ruling power influencing it. The Darbar maintained that the Government of India should not be disturbed on these issues at a time when it was pre-occupied with more important matters relating to war. On budgets presented in the legislative council Muthuswamy Vallatharasu complained that they simply recalled the class room experience of arithmetic and history.

Kailasa Ambalakarar, a member of the legislative council, stated that it was derogatory to the sovereignty of the state, to put the state police under the control of the British Indian Police Officers. If this was position of the state, its independence was a farce. The Darbar, that was orthodox in social reforms, could not be liberal in granting constitutional reforms. While one member of the legislative council maintained that the time was not ripe for democracy, another member said that the Rajah should not be given absolute powers. On the question of responsible government, the Darbar always quoted the views of Agama Sastri to support their traditional stand. It was also maintained, that in the case of a tie in the council,
the ruler or Presiding Officer had a casting vote. Sir Alexander Tottenham, the author of the District Office manual, evinced keen interest in the periodical review of administration. He effected notable improvements in the municipal town and conducted regular camps in the villages. Thus the state was run by Brahmin bureaucrats and British administrators like Seshiah Sastri, Holdsworth and Tottenham.

The relations of the British with the Thondaimans were mutual but unequal. Political relations officially began since 1801. No treaty was formally drawn between the East India Company and the Thondaiman rulers. The state acknowledged the sovereignty of the British government. As a result, the loyal Thondaimans occupied a subordinate position and became the dependent chiefs of the British.

In actual working, the state exhibited certain features distinctly its own. The name of the state, 'Dharma Samasthanam' and Agama Sastri holding the post of the court Purohit indicate that the state followed Hindu traditions. But the rulers were at the mercy of the Britishers. The replacement of the personal rule of the Thondaiman will become an un-rewarded act to the Britishers. The transfer of authority will not clarify fully the relationship between the Thondaimans and the British. The withdrawal and conferment of titles indicate the authority of the British. This is what Dirks calls as 'Hollow Crown'.

The state was strategically located as a frontier guard of the Kallar-maravar region. Annexation of the state by the British will be an additional liability to them by way of administrative expenditure. The clans inhabited could not only be easily managed but also made use of to enhance power by rendering military help to a loyal ruler. By allowing the state to exist, the British commanded its resources without incurring any additional expenditure on maintenance. It was not economically viable to the Britishers to bring the state under its direct rule. So due to economic and political reasons, the British allowed the state to continue as a separate entity.

In the legislative council, the voice of the people was raised for the grant of a responsible government to the state, as in the tiny state Aundh. The impact of All India politics and national resurgence was partially reflected in the discussions during legislative proceedings. Members were not satisfied with the often quoted phrase, 'Dharma Samasthanam.' They compared the economic conditions in the British Presidency with that of Pudukkottai expecting reforms.

The state of Pudukkottai under the Thondaimans withstood the test of time. The formation and stability of the state was closely connected with the development of agriculture. Land settlements in the adjoining presidency were partially applied
here. Land grants and land revenue gradually linked various segments of the peasant society. Yet, in the Legislative Council, officials and non-officials clamoured that mamul custom on agriculture should not be violated at any cost.
CHAPTER - II

REFERENCES


8. In Tamil 'Pādi' means village 'kāval' means protection. Pādkāval denotes the watchmanship-right of a village.

9. Padaiparry is a military containment or a settlement of soldiers.


12. Appendix I, 'Chronological Table of the Thondalman Rulers.

13. The clan of Kallars, it is believed, came from the region from around Tirupathi and Kanchipuram during Vijayanagar times. Venkannas Telugu Manuscript Thondalman Vamsavalli (Genealogy) gives an account of the legendary origin of the early Thondalman. The valour and strength of the Thondalman helped to subdue elephants. The elephant episode was the subject matter narrated in the Tamil poems of Raya Thondalman Anuragamalai and Irattaimanimalai which were referred as sources. (Chapter I, References 8 and 9.)

14. The Kallar groups have well developed conceptions of their settlement in Pudukkottai. They have settled in the area now known as Alangudi eventually extending themselves into Kolathur taluk. Ammachatram Copper Plate grant dated 1733 speaks of the spread of Kallars to the north-eastern part of the state. More details are given in Copper Plates. See Raju, S., (Ed.), *Pudukkottai Thondalman Copper Plates*, Tamil University, Thanjavur, 1991, p. 85.

15. There were three Carnatic wars. The first Carnatic war was 1747 to 1749, the second Carnatic war was from 1749 to 1754 and the third Carnatic wars from 1754 to 1763, put an end to the French influence in the Carnatic.

16. The first Anglo-Mysore war from 1780 to 1784, the third Anglo-Mysore war and the fourth Anglo-Mysore war from 1790 to 1792 had put an end to the challenge offered to the British by Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan.
17. The Poligar Wars (1797-1801) were mainly fought in the southern district against Kattabomman, Umaithurai and Marudhu Pandya of Sivaganga. The role of Thondaiman in the capture of Kattabomman has been viewed as 'un-patriotic'. Such a view emerged from the ethnocentrism of the previous century. Nationalism and patriotism were alien concepts in those days. Every native ruler wanted to prolong his rule at any cost. The political landscape of Tamil Nadu was governed by the balance of power strategy that ultimately led to the paramountcy of the British and subordination of native rulers.


33. For the purpose of war, a sum of Rs.29,400/- was contributed by the state, apart from a sum of Rs.500/- per month contributed for Madras Hospitalship.


38. *Ibid*.


41. Ibid.

42. *T.N.S.A., Madras under Secretaries, File No.2 of 1946.*

43. *Vide Plate 15 and 16.*


47. Nagarajan, K., *Sir Alexander Tottenham,* Pudukkottai.


60. Ibid., p. 178.
67. Ibid., p. 385.
68. The Thondaiman rulers belonged to the Kallar clan.