INTRODUCTION

The four Southern most taluks, Thovalai, Agasteeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavancode which were once a part of South Travancore constitute the present Kanyakumari District. It is bounded on the north by Mahendragiri Hills, on the south the Indian Ocean, on the west the Kerala State on the East, the Tirunelveli District.¹ This district derived its name from Goddess Kumari Bhagavathi Amma, who has a temple there.² It is located in the south-west portion of the Indian peninsula forming an irregular triangle with its apex at Cape Comorin. Comparing other districts of Tamil Nadu, Kanyakumari District is smaller in size. Tritiya Upanishad which belonged to the 6th century B.C. makes mention about Kanyakumari District.³ Erytheran Sea, a work brought out in the 1st century A.D. also mentions about the existence of Cape Comorin. As such Kanyakumari District has no independent history of her own. Largely, her history is mingled with the Chera country.

**The Land and the People**

Situated between latitudes 8° 20' north and longitudes 77° 40' east, it shares Mediterranean climate with the rest of Tamil Nadu. Kanyakumari District also differs from the rest of Tamil Nadu with regard to its physical features and all other aspects, such as people and cultures.

Kanyakumari District presents a striking contrast to the neighbouring Tirunelveli district and Kerala State in point of physical features and agricultural conditions. The Aralvaimozhi Hills and the Aralvaimozhi pass are historically important. The fort at the top of the hill was built by the ancient kings to defend and save the Ay Kingdom from the onslaught of invaders. Through Aralvaimozhi pass commercial intercourse between the Pandyas and the Ays of Nanjilnad took place. Historical wars also were fought at Aralvaimozhi. Mahendragiri is very high and steep (2500 ft). There are other hills, such as Thadagaimalai, Marunthuvalmalai or medicinal hills, and

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6 Ramanatha Iyer, S., A Brief Sketch of Travancore, Trivandrum, 1903, p. 21.
7 The hill is named after Thadagai, the legendary giant woman.
8 Marunthuvalmalai: It is said, Hanuman took this hill to cure Rama and Lakshmana from the effect of the poisonous arrow of Indrajith, the son of While he was carrying the hill a piece of it fell down near Cape Comorin. As it has medicinal value the name Marunthuvalmalai or Medicinal hill has been derived.
many hills with different names. These hills are of high economic value. Teak, ebony, rosewood and other trees of high economic value are found. Commercial crops like pepper, cardamom and cloves are cultivated. Marunthuvalmalai or the medicinal hill is referred in the epic of Ramayana. Rare medicinal plants and herbs are found here. At present Mahendragiri hill is occupied by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for research. Udayagiri fort which is historically important is situated at the foot of Western Ghats.

Animals like elephant, tiger, bison, leopard and a large number of wild animals are roaming in the hills. A numerous variety of birds add further attraction to the hills.

Two ancient rivers called the Palayaru and the Tambraparani are flowing in the eastern and western parts of this district respectively. River Palayaru is one of the most important sources of water supply. It rises from the Mahendragiri Hills. Flowing through Thovalai and Agasteeswaram Taluks, it reaches the Manakudy Kayal. During its course, it covers a distance of thirty seven kilometers and passes

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9 Gopalakrishnan, op.cit., p. 5.
10 Idem.
11 Ibid., p. 6.
12 Ibid., pp. 79-80.
through important places like Boothapandi, Kottar, Suchindram. River Thambraparani also originates from the Mahendragiri Hills and passes through many villages in Kalkulam and Vilavancode Taluks. It reaches the Arabian Sea near Thengapattanam, one of the ancient trading centres of the ancient Chera kingdom.

Above these a number small streams and water carriers are found throughout the district. The Mullaiyar river is not a perennial source of water supply. Valliyar found in Kalkulam Taluk helps cultivation of paddy, plantain and other food crops in its course throughout Kalkulam Taluk. The Kothaiyar system consists of Pechiparai dam and Perunchnathi dam, the Ponmanaiputhen

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13 Boothanapdy is named after the Pandya king Boothapandyan whose sway spread over Nanjilnad.
14 Suchindram is a noted pilgrim centre where Lord Indira attained Mukti.
16 Mullaiyar river flows through Pallikuttam at Anducode village of Vilavancode Taluk. A scheme was proposed to irrigate 500 acres of new ayacut. But it is yet to be completed.
17 Valliyar: Valli in Tamil means creeper. Aar means river. It is called so because it flows like a creeper with many bends, turns on its course. It joins the Arabian Sea at Kadiapattanam a noted historical place. The kings of erstwhile Travancore on their way took a holy dip in the sea. During the time of king Marthanda Varma, the sea came behind him after the holy dip. Seeing that the king cut off one of his fingers and the sea stopped. Valia Thampi and Kunju Thampi Kathaipadal, Palmleaf.
18 Pechiparai dam: This dam was constructed in 1906 by Maharaja Sri Mulam Thirunal, with the help of a European Engineer Alexander Minchin and a host of European engineers. Report of the P.W.D. Engineer, Kulasekaram, 1890, pp. 1-2.
dam\textsuperscript{20} the Chittar dams I and II,\textsuperscript{21} Mampazhathuraiyar\textsuperscript{22} and Poigaiyar dam\textsuperscript{23} are some of the important dams that irrigate the whole arable and fallow lands of Kanyakumari District. Apart from these there are minor irrigation schemes and check dams across the rivers especially on Pazhayar for cultivation. Even though there are nearly 2000 tanks, some of them are useful and many of them are reduced to very small ponds due to encroachment.

The rainfall is steady and regular in this region. The two seasonal winds from the southwest and the northeast pour generous rain throughout the year. From the middle of December to February the season becomes cool and dry. March to May are generally hot season, but occasional rain blesses this area. The climatic condition of Thovalai and Agastheeswaram Taluks is influenced by the nearby dry and flat lands of Tirunelveli District. These two taluks frequently

\textsuperscript{20} Ponmanaiputhen dam: It was constructed during the reign of Marthanda Varma for the benefit of the Nanjilnadians. The Maharaja personally supervised the construction. Shangoony Menon, P., \textit{A History of Kerala}, Trivandrum, 1983, p. 89.

\textsuperscript{21} Chittar dam I and II: In an attempt to fulfil the water needs of the people of Vilavancode Taluk the Chittar Pattanankal project was taken up for execution in 1964 and was completed in 1968. Tamil Nadu State Administration Report, 1968-1969, p. 225.

\textsuperscript{22} Mampazhathuraiyar: The Mampazhathuraiyar reservoir is located 3 kms from Villukuri, in Kalkulam Taluk of Kanyakumari District.

\textsuperscript{23} The Poigaiyar is also situated near Aralvaimozhi in Agastheeswaram Taluk. Santhoshakumari, H., \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 184-195.
receive scanty rainfall and blow of dry wind is a common feature. So the vegetation in these two taluks are less dense than that of the other two taluks.

The district possesses a lengthy coastal boundary of sixty eight kilometers. The coastal line is regular in nature except some points of land projecting into the sea at Cape Comorin and Muttom. The presence of a small harbour at Colachel, is noted for the defeat of the Dutch forces in 1741. The beach deposit at Kanyakumari and Manavalakurichi contains minerals of great economic value such as monazite, ilmenite, rutile, zircon, gillimanite and garnet. The long sea coast facilitates the growth of fishing industry in this district.

The soil is fertile and suitable for paddy and banana cultivation. Coconut cultivation is one of the chief agricultural activities among the people. The district is noted for its production of fruits such as mango, jack fruit, pineapple and plantain. In the dry areas, tamarind and

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26 Colachel, a noted sea port from time immemorial. It is historically important because of the Colachel War, 1741 fought during the reign of King Marthanda Varma, 1627-1758. The Travancore forces defeated the Dutch forces and arrested the Dutch General De Lannoy. Short memorials of Captain De Lannoy is found here. File No. 43/34, Directorate of State Archives, Trivandrum, p. 9.
cashew are cultivated and that also give economic stability to the people. Among the plantations, rubber stands first and the district takes the pride that it is the only district which produces high quality rubber in Tamil Nadu. Cloves, cardamom, pepper and tea are some of the hill products of this district.

The plains of Kanyakumari District present a pleasing sight with its long stretch of paddy fields at Thovalai and Agastheeswaram Taluks. The coconut gardens, the plantain gardens, the mangroves and the other cultivated lands attract people and fetch sufficient income to the people. The numerous ponds, dotted here and there both river-fed and rain-fed, enable the people to cultivate paddy even if monsoon fails.\textsuperscript{28} According to the recent survey the extent of cultivable land is 63,31,587 acres. The other two taluks, Kalkulam and Vilavancode are partially dry.

The people of Kanyakumari District belonged to Nadars, Vellalas, Ezhavas and many other communities. The Brahmins constitute the uppermost stratum of the caste hierarchy. Being a priestly class the Brahmins held the keys of social situation such that they integrated the rest of the community into a conveniently graded

\textsuperscript{28} Gopalakrishnan, M., \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 4-6.
network of castes, graded one below the other with diminishing social status.\textsuperscript{29}

Nayars are next to the Brahmins. Yet, much of the characteristics of the region can be traced to the civilization of Nayars, the caste to which the ruling class belonged. Traditionally they were a military class in the society.\textsuperscript{30} Nair women are chaste and are faithful to their neighbours.\textsuperscript{31} The Nayars in the southern part were divided into twelve pidakais or sects.\textsuperscript{32} Moreover, they were the principal slave holders.\textsuperscript{33}

There was much in common between the Brahmins and Nayars regarding their social status that they joined together in the notorious act of oppressing the lower classes represented by poor cultivators, labourers and slaves.\textsuperscript{34} Next to the Nayars and classed among the outside the Orthodox Hindus were the two great classes called the Shanars\textsuperscript{35} and the Theyars.\textsuperscript{36}

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\textsuperscript{29} Samuel Mateer, \textit{The Native Life in Travancore}, London, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{31} Ramanatha Iyer, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{32} Agur, C.M., \textit{Church History of Travancore}, Madras, 1903, p. 569.
\textsuperscript{33} Kerala Society Papers, Volume 1, Series 1 to 6, 1928-1930.
\textsuperscript{34} Report of the Travancore District Committee for 1864, Santhapuram Mission District, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{35} Edgar Thurston, \textit{Caste and Tribes of South India}, Vol. VI, Delhi, 1975, p. 368.
\end{flushright}
Shanars migrated from Tirunelveli District to the Kanyakumari District. Their chief occupation was toddy-tapping. Some of them laboured on the land and aristocratic Shannars and Vellalas in the eastern part of Kanyakumari district worked on the lands of the powerful Nayar landlords.\(^{37}\) Shannars were considered to be inferior to the Nayars but superior to the Pariahs.\(^{38}\) Along with the Vellalas, the Ambattars, the Vannan, the Nayakkars and the Pariahs claimed that they belonged to the Righthand caste.\(^{39}\) The Pariahs were of two types, Poorom Pariar and Nonny Pariar. The vast majority of Pariahs were landless agricultural labourers.\(^{40}\) The society was divided by customs, caste prejudice and religious beliefs. The life of the lower class people was miserable.\(^{41}\)

The higher class exploited the services of the low caste and even their products. If a high caste man touched a Pariah by accident the former was obliged to purify himself by taking bath. For selling their products, the low caste street vendors had to shout out their price to the


passersby from a certain distance and the prospective purchaser would place the money on a stone. They could also purchase articles from the high caste merchants by placing their money on the stone.\textsuperscript{42} Because of the tax burden the people lived in a miserable condition. The economic condition of the people was also very poor.\textsuperscript{43}

Muslims also lived in South Travancore. The Mapilay or Lebbais were of an inferior class of Mohammedans and constituted important and larger part of the population. They were the emigrants from other parts of India. They are a group of people always dependent upon hard work.\textsuperscript{44}

The earliest Jesuit Missionary who came and propagated Christianity in South Travancore was Francis Xavier. He reached India in May 1542 and settled in Goa. Francis Xavier understood that Travancore was a fertile ground for missionary work and so he established the Cape Comorin Mission.\textsuperscript{45}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textsuperscript{42} & Samuel Mateer, \textit{The Land of Charity}, Madras, 1991, Reprint, p. 47. \\
\textsuperscript{43} & Sehurhammer, G., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 415. \\
\textsuperscript{44} & Ward and Conner, L., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 216. \\
\textsuperscript{45} & George Mar Moreas, \textit{St. Francis Xavier Apostle Nuncio} (1542-1552), Bombay, 1952, p. 120. \\
\end{tabular}
\end{footnotesize}
The principal religions professed by the people are Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.\textsuperscript{46} The most famous Vaishnava temple of great repute in South Travancore is at Tiruvattar, situated at north-east of Marthandam. The most famous Siva temple in this area is at Suchindram about 12 kms from Cape Comorin.\textsuperscript{47} Kulasekharaperumal was probably the king of Travancore who lived in the Eraniel palace in South Travancore and to this day he is known as Kulasekharaperumal.\textsuperscript{48}

The thickly populated areas in this region are Nagercoil, Kottar, Vadiveeswaram, Oluginasseri, Vadassery, Kochapidaram, Parakkai, Terur, Suchindram, Kanyakumari, Agasteeswaram, Mylaudy, Eraviputhoor, Marunkoor, Boothapandi, Thovalai, Thiruppathisaram, Aralvaimozhi, Azhakiapandiapuram and Talakkudi. It is worthy to mention in this context that Kottar was a flourishing centre of commerce from very early days and Ptolemy (A.D. 150) mentions ‘Kothara’ as a metropolis with considerable trade while Pliny calls the same ‘Kottar’ which is the nearer approximation to its correct present

\textsuperscript{46} Ramanatha Iyer, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 108.

\textsuperscript{47} John A. Jacob, \textit{A History of London Missionary Society in South Travancore}, Nagercoil, 1990, pp. 4-5.

The most famous temples found here remind us of the influence of the great Chola, Pandya and Vijayanagar empires. Every village in South Travancore except for certain topographical variations, is a verdant paddy field, hence it has become famous as the ‘Granary of Travancore’. There are important pilgrim centres like Chitharal, Kanyakumari and Suchindram. Many tourist spots are found here.

**Political History**

Politically Kanyakumari District has no continuous history of her own. It was under the Ays for some time, then it came under the sway of the Venad Kings and finally under the sway of the rule of Travancore Kings. She was invaded by the Pandyas, the Cholas, the Nayaks and the Muslims in succession. In spite of it the District had not lost her identity.

The Brahmins assembled at Tirunavoy, resolved to appoint a king. They empowered the four selected villages to choose a king. Their first choice fell on ‘Keya Perumal’ of Keyapuram in the country.

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49 Kottar was a bone of contention between the ruling dynasty and the invaders. A church was constructed there for visitors for worship. It was a trading centre in the early period of her history. Velupillai, T.K., *op.cit.*, p. 221.
east of the Ghauts. He was brought to Travancore and installed as the first of the ‘Perumals’ in the Kali era corresponding to A.D. 216.  

The Ays ruled over an extensive area stretching from Nagercoil in the south to Tiruvalla in the north including Sahyadri ranges. The Sangam works refer to three important Ay kings, viz. Ay Andiran, Titiyan and Atiyan. Sadayan Karunandhan and Karunandakkan were also the prominent Ay kings. There is a specific mention Vikramaditya Varaguna, who ruled from 778 A.D. to 925 A.D.  

The important Chera rulers, Kulasekhara Alwar, Raja Sekhara Varman, Sthanu Ravi Varman, Rama Varma Gotha Ravi Varma and Indukotha Varma, ruled from 800 A.D. to 962 A.D. From 962 A.D. to 1102 A.D. the rulers were Bhaskara Ravi Varman I, Bhaskara Ravi Varman II, Vira Kerala Rajasimha, Bhaskara Ravi Varman III, Ravi Varma and Rama Varma Kulasekharan. Andrian gave away a large number of elephants as gift to the Chera king. By his unparalleled gifts, Andrian’s name became widely known. He was a trained soldier.

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and a warrior of much powers.\textsuperscript{56} Not only was he God fearing but he also had other noble qualities to commend him. He was always obliging and was ever generous and sympathetic.\textsuperscript{57} He had more than one wife. All of them were devoted to him and ecstatic. They were so chase that when he died his wives practised Sati or self-immolation. It is even said that a certain owl which lived in his forest saw that the master of the country died, and without bestowing any thought it fell into the funeral pyre. The idea is that Andrian even had the love and esteem of inanimate objects.\textsuperscript{58}

Ay Andran had a son by name Titiyan who succeeded him. Like Andran, Titiyan seems to have been a great warrior and Chieftain. Ollaiyurtande Bhutappandian refers to Titiyan as ‘Podiyir Selvan’ or the lord of Podiyil hills.\textsuperscript{59} The poet Nakkarin informs us that Titiyan was one of those who joined the confederacy of Kings against the Pandyan Nedumchezhiyan who defeated them in the historic battle of

\textsuperscript{57} Pattupatty – 11, 96-97.
\textsuperscript{58} Puram, 240.
\textsuperscript{59} Aham, 25: 1-20.
Thalayalanganam\(^{60}\) now identified with Talai-Alam-Kadu, eight miles north-west of Tiruvalur in the Tanjavur District.

The history of the Ay dynasty after Tityyan is completely a blank chapter in South Indian history. Neither literature nor epigraphy comes to our help. K.N. Sivaraja Pillai however thinks that Adigan was a successor of Titiyan.\(^{61}\) The Ays were subjugated by the Pandyas after the death of Titiyan. In the third century A.D., the Ay kingdom lost its independence. However, it is found on records that the Ays did not disappear completely from the scene. It is surmised that legitimate successor to Titiyan was installed on terms of subordinate alliance to the Pandyan king, and this continued for some centuries until it was given to one Sadaiyan to shake off the Pandyan yoke and regain his independence.

Sadayan, according to the available inscripitional evidence must have gained independence of Malainadu. The documents which throw light on the later Ay rulers are the Wazur office plates, the stone inscription at Kalugumalai and the Paliyan plates of Vareguna.\(^{62}\) A reconstruction of chronology on the basis of records shows that

\(^{60}\) Aham 25: 1-20.
\(^{61}\) Travancore Archeological Series, Vol. I, p. 7. (Hereinafter referred to as T.A.S.)
Adakkan was reigning in 855 A.D., and continued to rule till 866 A.D. when Vikramadity Vraguna succeeded him. It has been taken for granted that this Sadayan, according to inscriptions, was the father of Karunandan.\(^63\)

Karunandan succeeded his father Sadayan and is known in inscription as Sadayan Karunandan. As the epigraphist puts it, it simply means Karunandan, son of Sadaysn. The Madras Museum Copper plate and Velvikudi grant informs that King Jatilavarman Parantakan was his Pandya contemporary. The Kalugumalai inscription mentions that Maranjadayan, the Pandyan king led an expedition to Malainadu in the twenty-third year of his region. This expedition was a successful one to the extent that the fort of Ariviyurkottai fell. The reigning Ay chieftain also fell a victim to the Pandyan sword.

It is not clear from the materials available whether his immediate successor Adakkan became a vassal of the Pandyan King. But Gopinatha Rao seems to think that he became a vassal, and as usual with the vassals he assumed the name Sri. Vallabha, his overlord for

himself and Varaguna for his son. The full name of Adakkan is Karunandadakkan. The Hazur office plates yield much information about him. The first plate says that he built a Vishnu shrine and a salai. For this purpose he bought a plot of land known as Ulakkaivilai at Munchirai, and the whole was converted into a village which was named Partivasekharapurem. He made arrangements to give boarding, lodging and tuition to 95 scholars, all of them being Namboothiris.

Vikramaditya Varaguna (885-925 A.D.) was the immediate successor of Karunandadakkan. His political supremacy was accepted by the Pandyas and the Cholas in South India. But after the death of Vikramaditya Varaguna, the Ay kingdom lost the status of a separate dynasty and its northern territories became a part of the Venad region of the Chera empire.

It appears that Viranarayana Chadayan, who ascended the Pandya throne about 880 A.D. had been actively associated with South Travancore. Some of his inscriptions are found in the Thanumalayan Temple at Suchindram. It is likely that Suchindram was one of the sacred places patronized by him. The two other villages, Veeranarayanaseri and Veeranarayanamangalam, are located a few

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miles south of Kottar. Again, in 900 A.D., Raja Simha II succeeded Viranarayanan. He continued to be in possession of South Travancore, is proved by his title records found in large numbers in this region.\textsuperscript{66}

**The Cholas**

In the beginning of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century A.D., South Travancore was annexed with the Chola Empire by Parantaka Chola I, who ruled it between 907-955. Few of his inscriptions are found in South Travancore, especially in Suchindram.\textsuperscript{67} It is seen from these inscriptions that he defeated the Pandya King Maravarman Raja Simha, and captured Cape Comorin and extended his kingdom up to Suchindram.\textsuperscript{68} But it was only in the reign of Raja Raja I (985-1016) A.D.), the greatest of the Chola rulers that the Chola authority was firmly established over the whole of the Pandya Kingdom including Nanjilnad, the fertile area of South Travancore.\textsuperscript{69}

It is well-known that the country of Raja Raja Cholan was extended even beyond the Northern boundary of Nanjilnad. Inscriptions found in the temple at Cholapuram near Kottar bear

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{66} T.A.S., Vol. IV, pp. 120-123.
  \item \textsuperscript{67} Ibid., XIC, pp. 237-238.
  \item \textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p. 238.
  \item \textsuperscript{69} Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., *The Cholas*, Madras, 1955, pp. 104-105.
\end{itemize}
witness to the Chola conquest of South Travancore. The newly acquired places were made into a separate administrative unit called Raja Raja Pandinadu. Kottar which was the southernmost military outpost in the Chola dominion was named Mummudicholanallur and a permanent Chola army was stationed there. Thus during the reign of Raja Raja Chola, South Travancore become an integral part of the great Chola kingdom.

Raja Raja was succeeded by his brave son Rajendra I, and immediately after his accession to the throne, he made Cholapuram, his capital and governed his provinces through Viceroyys. He appointed his own son Jatavarman as the first viceroy over the Pandyas territory including South Travancore. The system of Viceroyalty continued for nearly sixty-five years and finally it was abolished by Kulotunga Chola I.

Kulotunga I (1070-1118) the first of the Eastern Calukya Chola emperor came to the throne and was closely associated with South Travancore. An inscription in Tirukkalumkuntram refers to his victories against the ‘Five Pandyas’ and capture of the region round the

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Potiyil Hill and also the destruction of Kottar.\textsuperscript{73} He was opposed to the sharing of power with the Viceroy and 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 prevent attempts by the outlying regions at the breaking away of the empire. One such unit was kept at Kottar in South Travancore. An inscription at Cholapuram dated the 9\textsuperscript{th} original year mentions ‘Kottaru Nilappadai’.\textsuperscript{74}

During the region of Kulothunga, the Western Calukyas and Hoysalas achieved several victories over the Cholas and the northern portion of the Cholas Empire passed under their sway. Taking advantage of this disaster, Parantaka Pandya overran Kanyakumari easily.\textsuperscript{75} He is also said to have occupied South Travancore and even marched up to Vizhinjam and Kandalur Salai and captured them. According to K.K. Pillay, Parantaka did not occupy Nanjilnad, but only marched his army from Kanyakumari to Trivandrum. Nevertheless it must be concluded that he captured Vizhinjam and

\textsuperscript{73} Pate, H.R., Madras District Gazetteers, Tirunelveli, Vol. I, Madras, 1917, p. 50.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., Vol. I, No.3, pp. 5-6.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 6.
Kandalur Salai during his march through these places.\textsuperscript{76} Depending on the Kanyakumari inscription of Parantaka Pandya, one cannot come to the conclusion that the Pandya king was successful in his campaign against Nanjilnad and even against Kupaka, the Venad ruler. The loss of Nanjilnad in the South appreciably weakened the Chola power, which was soon dislodged by the Venad rulers.

The history of South Travancore during the transition from the Chola authority to that of the Venad rulers is covered by a thick mist of historical uncertainties. On the strength of an inscription on the Pandyan Anai or the dam on the river Pazhayar, Nagam Aiya records the achievements of a Kupika ruler. This inscription also records that a Kupaka ruler conquered Kottar and seized the whole of South Travancore in 1116 A.D.\textsuperscript{77}

Regarding one of the causes for the eclipse of the Chola rule in South Travancore, there has been much speculation. Legend and fact have been closely interwoven that it is difficult to say where fiction ends and truth begins. According to Sangoonny Menon, when Travancore conquered the Pandya kingdom while under Muhammadan

\textsuperscript{76} Pillay, K.K. \textit{op.cit.}, p. 29.

sway, Nanchilkuravan took Nanjilnad and became its ruler. The reference to Muhammadan rule of the region seems to be a chronological error, for here was no Muslim invasion on South India till 1310 A.D. The Nanchilkuravan episode was perhaps invented by a member of the Periyavittu Mudali family. But T.K. Velupillai takes cognizance of the story in concluding that Vira Kerala Varma (1126-1140) had to defeat Nanchilkuravan before taking Nanjilnad. K.K. Pillay disapproves the authority of this story and rejects it as a legend. However, it is evident from inscriptions and other sources that Venad came to establish its supremacy over certain portions of South Travancore in the first quarter of the 12th century A.D. and continued to retain it with fluctuating fortunes under the Venad Kings.

It was during the reign of Bhutala Vira Udhaya Marthanda Varma (1515-1526 A.D.) a major war broke out between Travancore and Vijayanagar. The second invasion of Travancore by the Vijayanagar forces took place during the rule of Sri Vira Kerala Varma (1544-1545 A.D.).

79 Pillay, K.K., *op.cit.*, p. 32.
81 Elankulum Kunjan Pillai, P.N., *op.cit.*, p. 404.
Following the death of Achyuta Raya in 1542 A.D., the Nayak Chief of Madurai asserted his independence. In 1553 A.D. Viswanatha Nayak, who founded the Nayak dynasty needed the older lands of Travancore. The year 1623 A.D. was the advent of Thirumalai Nayak, who came with his forces to Nanjilnad. In 1655 A.D., Kalkulam and Padmanabhapuram became the seat of Thirumalai Nayak. The other rulers who invaded Travancore were Chokkanatha Nayak and Timmappa Nayak. During the latter half of the 17th century, certain places of South Travancore were under the sway of Madurai Nayaks.\(^{83}\)

Soon after the extinction of the Madurai Nayak dynasty, the Nawab of Arcot came to support the dominion of the Nayaks of Madurai. Even during the period of Nayaks, Travancore had constant disputes with them. The Nawab of the Carnatic who succeeded the Nayaks of Madurai in power also continued this dispute. Anwardin was the first Carnatic Nawab who invaded South Travancore. His successors were Maphazekhan, Yusufkhan, Hyder Ali, Tippu and others. By the treaty of alliance with the Nawab of Carnatic in 1766 A.D., Travancore Government had been paying an annual tribute of Rs. 6000/- and a quinquennial tribute of five elephants.\(^{84}\)

\(^{84}\) *Ibid.*, 405.
Under Travancore

The modern history of South Travancore begins with the rule of Bala Marthanda Varma who ascended the throne in the year 1729 A.D. He enlarged the kingdom of Venad, consolidated the royal authority, reorganized the administration and founded the modern Travancore. He introduced the land tax in 1739. When the kingdom expanded and administration became unwieldy, the Maharaja formed a ministry, headed by the Dewan, and the administration was centralized. In addition, he shifted his capital from Thiruvithancode to Padmanabhapuram in 1756 A.D. He modernized the administration but along with it the State was transformed into a ‘Hindu State’, where Brahmins reigned supreme.85

His successor Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma (Dharma Raja) reigned during the period between 1758 A.D., and 1798 A.D. During the fag end of his rule, he entered into a treaty of perpetual alliance with the English East India Company in 1795 A.D. It was he who permanently transferred the capital from Padmanabhapuram to Trivandrum. He was assisted by able ministers namely, Ayyappan Marthanda Pillai and Rajakesavadas.

85 Madras State Directory, Cochin, 1934, No. VIII, p. 3.
Balarama Varma (1798-1810 A.D.), was a weak successor of Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma and he came under the influence of the then three ministers, Jayanthan Sankaran Nambudiri, Sankara Narayanan Chetti and Mathu Tharakan.\textsuperscript{86} These ministers raised forced contributions from the people to improve the finance of the State. The most important event that occurred during this period was the rise and fall of Velu Thampi.\textsuperscript{87} Velu Thampi supported by a large body of men, revolted openly against the practice of exhorting money from the people. During his rule, a revolt in the barracks forced Travancore to conclude a modified treaty of alliance and friendship with the East India Company and to become a subsidiary ally. As per the treaty of 1805 A.D., Travancore had to pay a tribute of Rs. 80,000/- annually to the company. They insisted on prompt payment instead of a bankrupt economy which forced Velu Thampi to raise the banner of revolt along with Paliath Achan, the Dewan of Cochin who also came into conflict with the Resident on account of interference of the


\textsuperscript{87} Velu Thampi was the Karyakar of Talakulam, situated near Monday Market in the present Kanyakumari District.
Company in the internal affairs of his State.\textsuperscript{88} The uprising was crushed and Velu Thampi committed suicide in 1809 A.D.\textsuperscript{89}

With his death, Travancore practically lost its independent status. Even its army was disbanded. From then on the British interest became the main part of the administration. All succeeding Rajas and Dewans were satisfied with one aspect of internal sovereignty.

The death of Balarama Varma on 16 November 1810 made Rani Lakshmi Bai to ascend the throne in 1810 A.D.\textsuperscript{90} She ruled the country till 1815 A.D. Col. Munro, the Resident, who was also appointed as the Dewan in 1811 A.D., reorganized the administrative set up.\textsuperscript{91} He built up a centralized system as followed in the Madras Presidency.\textsuperscript{92} The reforms of Munro influenced the future political system of Travancore.

The Regency of Gouri Parvathi Bai (1815-1829 A.D.) too opened a period of administrative and social progress, while that of Swati Thirunal represented a period of enlightened administration.

\textsuperscript{88} Sobhanam, B., Diwan Velu Thampi and the British, Trivandrum, 1978, pp. 52-57.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{90} Agur, C.M., \textit{Christianity in Travancore}, Madras, 1903, pp. 528-529.
\textsuperscript{92} Velupillai, T.K., \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 37-46.
English education began during the reigns of Ayilyam Thirunal (1860-1880 A.D.) and Visakham Thirunal (1880-1995 A.D.). The period of Sri Mulam Thirunal (1885-1924 A.D.) can be viewed as the period of genesis of political consciousness among his subjects. In 1888 A.D., he inaugurated a Legislative Council which was the first institution of its kind in any Princely State in India. In 1904 he inaugurated the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly. His death in 1924 made Senior Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bai (1924-1931 A.D.) to rule as Regent to the minor Prince Chitira Thirunal (1931-1948 A.D.) constituted a period of constitutional, administrative and social reforms. His period witnessed the struggle for Responsible Government, the Temple Entry Proclamation 1936 and the establishment of Travancore University in 1937 and the formation of Travancore State Congress in 1936. The struggle for the Responsible Government, the Civil Disobedience Movement and India’s Independence formed the major incidents of his reign.

After Independence, the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress (TTNC) started a struggle to separate the Tamil speaking areas from Travancore-Cochin and merge the same with Tamil Nadu. According

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to the State Reorganisation Commission the Tamil speaking areas, especially the four southernmost taluks, Kalkulam, Vilavancode, Thovalai and Agastheeswaram were merged with Tamil Nadu in November 1, 1956.\textsuperscript{95}

The District consists of important tourist places like Kanyakumari, Chothavillai beach, Sanguthurai beach, Thengapattanam and many dam sites and forest areas. Important pilgrim places like Kanyakumari where the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea meet, the Suchindram temple,\textsuperscript{96} the Nagaramman temple at Nagercoil,\textsuperscript{97} the Jain temple at Chitharal\textsuperscript{98} and many other pilgrim spots attract the attention of the tourists. Hence every year large number of pilgrims and tourists visit this district.

\textbf{Methodology}

An analytical study is made on the subject with scope objectives, hypothesis, limitations and review of literature and discussion type of methodology is followed.

\textsuperscript{95} Maria John, B., Linguistic Reorganisation of States, Nagercoil, 1985, pp. 125-140.

\textsuperscript{96} This place is called so because Lord Indra attained purification or Suchi.

\textsuperscript{97} A famous Jain temple situated in Nagercoil, where Naga or snake is worshipped.

\textsuperscript{98} A noted centre for Jainism. It is situated at the top of a hill. This is one of the best examples for cave temple in Kanyakumari District.
Scope

Academically the subject has much scope for further research. It adds another interesting addition to the history of industrial, economic and working class movement.

Objectives of the Study

1. To make known to the general public of the other parts of Tamil Nadu about the places of weavers settlement.
2. To highlight the economic conditions of the Weavers.
3. To highlight the causes for their struggle and various methods that they adopted in this struggle.
4. To highlight the various struggles of the weaving community during the period under study.
5. To highlight the results of the struggle.

Limitations

The period of study is limited between 1956 and 2006 and the area of study is limited to the geographical area of Kanyakumari District.

Hypothesis

From the preliminary study the following hypothesis are made.
1. The coming of the weavers from various parts of Tamil Nadu and the reasons.
2. The condition of the weavers in Travancore.
3. Earlier struggles and their consequences.
4. The results of the struggles.

**Review of Literature**

The sources for writing the history of Working Class Movement in Kanyakumari District with special reference to Handloom workers can be divided into primary and secondary. The primary sources are collected from Kerala State Archives at Madras, Government Orders, Memorandum, handbills published by the Union officers, industrial weaving units, both public and private repositories.

The State Archives at Nalanda in Trivandrum is an abode of records pertaining to Travancore history, then Travancore-Cochin history and after 1956, Kerala State. The records pertaining to the present study contain sufficient records regarding the Working Class Movement among the handloom weavers. These records refer the problem of the working class and their struggle upto 1956. The available records make mention about the Minimum Wages Act of
1936 and 1946. They are highly useful to give the needed directions to the progress of the research work.

The State Archives at Madras is an abode of valuable and reliable records. The responsibility of starting the records goes to Lord William Bentinck in 1806. He took steps to centralize the scattered secretarial records in Fort St. George. The records were laying in pelmel orders in various departments waiting for a caretaker. It was in this situation, the sense of organizing all records arranging in a systematic way came in 1909. Now the State Archives at Madras has become very popular and it has housed the records on various subjects. It contains records pertaining to Working Class Movement records, but for Kanyakumari District records from 1956 only. Some of the Government Orders preserved there are highly useful for the present study.

The Government Orders, even though limited in number are highly useful to note the wage revisions that the State Government announced to improve the welfare of the workers and thereby they had pacified the agitating workers. Usually these Government Orders were considered to be a boon to the workers. When they asked the proprietors to implement them, the difficulties arose. However, they
supply the needed information to compare and confirm the information that are collected through personal interviews and from other sources.

The handbills published and the memoranda that were submitted by the workers and the trade unions jointly to the proprietors of handloom weaving factories are really helpful to any scholar who makes an attempt to probe on the Working Class Movement. They portray the real problems of the workers, their sufferings, the disappointing answers of the proprietors and the government authorities. While publishing handbills, the workers attempted to create a sense of awakening and awareness in the minds of the general public to earn their sympathy. Further the workers and their unions felt that their duty was to educate the general public about the illtreatment that they had meted out and the cheating while disbursing their wages. It is highly interesting to note that very often neither the trade unions nor the workers evoked sympathy of the general public.

Letters and correspondences between the proprietors and the trade union leaders represent the real informative bit of source materials. They show the real nature of the proprietors and how they approached each and every problem of the workers. Even though these letters and correspondences are very limited in number, they are highly
useful in filling up some of the gaps that are left by the other source materials. Thus they are useful in bringing the disjointed events.

Even though the above said source materials are useful, they are very limited in number. Very often they do not supply us with the full details of the strikes organized during the early period. Even though, newspapers like the Dinamalar and Dinathanthi were in circulation, they did not publish any of the struggles of the workers engaged in the weaving industry either for want of information or in support of the proprietors. Hence, personal interviews with the trade union leaders, politicians turned trade union leaders and the workers became highly necessary. They supply us with interesting informations about the underhand dealings of the politicians and some of the trade union leaders. Thus the personal interviews are helpful in connecting the bits of information collected from other source materials.

The memorandum of settlements and other papers related to the labour disputes are available at the office of the Assistant Commissioner of Labour (Conciliation) at Nagercoil. The Nagercoil Nagar Kaithari Javuli Urpathiyalargal Sangam also possesses some valuable original records such as judgements and stay orders of Madras High Court, letters to the officials, notices and handbills. All these
primary source materials are much useful to confirm the other informations collected from the other source materials.

Secondary sources are practically limited to this topic. One or two dissertations that are found on the Working Class Movement on rubber plantation workers are of some help to anyone who attempts on Working Class Movement on any industry. In fact, the accounts given by these sources yield facts for our study. They suggest that the Working Class Movement in the handloom industry was essential to safeguard the interests of the weavers. They further bring to our notice the sufferings that the weavers are undergoing till today. In the absence of any legislation or Government Orders the factory owners played havoc on the life of the workers. Hence, they feel that a movement to safeguard their interest was essential. Consequently, trade union movements were started. Thus the study makes it clear that a joint venture of the workers and trade unions paid the dividend and safeguarded the interest of the workers.

**Methodology**

The methodology is analytical, historical narrative method is employed. Heuristics and synthesis are adopted. On the exposition part clear analysis was employed.
Chapterization

The thesis opens with a historical introduction consisting of the geographical location, the hills, rivers and the fauna and flora of the district and how they helped the economic activities of the people. The second part of the chapter deals with the political history before 1956 and the formation of Kanyakumari district incorporating Kalkulam, Vilavancode, Thovalai and Agastheeswaram taluks. The last part of the chapter deals with the description of the source materials and how they are useful in writing the present thesis. The chapter ends with descriptive note on the methodology employed in writing the thesis.

The first chapter of the thesis deals with the socio-economic background of the Kanyakumari district under Kerala set up. The area as it was called the South Travancore was filled with Namboodiris, Nayars, Brahmins, the Ezhavas, the Mudaliars, the Nadars and the slave communities like the Pallans and the Parayas. Each community had been under the influence of the social customs and practices and they had their own story of origin. The next part of the chapter deals with the economic background, the village and small scale work flourishing in the district under the Kerala kings. Agriculture like paddy, tapioca, palm groves, coir factories, sugar factories, mat making and many other industries were flourishing, weaving was another
industry that was patronized by the Kings also. Thus the economic background was well organized.

Chapter Two deals with the conditions of the working class under the Kerala set up upto 1956 in weaving industry. During the Second World War, there was shortage of yarn for weaving. The salaries for the weavers were not paid. This led to the boycott of works by the weavers. Since the European influence was not there, the weavers and their demands were suppressed. The war period was followed by famine. During the famine, the poor weavers were put under further difficulties. The workers were paid low wages and the non-availability of extra monetary benefit, discontinuity of employment forced the workers to start a struggle in 1952.

The struggle in 1952, and the new inventions around 1950, affected the prospects of weavers. Hence the workers under their unions started a struggle in 1952 for reasonable wages and 10% bonus. But the managements did not respond to the demands. Hence, they served a strike notice. There were strikes and lock-outs. The Labour Commissioner of Trivandrum was also supplied with notice. However the struggle ended in favour of the workers.
In Chapter Three, the Travancore Tamilnadu Congress under the leadership of A. Nesamony started the struggle after 1952 is discussed. After a prolonged struggle the State Reorganization Commission separated Kalkulam, Vilavancode, Thovalai and Agastheeswaram taluks from Travancore-Cochin State and formed the Kanyakumari district and merged it with Tamilnadu. After 1956, the weaving industry came under the control of Handloom Textiles Department. The situation was completely changed. Now the D.M.K. party came in support of the weavers. There was a sale of Handloom in streets. At this time the Co-operative Movements came for the support of the weavers.

Chapter Four deals with the formation of Trade Unions in the Handloom industry. The entrepreneurs understood the low wages to the workers will bring huge profits. Hence large number of factories were established. No trade union existed among the labour forces. There were Factory Committees that were either incapable or silent to deal with the problem of the workers.

In the general election of 1967, the Congress Party paved the way for the D.M.K. Party to form the Government. The D.M.K. party’s performance under C.N. Annadurai was not poor. The positive approach of the D.M.K. toward the weavers paved the way for the
formation of many trade unions in the state. Hence with the help of Madurai Muthu an active D.M.K. worker, Mr. C. Ramaswami of the Vadasery D.M.K. formed the Union in 1963.

Nagercoil Kaithari Nesavalar Sangam was formed. In 1978 Kumari Mavatta Kaithari Nesavalar Thozhilalar Munnetta Sangam was formed. Following this the Communist Party of India formed the C.I.T.U. Handloom Labour Union. The General Workers Union was also formed. These unions worked for the welfare of the people and organized many struggles.

Chapter Five deals with the Working Class Movement between 1970 and 1972. Between 1960 and 1970 there were minor strikes. In 1964, the D.M.K. led union started a struggle. But the struggle was nipped in the bud. The year 1970 witnessed scarcity of yarn. Yarn was sold in black market. Workers lost their work. The unions met at Vadasery in September 1971 and planned for a huge struggle in 1972. Understanding the predicament of the workers, comrades M.M. Ali, K. Velayuthan, N. Krishnan Nair and others visited the workers in the factories and discussed with the workers and convinced the workers. They served demand notices and strike notices to the proprietors. The proprietors did not mind it and hence they resorted to strike. The strike continued for more than twenty days. However by the intervention of
the Labour Commissioner the struggle ended in favour of the working class.

Chapter Six discusses about the struggle which broke out in 1974. The Onam festival was fast approaching in 1974. The workers prepared a charter of demands. They served demand notice to the factory owners. The Joint Action Council did not receive any reply it. So the union served strike notice. The proprietors resorted to police help. The political parties too intervened. The workers of plantation estates joined hands with them. The workers in an attempt to meet pressure resorted to Pachamattai and padai oorvalams. After a prolonged struggle the labourers won the strike and got the bonus. After the struggle of 1974, the Joint Action Council ceased to function. The D.M.K. Nagercoil Nagar Kaithari Nesavalar Sangal also suffered a setback when its leader joined the A.I.A.D.M.K.

Following this there were strikes and lockouts to reform wage. But there were settlements among the workers and proprietors. During this time the Trade Union activities also lost its momentum. But there was strike in 1979, which had no great impact.

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99 Pachamattai – Pacha stands for fresh, mattai stands for branch of coconut tree. So Pachamattai stands fresh coconut tree branch. Padai stands for coffin. Oorvalam stands for procession. Pachamattai and Padai oorvalam means that the workers carried coffin epigy and coconut branches in the procession.
Chapter Seven deals with the Working Class Movement between 1980 and 1990. During 1980, there was united struggle by many handloom weavers trade unions. The struggle was started with great magnitude. The strike prolonged for more than two months. But it failed without obtaining any benefit for the workers. After this there were small strikes in the handloom industries. These struggles were settled by workers and the proprietors.

Chapter Eight deals with the problem of weaving industry and closure of them one by one and converted them into Kalyanamandapams and other business houses. Further the competition from the mechanized industries forced the handloom industries to be closed down one by one. By the end of 2006 all the handloom industries in the district were closed down by one by one.

The last part of the thesis is the “Summation” of what has been written in the foregoing chapters and the findings of the researcher.