CHAPTER – II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TRAVANCORE

The earliest rulers of Travancore were the Ay kings. They were probably ruling over the region around the Potiyil Hills, the southernmost section of the Western Ghats.\(^1\) Ptolemy states that the territory of the Ays flourished in the South of the Chera Kingdom and extended from Nelcynda to Kumari and the Pandya Kingdom lay only ‘Past Komaria’.\(^2\) Robert Sewell opines that the Ays were the rulers of the hill-country of Travancore.\(^3\) Ayakkudi near Aralvaymoli, Idalakkudi and certain place-names near Amsi give some clues regarding the Ay Kingdom of the Sangam Age.

The important Ay kings who ruled over Travancore are Ay Andiran, Titiyan, Atiyan, Titiyan II and Nanchil Porunan.\(^4\) Ay Andiran is said to be an independent ruler. His region, extended over the mountainous tracts from the Coimbatore gap in the Western Ghats down to Kanyakumari in the South.\(^5\) Purananuru extols him as a

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\(^2\) M. Rajaraja Varma Raja, ‘Some Travancore Dynastic Records’ K.S.P. Series 1, p.27.
\(^3\) Robert Sewell, Historical Inscriptions of Southern India, Madras, 1932, p. 361.
philanthropic king who ruled over the region near the Potiyil Hill. He is described as Vel Ay and Mal-Vel-Ay in Purananuru. He patronized the Tamil poets. The most important among them were Mudamociyar, Kuttuvan, Kiranar and Odaikilar. Another eminent poet Karikkannanar also refers to him in Nattinai, Ay Andiran drove the Pandyas from Nanchilnad and came to prominence sometime between 96 and 140 A.D. Titiyan is described as ‘Potiyir Celvan’ by the poet-king Bhutappandiyan. During his regin, the neighboring Pandya Kingdom was ruled by king Bhutappandiyan. The Sangam literature does not make mention of any war between Bhutappandiyan and Titiyan. But the Pandyan king must have come at least as far as Bhutappandi, a place named after him, and where a temple called Bhutappandisaramudaiyar was founded. So it may be suggested that the Pandya king and Titiyan came to an agreement fixing Bhutappandi as the western limit of Pandyan Kingdom, leaving the region to the North and West of it in the hands of Titiyan. In the time of Atiyan, the Ay Kingdom began to disintegrate. Alakiyapandiyan is said to have invaded the kingdom of the Ays and defeated Atiyan and reduced

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8 There is a village named Atiyannoor is Neyyattinkara Taluk even today. The older name of Alakiapandipuram in Thovalai Taluk was also Atiyannoor. It is quite possible that these villages were named after Atiyan.
him to the position of a tributary Chief of the Pandya king. Paranar, the Tamil poet has described this historical fight in the *Ahananuru* and sings of the victorious flag of the Pandyas, flying on the top of the Potiyil Hills.  

The Ays after being defeated by the Pandyas struggled in vain to regain their lost independence and their supremacy over the Potiyil region. Talayalankanattu Ceru Venra Nedunceliyan, who came to the Pandya throne during the reign of Titiyan II, repulsed the latter in the battle of Talayalankanam. Thus, the battle of Talayalankanam sealed for ever the fate of the Ay kingdom.  

This heroic fight of Talayalankanam has been briefly described by Nakkirar in the *Ahananuru*. As a result of the battle of Talayalankanam, the Potiyil region was broken up into petty Kingdoms.  

After the discomfiture of the Ay kings, certain regions of Nanchilnad remained under Pandya rule for several centuries. The Pandya King Sendan (645 - 670) invaded Nanchilnad.  

The only reliable basis for the inference that he undertook expeditions beyond Aralvaymoli is that Sendan assumed the surname Vanava, the

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9 *Ahananuru*, Stanza – 162.
distinctive appellation of the Chera. It is also inferred from certain surviving place-names that he might have conquered parts of Nanchilnad and commemorated his victories by bestowing his name on villages and temples.\textsuperscript{13} For instance, at Talakkudi, about three miles north-east of Kottar, there exists the Temple Sendanisvaramudiyar. Popular tradition connecting this shrine with Sendan, a Pandyan king, is perhaps based on fact. Again, on the southern fringe of Alakiyapandipuram is found a temple known as Jayandanarkoyil. Further, a village in the Agasteeswaram Taluk located about five miles south-west of Kottar is the village of Sendanputur.

The next king who attacked Travancore and places to the North of it was Sendan’s successor known as Arikesari Maravarman (670 - 710). He achieved victories at Kottar and captured it.\textsuperscript{14} It is described in the Commentary of \textit{Iraiyanar Akapporul}. So, it is certain that he conquered certain portions of Travancore which were not under Pandya authority. He completed the annexation of Nanchilnad to the Pandya Kingdom. Kochadaiyan (710 - 740) who succeeded Arikesari is said to have defeated Ay Vel, who held sway in the Western Ghats.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Travancore Archaeological Series}, Vol. VI, Part 1, p. 100.
region in the battle of Marudur. The Ay king was forced to acknowledge the Pandya supremacy. Perhaps, Kochadaiyan extinguished the last vestiges of the authority of the Ays in Travancore and thus completely asserted the Pandya supremacy over the whole of Travancore.

During the reign of Maran Chadayan (765 – 815), the Ay ruler again seems to have reasserted his independence in the neighbouring region to the North, including South Travancore and the Pandya King had to wage a war with Ay Vel. The latter was defeated and his country annexed. Not satisfied with this victory the Pandya King marched against the Ay king, Karunadan, probably the successor of Ay Vel. The result of this battle is not known, but it is unlikely that the Ay ruler was completely subdued by the Pandya ruler. In this encounter, Karunadan was assisted by the Cheras, and the Pandya army was driven back as far as Karaikkottai which is identified with Aralvaymoli.

It appears that Viranarayana Chadayan, who ascended the Pandya throne about 880, had also been actively connected with

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16 *Travancore Archaeological Series*, No.XII, pp.188 - 189.
17 A.S. Ramanatha Iyer, ‘The Aruvaymoli Pass or the Open Gateway of Travancore’, *Journal of Indian History*, April,1925, p.7.
Travancore. Some of his inscriptions are found in the temple of Suchindram. It is likely that Suchindram was one of the sacred places patronized by him. The fact that the Suchindram inscriptions of his period bear the regnal years of his reign is a clear proof that the locality was under his sway. Viranarayananasseri and Viranarayananamangalam, two villages located within a few miles of Kottar, perhaps owe their names to the particular Pandya sovereign.\textsuperscript{18} Again in 900, Raja Simha II succeeded Viranarayana and that he continued to be in possession of Nanchilnad is attested by his inscriptions which are found in large numbers in this region.\textsuperscript{19} However, Rajasimha’s power, and along with it, the supremacy of the early Pandyas, was crushed by Parantaka Chola.

About the beginning of the tenth century A.D., South Travancore was annexed to the Chola Empire by Parantaka I (907 - 955). His inscriptions are found in Travancore; especially in Suchindram.\textsuperscript{20} He defeated Maravarman Rajasimha, the Pandya king. Parantaka captured Kanyakumari and extended his kingdom upto Suchindram as is testified by the Suchindram inscription of Parantaka Chola I, which records the gift of fifty sheep for maintaining a

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Travancore Archaeological Series}, Vol. IV, pp. 120 - 123.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}, XIC., pp. 237 - 238.
perpetual lamp before the God of the temple at Suchindram. But, it was only in the reign of Raja Raja I, the greatest of the Chola rulers (985 -1016) that Chola authority was firmly established over the whole of the Pandya Kingdom including Nanchilnad. His hegemony was accepted ever beyond the northern boundary of Nanchilnad. Several inscriptions in the Cholapuram Temple near Kottar bear witness to the Chola conquest of Travancore. The temple itself by Arayan Madhurantaka, a native of Tanjore, who after serving as a military commander under the Cholas appears to have settled down in Nanchilnad as a subordinate chief. In commemoration of his great victory over the Pandyas, RajaRaja renamed Kanyakumari as Rajarajesvaram. RajaRaja seems to have consolidated his southern conquests by constituting the newly acquired places into a separate administrative unit called RajaRaja Pandinadu. Kottar which was the southernmost military outpost in the Chola dominion was named Mummudicholanallur and a Chola garrison (nilappadai) was permanently stationed there. Thus by the end of the reign of RajaRaja Chola, South Travancore became an integral part of the Chola kingdom.

24 Ibid.
Raja Raja was succeeded by his son Rajendra I. He made Cholapuram as his capital and governed the farflung provinces through Viceroy. He appointed his son Jatavarman, the first Viceroy over the Pandya territory, the southern part of the Pandya region, including Nanchilnad came to be governed by the Chola Pandya Viceroy lasting for nearly sixty-five years, at the end of which period this system was finally abolished by Kulottunga I.

Kulottunga I (1070 - 1118) the first of the Eastern Chalukya Chola emperors, came to the throne and was closely associated with Travancore. An inscription of Tirukkalukkunram refers to his victories against the ‘Five Pandyas’ and capture of the region round the Potiyil Hill and also the destruction of Kottar. He was opposed to the sharing of power with the Viceroy and hence unified it under greater control from the centre. He introduced a new system of opening military cantonments at various strategic places with a view to maintain law and order and to prevent attempts by the outlying regions at breaking away from the empire. One such unit was kept at Kottar in

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27 K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, _op.cit._, p. 231.