INTRODUCTION
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Ours is a representative democracy, because our population exceeds so crores and it is impossible for all of us to meet at one place and decide every issue. It may be possible if, the state is a very small one having a population of a few lakhs. To make participation of the people more active, village panchayats are introduced. The people can elect their representatives directly. It is the first effective democratic way of functioning. The government functions in a democracy on party basis. The ruling party was well as the opposition is equally important. A strong opposition is a must for effective democratic functioning. At the National level, the parliament, at the State level the Legislative Assembly and the local level the panchayats or municipalities are the various democratic institutions.¹ In South India in Tamil Nadu, the panchayats had their roots in the past and as evident from the historical records inscription and monuments, they played a vital role in the integration and development of village life.²

**Panchayats:**

The village Panchayat Act of 1920 was modified in some respects and improved by the Local Boards Amendment Act x1 of 1930. This act repeated the village Panchayat Act, brought the Village Panchayats within the scope of the local boards and at the same time converted the union boards into panchayats or as they are sometimes called Panchayat Board. It rearranged the taluk board areas. Making them normally luminous with the revenue taluks. It declared that all members of every local Board whether a District Board, A Taluk Board or a Panchayat Board, were to be elected but seats were to be reserved in these boards for certain communities and women.\(^3\) It laid down that the members of the District Board were to be chosen by direct election. It extended the franchise of local Board to every person who was assessed to any tax panchayat to the local boards or to any other local authority or to the local government or to the government of India. It made all offices of the President of the local boards elective and provided for the provincialization of the services under the local boards. It modified the provisions relating to taxes, and tolls, fixed the land and allocated one-third of the proceeds to the district Board, another one

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\(^3\) Dr. A. Ramaswami, M.A.M.Phil,Ph.D Madras *District Gazetteers* Salem, Madras, 1967. p.507
third to the taluk boards, one third to the panchayat Board and one sixth to the village Development Fund. It empowered the presidents of the District Boards and Taluk boards to exercise control over the affairs of the panchayat. Finally it provided for the appointment of a District panchayat officer and for the formation of the village Development fund. The change subsequently made in local administration can be easily described consequent on the passing of Madras Motor Vehicles Taxation Act III of 1931. The boards being compensated out of the proceeds of the tax levied by the government under the Act.

Keen interest was also evinced by the then Travancore Government to involve the rural people in local self government. The first piece of Legislation in regard to this was exacted in the year 1935, by passing Travancore village panchayat Act.

The immediate result of the Act was the formation of two rural panchayats, one at Bhoothapandi - a taluk head quarters in the present kanyakumari District. Further Development in the history of the Local self government was the Travancore village union Act, 1940. This Act had provisions for the formation of village unions a type of Local self governing Organisations, slightly less powerful

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5. *Ibid*
than village panchayats. They had the status of the corporate bodies and had perpetual succession and a common seal. They could also acquire, hold and transfer property and enter into contract. The term office of a member was fixed as three years. A few years after the passing of the Act, these local bodies were brought under the control of the Register of village unions and panchayats.6

Even after the carving of the kanyakumari district out of the territories transferred to the then Madras state from the rest While Travancore-Cochin State in 1956, the administrative set up of the Local bodies then in existence, were allowed to continue until 31st March 1962. The Tamil Nadu Panchayats Act 1958, was extended to the Kanyakumari district with effect from 1 April 1962.7

These village unions attended to certain public utility services such as cleaning of streets, construction, maintenance and improvement of public works and tanks for the supply of drinking water, opening of burial and burning ghats, control and management of the cattle pounds and other items of local importance.

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The first major Legislation after independence, with regard to the panchayat was the Travancore-cochin panchayat Act, 1950. The first Panchayat election was held in the district of 15th Aug, 1953.\(^8\)

The panchayat unions implement the various developmental programmes of the state and central governments They include, the National Rural Employment Programme, Integral Tribal Development Programme, Self Sufficiency Scheme, Rural Landless Employees guarantee programme, National Bio-gas programme, etc. The panchayat unions have also to carry out repairs in minor irrigation sources, maintenance of rural dispensaries and maternity and child welfare centers, execution of road works, construction of culverts, causeways, school buildings, rural water supply wells and primary health centres.\(^9\)

In the panchayat Administrative system prevailed prior to the extension of the Tamil Nadu panchayats Act, 1958 to Kanyakumari district every panchayat was having a full time panchayats officer. But as per the provisions of the Tamil Nadu Panchayat 1958 only executive officers of the Panchayats, in their capacity as executive authorities can implement the provisions of the Tamil Nadu

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8. A. Sreedhara Menon, \textit{op.cit.}, 1961, P.627
9. M. Gopala Krishnan, \textit{op.cit.}, P.761
panchayat Act 1958. But as per this Act, Town panchayat alone are manned by executive officers. Hence this problem was solved by upgrading all the panchayat in the District as full fledged Town panchayat and the panchayat officers were redesignated as executive officers.

There are 9 panchayat unions comprised of 53 Town panchayats and 99 village panchayats in kanyakumari district. There are 4 municipalities in Kanyakumari District namely Nagercoil, Padmanabhapuram, colachel and Kuzhithurai.¹⁰

Under the Rajakkamangalam Panchayat union, there are, 19 Town and Village Panchayats, one among the Town panchatat is Thengamputhur Town panchayat.

Kanyakumari can be termed as the most urbanised district in Tamil Nadu, for it has sixty six town panchayats and a town ship besides four municipalities of all the Districts Tamil Nadu, Kanyakumari comparatively a smaller district comprises the highest number of town panchayat.¹¹

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¹¹ M. Gopalakrishan, op.cit.,
The town Panchayats are classified as second grade, first grade, and selection grade, on the basis of their annual income. If the annual income of a village panchayat exceeds Rs.10,000 it may be upgraded as a Second Grade town panchayat. If the annual income of a Second Grade town panchayat exceeds Rs.40,000 it may be upgraded as a First Grade town panchayat.\textsuperscript{12}

In Kanyakumari District, there are ten selection grade town panchayats, forty-nine first grade town panchayats and seven second grade town panchayats. Besides, there is "Kanyakumari Town Ships" which is under the control of the Director of Town Panchayat, at the State Level and District Town panchayat officer at the District level.

The total number of Town panchayats in Kanyakumari District is II first grade. There are Forty nine II first grade panchayats. Among them Thengamputhur Town panchayat is also one.\textsuperscript{13} The Thengamputhur Town Panchayat was established in 1952. In 1960 onwards its functioning as a Town Panchayat. In 2002 Thengamputhur Town Panchayat changed as a special Village Panchayat. 2006 again it changed as a Town Panchayat.

\textsuperscript{12} Achievement of Town Panchayats in Tamil Nadu Directorate of Town Panchayats – Rural Development 1981-82 to 1983-84.
\textsuperscript{13} Director of Town panchayats, Madras.
Analysis of Data:-

Analysis of Data brings to light the important sources that were consulted for this work. Without data analysis no dissertation has become completed. For the completion of work sources have been collected from various quarters and the same have been utilised carefully. In the modest work entitled “Functioning of Thengamputhur Town Panchayat”, the past and present developments connected with the place has been traced. Research is discovery of truth but here discovery is mentioned about the past incidents such as social and cultural. Most of the data are collected by visiting every nook and corner of the area, specifically the study area Thengamputhur.

The sources can be divided into primary and secondary. Primary sources, dealt in this work are files from panchayat. The important source material collected are policy note of 2007-2008 of Thengamputhur Town Panchayat, profile of Thengamputhur Town Panchayat, Census Report of Thengamputhur Town Panchayat, Map of Thengamputhur Town Panchayat, etc. Government orders were the important written documents made use of while preparing this work. The documents were more useful for the preparation of many work. Also it gives a concrete proof on the particular subject,
institutions, events, etc. Files used in this dissertation form vital role in the preparation of this dissertation. The important files put to my disposal from the governments schools.

Registers maintained in the office of the co-operative of Agriculture Bank Thengamputur were perused by me to make clear the sketch about the condition of cultivation. The information about Thengamputhur Villages, agricultural conditions, variety of crops, growing period, harvesting, for immense use. The above Registers were of much help for my studies. This work had some secondary sources that were very informative. They are C.M Agur's Church of Travancore, M.GopalaKrishnan, District Gazetteer of Kanyakumari, Kulathuvilai church Sirappu Malar, N, Kujan Pillai Census of India, 1931, A. Sreedhara Menon, Trivandrum District Gazetteer, V.Nagam Aiya, The Travancore State Manual Vol.II, Trivandrum, 1906, N. Subramanian, Tamil Social History Vol.I, Madurai, 1997, Rev. Samuel Marteer, The land of charity London, 1891.

Personal interview are and helpful to fill up the gap in connecting different information. Personal interview is nothing but investigation. Some personal interviews were conducted which were much better utility than the secondary sources. Many rare
information elicited from the interviews done with the elders of the area served much in this work.

**Scope and purpose:**

The purpose of the study is to unravel the uniqueness of the very ancient village Thengamputhur of Kanyakumari District. The Mutharamman temple in Thengamputhur Panchayat is very famous in their area. 1699 onwards the Jesuit missionaries spread Christianity and here having eight churches. Further research on the history the present one is the humble attempt to bring light about Thengamputhur. This modest attempt will help the scholars to do further research of Thengamputhur. Functioning of the Panchayat provide a elaborate scope for further study on the subject.

**Hypothesis:**

The aim of this humble study is to highlight the origin economic and social life of the people in around Thengamputhur. Oral tradition and a few literary works is reptile with information about this unique village. One unique quality of this village is the availability of "coconut". All the raw materials available with coconut are on demand for all the periods. The people of different caste and communities lead a peaceful and self-sufficient life. The resource of the village provide better facilities so as to enjoy their life. Panchayat
administration works for the upliftment of the people of Thengamputhur.

Organisation of the thesis:-

The subject matter of this dissertation has been divided into five chapters excluding the introduction and conclusion chapters. For the deep study the chapters are arranged according to the modalities of the information and continuity.

The first chapter captioned as "Land and people" of Thengamputhur, depict the natural condition of the land and its resources. The life and condition of the people, the various caste and communities have been vividly described in this chapter.

The second chapter provides the information on the various economic activities which are going on in this village. The occupation of the Local people and development of cottage industries are analysed with care.

The third chapter entitled "Religious condition" narrates about the temples of Thengamputhur and near by Villages. The origin of the temples, their location, the festivals and such other important matters relating to the temples of Thengamputhur and near by villages are dealt with. Then, about Christians, the advent of the Christians preachers who established their Christian church,
erection, church buildings are brought up in this chapter. The “Protestant Missionaries” work and other information are dealt with this chapter. “Education” is the next chapter. This chapter deals about the general educational programmes, pre and primary school pattern, and the educational development of college and its administration.

The last chapter is captioned “Panchayat Administration” in Thengamputhur Town Panchayat, dealing about the elected head and his powers, official head and the powers, Development Schemes including M.P and M.L.A Funds, and revenue and expenditure of Thengamputhur Town Panchayat. The dissertation ends with conclusion which is nothing but the summary of the previous chapters.