The treaties of 1787 and 1792 formulated and established a dual system of administration in the Tamil Country. The English exercised military authority and controlled foreign relations. The Nawab of the Carnatic and the Rajah of Thanjavur, on the other hand, administered revenue and justice in their respective territories. However, in times of war, this form of dual government was liable to be replaced by the sole jurisdiction of the English. The dual form of control was extended to the poligar system too. The Nawab retained his sovereign authority over these feudal powers, while the English collected tribute. The Fifth Article of the Carnatic Treaty of 1792 provided that the Company would have right to collect the customary tribute from the poligars and to enhance the demand on them, if on enquiry there appeared that they had to pay an amount larger than what they usually paid, by virtue of any lawful engagements. At the same time the Sixth Article laid down that the Company, desirous of preserving the Nawab's rights of sovereignty over the poligars, would engage to the utmost of their power and consistent with the realisation of tribute to enforce the allegiance and submission of these chieftains to the Nawab in regard to customary ceremonies and established practice of furnishing their services for the protection of the inhabitants property. The poligars were thus required to serve two matters. Their duties to the Nawab...
were to attend to customary ceremonies in the Nawab’s court, to render military service and to perform village-watch. On the other hand, their responsibility to the Company required them to pay tribute. The first category of service entitled them to maintain their armed strength and the second category expected them to hold possession of their territories. In consequence the poligars at least in theory retained their influence intact. At the same time, the Nawab and the Company restricted each other in the exercise of definite authority over these chieftains.

However, the terms under which the poligars were transferred to the British authority proved incompatible with the objects of the policy on which they were founded. The chieftains retained as it was natural for them to do, a strong desire to exercise military and independent power. They engaged in mutual conflicts and defied the Company’s authority whenever they found it possible to do so.¹ To add to the trouble, the Nawab’s amuldars misled the poligars to believe that the settlement of 1792 was a temporary arrangement and that they would be brought back to the circar administration. Such a manoeuvre encouraged the poligars to defy the British authority and to neglect payment of tribute.² These factors embarrassed the Company’s administration. The English found it impossible to interfere in the disputes not connected with professed object of


collecting tribute, for fear that any other conduct would expose them to strained relations with the sovereign.\(^3\) In an attempt to remove the anomaly created by the Treaty of 1792 and to introduce for its object an entire control of the tributaries, the Madras Council made repeated representations to Mohammad Ali, requesting him for his consent for a modification of the settlement of 1792, but the latter refused to accept any such erosion of his rights.\(^4\)

The dual system infused ill-feeling in the relations of the poligars with the English. As under the feudal set up, the Nawab collected presents from the chieftains on different occasions. After 1787 the amuldars, denied of the right to collect the customary tribute, lost no opportunity in exacting presents under different pretexts. Their exactions and armed interventions proved a potential source of trouble. As the poligars paid tribute to the company, they looked upon it for protection; 'but the English refused to defend the poligar’s interests as the rights of the Nawab as sovereign came in the way. At the same time the poligars could not appeal to arms, as the English undertook to enforce the obedience of the chiefs to the circar. This anomaly kept the poligars denied of the shield of

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protection as well as the right of self-defence. The poligars felt that the English were responsible for their predicament and as such their subsequent resistance to authority assumed anti-British overtones.

**Dispute over Sivagiri and Ramnad**

The rights of the Nawab as sovereign and the policy of the Company as collector of tribute from the poligars came into conflict with each other over the possession of occupied palayams. The forces of the Company moved onto Sivagiri, a principal palayam in the province of Tirunelveli, in 1792 and occupied Ramnad, the Marva palayam, in 1795. But the Nawab, despite his waning influence sought to assert his authority over them in an attempt to Thwart the design of the English.

Chinna Tambi Varaguna, the chief of Sivagiri, in his bid to expand his estate annexed the former palayams of Tomachi Nayak and Puli Tevar. Further in May 1792 he invaded the palayam of Settur and killed the young poligar. Collector Torin summoned Varaguna to his presence to explain his conduct, but the poligar did not comply with. Thereupon Col.Maxwell, taking the command of

a force, advanced to Sivagiri in July 1792. The rebels evacuated the Town and took their position on the height of rolling hills. The troops cut their way up the terrain through the declivity of the mountains but the poligar’s party was seen climbing up the steep ranges. 7 As the task appeared hazardous Col. Maxwell sent searching parties and himself withdrew to the plains. On 28th of August one of their parties captured Varaguna a prisoner.

The Company held an enquiry into the conduct of the poligar, but acquitted him of the charge of his personal responsibility for the murder of the chief of Settur. Still, the Madras Council, considering that the violent attack on Settur by his men and the total disregard shown to the Collector’s order for attendance at his office constituted an outrage committed in contempt of the established authority, decided to deprive him of the possession of the palayam. The Nawab, on the other hand, called upon the Madras Council to hand over the possession of the palayam to his circar. In support of his demand he cited his sovereignty over the poligars. This requisition considerably embarrassed the Madras Council, for it wanted to take over the poisson of the estate and to establish its direct administration over the territory. Still obliged by the Treaty of 1792, the Madras Council promised to comply with the Nawab’s demand after the restoration of order in Sivagiri. Subsequently, it referred the issue to Bengal for the

7. Ibid., 7 September 1792, Vol.166, pp.4422-4431
decision of the Supreme Government. Lord Cornwallis, the governor general decided against sequestration, alleging that Varaguna was not so much involved in the murder of the poligar of Settur, as it was believed and that it was essential to avoid giving an impression that the English were carrying on a traffic of making and unmaking rulers for the advancement of their interests. Accordingly, the palayam was restored to Varaguna, thereby defeating the Nawab's bid. Varaguna paid his allegiance to the English and restored Vasudevanallur and Settur to the possession of their former ruling houses.

There emerged another dispute over the possession of palayam. It was the case of Ramnad after its conquest in 1795. The factors that led to the reduction of Ramnad to submission were centered on a conflict between that palayam with Sivaganga. After his failure to incorporate Sivaganga with Ramnad through a matrimonial alliance, the ruling Setupati Mutturamalinga Tevar closed a road leading from Tirunelveli to Tondi, in consequence of which Sivaganga lost the customs collected at Partibanur. In retaliation Chinna Marudu, the minister of Sivaganga, diverted a stream flowing from his territory to Ramnad. Now both the states armed against each other and entered into hostilities, marked by incursions,


freebooting and killing. The conflict spread, when several poligars openly or clandestinely aided one side or the other. The Madras Council restricted by the Nawab’s sovereignty over the poligars, took no action to nip the trouble in its bud. In consequence, the war continued, culminating in battles at Vesianoor, Paramagudi, Arandoo and Anundoor with neither side gaining any decisive victory.¹⁰

Concerned at the magnitude of atrocities, the Madras Council and the Nawab decided to intervene. London, the Company’s Collector of poligar - peishcush, directed the warring camps to stop the war and suggested to the Setupati to reopen the road and to Mardu to let the water to the stream. Chinna Mardu complied with the instruction, but Muthuramalinga Tevar trifled with it. Thereupon, the Nawab warned the Setupati that his conduct would involve him in lasting ruin, in consequence of which the troops of Ramnad too withdrew from the war. George Powney, the successor of London, directed the Setupati to attend on him for an explanation of his conduct, but the latter refused.¹¹ In May 1794 the Nawab himself represented to Sir Charles Oakelay (1792-1794), the governor that Muthuramalinga Tevar was a man of such savage disposition that he felt no


remorse in taking away the lives of his people and that he gave no consideration to the circar. Anxious to get possession of Ramnad, he sought British aid for the overthrow of the Setupati, from power. In consequence, the Madras Council decided to take military action against Ramnad.\textsuperscript{12}

Accordingly in February 1795 the Company’s forces led by Major Stevenson marched to Ramnad. The unexpected appearance of the army took the Setupati by surprise. Encountering no opposition, the forces occupied the fort on the 8th of May. The Company deposed the Setupati, sent him as prisoner to Tiruchirapalli and established its rule over the territory. The Madras Council granted a monthly allowance of 1,000 rupees for the support of Muthuramalinga Tevar. In an attempt to pacify the inhabitants it issued a proclamation promising then peace and security.\textsuperscript{13} The Madras Council entrusted the administration of Ramnad with the Collector of the Poligar peishcush and introduced certain reforms. It organised the troops of all descriptions into a disciplined force, controlled and paid by the company, abolished the collection of customs which checked the progress of trade and introduced a village settlement for the strict collection of revenue.


The Madras Council looked upon these measures as the foundation upon which an extensive and permanent system might be formed for the efficient administration of all poligar territories.

However, the Nawab Umdat ul Umra, the son and successor of Mohammad Ali, annoyed at these proceedings, which were enforced without any reference to his authority, directed the Madras Council to hand over the territory to his circar. There upon the Company informed him that it would give him credit for the met revenue of the province, but refused to comply with his demand. In an attempt to thwart the Nawab's endeavour and to conciliate the inhabitants of Ramnad, the Company decided the succession in favour of Mangaleswari Nachiyar. Thereupon the Nawab questioned the right of the English to determine the issue of succession, declaring that it legally belonged to him. Still, the Company's will prevailed. Thus the Nawab's rights suffered a set back in another round of struggle with the Company.

**REACTION OF THE POLIGARS**

The policy that was adopted by the English towards the feudal powers had its own reaction. It was aimed at the extension of its authority over the

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poligars through treaty settlements with the Nawab as well as refusal to respect his authority and armed intervention as in the case of Sivagiri and Ramnad. In the defensive strategy of the poligars Sivagiri was of particular significance. Situated on the eastern slopes of the Western Ghats and surrounded by barriers, it was not easily accessible and was eminently suited both for defensive and offensive operations.  

The British intervention in Ramnad, one of the principal palayams, added to the apprehension of the chieftains and the inhabitants, for the Setupati, as the ruler of the principality and guardian of the causeway to the shrine at Rameswaram, commanded the veneration of the people. Likewise in 1795 the Poligar of Palani, the guardian of the Muruga Temple, was imprisoned at Dindigul and the palayam was placed under the Company’s control. What aggravated the situation was the humiliation of the Poligar of Panjalamkurichi. As tribute fell in arrears, collector Jackson in August 1798 summoned Vira Pandya the young poligar of the estate to his office at Ramnad. After sending the order, the Collector left Ramnad on a tour of the feudal estates of Tirunelveli. Thereupon the Poligar proceeded to Tirukuttalam where the collector encamped but was told that he could see Jackson at his next halt at Chocumpatti, then at Sivagiri, then at Settur and then at Srivilliputtur. Kattabomman waited at all these places but was finally


told that Jackson would grant him interview only at Ramnad. While the poligar followed the Collector for 23 days on a journey of 400 miles, the letter allowed even lesser poligars to meet him and remit the tribute. On 20th September 1795 at Ramnad the Poligar was permitted an interview. On an examination of accounts it was found that Kattabomman remitted most of the arrears, leaving a balance of 1080 pagodas. Yet he was required to stand before Jackson for three hours and subsequently to wait inside the fort. Now a few sepoys appeared and Kattabomman escaped. At the gate of the fort there occurred a clash, in which a few sepoys including an English man died. On hearing this development Governor Edward Clive (1798-1803) ordered a public enquiry, found Jackson quality and suspended him from service. The policy of the Madras Council appeared conciliatory, yet the Poligar found himself insulted. Accordingly he proceeded to organise a league of the poligars against the British. The employment of the forces of the Company against Mysore during the Fourth Mysore War (1798-1799) and widespread unrest against the Company’s administration presented the needed opportunity.

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19. Edward Lord Clive, later on Lord Towis, was the son of Robert Clive Governor of fort William. Jackson was dismissed from service on charges of mismanagement. (Madras Council, Revenue Consultations, 21 December 1798, Vol. 92, pp.5415-5417.)

By this time the poligars of Nagalapuram, Mannarkottai Powalli, Kolarpatti and Chennalgudi in Tirunelveli had organised an alliance system for the assertion of their kaval rights in Ramnad. Kattabommon joined this combination and assumed its leadership by virtue of his personality and armed strength. In this bid to strengthen the league, he persuaded the poligars of Kadalgudi, Kulattur and Yezhayirampannai to join it. As a next step he drew the chiefs of Saptore and the Kallar tribes of Elavarasanur to join his camp. In August 1799 the League sought to establish its influence in Sivagiri. The fort of Panjalamkurichi being situated in an open plain, appeared vulnerable to the attacking forces. Sivagiri on the other hand, was not so. It was reported that Kattabomman’s design “in marching peons against Sivagiri is to get possession either by force or treachery of that fort and a narrow Pass which leads to it, difficult of passage, where he hopes to stand his ground against the force which his fears naturally suggest to him will be sent to punish him”. Kattabomman sought the alliance of the chief of Sivagiri, but as this bid was not successful, he won the support of the son of the chief and sent his armed men to that estate. As the poligar of Sivagiri was a tributary to the Company, the Madras Council took it as a direct challenge to its authority.


In the meantime in the court of Directors of the English East India Company, London, decided that “all subordinate military establishments should be annihilated within the limits now subject to our dominion” and accordingly sent instructions to Fort St. George. The trend of the times too appeared favourable to enforce this directive. The Mysore war (1798-1799) ended and the forces were free to move against the southern poligars. In May 1799 Lord Mornington, Governor General, who was at Madras, issued orders for the movement of troops from Tiruchirapalli, Thanjavur and Madurai to Tirunelveli. The forces of Travancore joined the expedition. Major Bannerman armed with extensive powers was directed to take the command of the expedition. The order that was issued to him read: “The rebellious conduct of Catabomanaiq (Kattabomma Nayak), Poligar of Pandalamcourchy (Panjalamkurichi) having rendered it necessary to equip a military force for the purpose of suppressing the commotions excited by him, the Right Honourable Governor General (Lord Mornington) has resolved to avail himself of this opportunity to carry into effect, the orders of the Honourable Court of Directors for disarming the whole of the Southern Poligars and for reducing those irregular chieftains to the authority of the Civil Government”. In fact the object of the expedition was not merely to suppress resistance but to carry out an

already formulated policy, aimed at the destruction of the armed establishments of the feudal order.25

Accordingly, in May 1799 Major Bannerman commenced his military operations from Ramnad. He engaged the armed men of the rebel poligars in a decisive battle at Palamaneri. The rebels lost many of their armed men including their chieftain Chingun Chitty. Those who fell into the hands of the English suffered execution. Bannerman stuck up the heads of the executed insurgents in the villages of Ramnad. Many of the inhabitants fled in terror to remote areas. However, a restlessness continued to reign over the country. Though the insurrection in Ramnad broke out chiefly because of the suffering of the masses due to oppression and famine, Bannerman took no step to apply remedies to lessen the hardship of the people or to concentrate them.26

After suppressing the insurrection in Ramnad, the forces marched against the rebel poligars of Tirunelveli. On 1st September 1799 Bannerman issued an ultimatum to Kattabomman, directing him to attend on him at Palayamkottai on the 4th, but the Poligar informed him that as the specified date was unlucky, he could not obey the order. The reply being evasive, Bannerman ordered the troops


to take the field. As the rebels were seriously alarmed at the advance of the British troops, he lost no time in appearing by surprise before their stronghold. Meanwhile, he sent express orders to the forces stationed at Kayattar and Koilpatti to advance to Panjalamkurichi. On the 5th September by day break, all the forces assembled before the rebel stronghold ready for assault. The Fort of Panjalamkkurichi, an irregular parallelogram of 800 feet by 300 feet with walls constructed entirely of mud, had small square bastions and short curtains. The armed rebels, though were not well equipped with arms, had taken their positions for defense.27

On their arrival at Panjalamkurichi, the troops cut off the communications of the rebels with the countryside. The armed men of the Poligar, moving from the countryside, sought to enter the fort, but were intercepted and repulsed with heavy loss. Now Bannerman debuted Rama Lingam Mudali to the fort to demand the unconditional surrender of the Poligar and to collect military secrets. Kattabomman refused to surrender, but Rama Lingam Mudali to obtained valuable information. Rama Lingam disclosed to the assailants that he observed a wide breach in the bastion east of the main gate of the citadel and that no preparations had been made to barricade the inner part of that gate and the gate itself was

weak. On the basis of this vital information the assailants formulated the military strategy.

Accordingly, Bannerman ordered the assault of the fort. On the 5th of September 1799 a six pounder broke the gate and the troops advanced with order and resolution to the breach. However the insurgents retaliated with determination and threw the attacking columns into disorder. A second attempt was made but it too failed. The rebels under the leadership of Umathurai, the brother of Kattabomman, put a stubborn resistance and frustrated the repeated efforts of the forces with heavy loss. Bannerman feelingly wrote to the Madras Council about the discomfiture. He stated: “The attempt was persevered in so long as there was a shadow of success and never was European energy more gallantly displayed than by the officers on this unfortunate occasion.” In this battle the native troops of the Company displayed no definite enthusiasm perhaps because of their sympathy for the rebels. The failure of the English was, therefore, due to the indifference of the native troops and the determined resistance of the insurgents.


29. Ibid., 8 November 1799, Vol, pp. 2706-2711.

After this reverse, Bannerman, sent orders for more of reinforcements from Palayamkottai. On the 6th evening fresh troops arrived; but could not re-commence the assault before dark. However, as the fort seemed indefensible against a second assault, the rebels evacuated their stronghold in the night. On the 7th morning the vakeels of Kattabomman waited upon Bannerman with a proposition that he might be permitted to proceed to Fort St.George with his usual retinue to represent his case to the Madras Council. After much discussion on the subject, Bannerman communicated to the Poligar his resolution that he would permit the latter to proceed to the Presidency only after surrender. But Kattabomman declaring that it was no assurance, broke off the conference and directed his course to Kadalkudi. Subsequently, a clash occurred at Kolarpatti. The forces with the support of the troops of Ettayapuram killed many of the rebels and took Sivasubramonia Pillai as captive. Bannerman followed up his victory by his march against other rebel poligars. On 9th September he occupied Nagalapuram and forced the associates of kattabomman to surrender. To spread terror among the chiefs, the army marched to Kayattar through Koilpatti. The Poligars of the western range assured their loyalty and submission to the Company. Thus the army suppressed the rebel poligars and established its authority in the eastern region of Tirunelveli.31

The ring leaders of the rebellion suffered capital punishment. Bannerman brought the rebel chiefs to an assembly of the poligars at Nagalapuram. He charged the leaders quality of defiance to British authority. On 15th September he executed the rebel chiefs Soundarapandyan at Gopalapuram and Sivasubramonia Pillai, at Negalapuram. He paraded the dead body of Sivasubramonia Pillai through the streets of Panjalamkurichi and piked his head on the bastion of the citadel. In the meantime Vijayaraghunatha Tondaiman, Poligar of Pudukkottai, caught Kattabomman and handed him over to the English. Bannerman brought the chief to an assembly of poligars at Kayattar on 16th October. Vira Pandyan accepted the charges and declared that he did resist the Company's authority. Thereupon, the sepoys carried Kattabomman off and executed him in a conspicuous spot near the old fort of Kayattar. When Vira Pandyan was led off for execution, Bannerman addressed the poligars who witnessed all that had happened in silent awe and astonishment. He expressed an earnest hope that what had seen would convince them and their posterity that no rank of them acting in contempt of British authority would in future escape punishment.

However, it may be questioned whether the Company was justified in taking

32. Ibid., Vol.988, pp.3767-3780.

such as extreme step as the execution of the chiefs. By virtue of the treaties English Company was a render while the Nawab was still the sovereign and the poligars were his subjects. As such execution of the rebels without his sanction overstepped the authority that he granted to the Company. In a situation of suspicion and doubt liberality and kindness would have been the best means of securing the allegiance of the people, but on this occasion these were not tried on the otherhand Lord Clive applied coercive means and later events showed that they had their own reaction.

After the suppression of the rebellion the company in its attempt to prevent further outbreaks took different measures. It rewarded the allies, who assisted the Company in the military operations against the insurgents. The poligars of Ettayapuram, Maniachi and Mailandai were rewarded with the allotment of villages from Panjalamkurichi. The Governor presented a horse and an ornamental attire to Tondaiman of Pudukkottai as a mark of acknowledgment of the services,\textsuperscript{34} that he rendered to the cause of the Company. In contrast rebel chiefs were subjected to harsh treatment. Accordingly the poligars of Nagalapuram, Ezhayirampannai, Kolarpatti and Kulattoor were put in prisons. The relatives of Kattabomman including Umaithurai were shut in the fort of Palayamkottai.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34} Madras Council, Revenue Consultations, 8 November 1799, Vol.98, pp.2796-2797.

\textsuperscript{35} James Webb, op.cit., vol.1, p.51.
The estates of the rebel powers were confiscated and brought under the direct administration of the Company. 36 The Madras Council assumed the military duties exercised by the poligars and the collection of taxes. In order to curtail the influence on the feudal chieftains it forced them to destroy their forts, and prohibited them from retaining armed followers. The administration prohibited the use of fire arms on pain of death and forced the inhabitants to surrender them, but without giving any compensation. The Madras Council posted bodies of troops at centers of disaffection and overawed the inhabitants in its bid to prevent recurrence of outbreaks. 37

These radical measures produced the most extensive changes in the affairs of the country. The enforcement of a series of drastic reforms in quick succession created internal tension. The southern poligars were a race of rude warriors, habituated to arms and independence. 38 But they found that their chieftains were either executed or condemned to a perpetual and ignominious imprisonment. This harsh treatment of a high spirited people reacted violently upon their sentiments. The Company in surprising the poligars subverted a time honored system of government, but without providing an effective parallel. The

37. Ibid., pp.2864-2875.
people were disarmed, their arms were confiscated and forts were razed to the ground. While no protection was given, the inhabitants were deprived of the means of rebelling the predatory incursions of their hereditary enemies residing in other territories and of resisting the unjust demands of the parties claiming the authority of the Nawab. They found their life subjected to constant supervision by British troops and interfered with by the Company’s tax-collectors. These harsh measures had their natural reaction before long.