PONDICHERRY
AN INTRODUCTION
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OUTLINE OF PONDICHERRY UNION TERRITORY
There are 25 states and 6 Union territories in India (1) and Pondicherry is one among the six. It is 22 Kms. Away from Cuddalore. The Union territory consists of 250 Sq. Kms. Area of Pondicherry as its capital town, another 160 Sq. Kms. area of Karaikal which is 160 Km. away from the head quarters. It also includes 30 sq. km., town of Enam situated 840Km. away from the capital on the banks of Godavari river in Andhra Pradesh and another tiny village in the Kerala coast known as Mahe whose area is just 9 Sq. Km. at a distance of 653 Km. from Pondicherry(2). The Union territory of Pondicherry, therefore, consists of four regions viz. Pondicherry, Karaikal, Enam and Mahe situated at different places and is under the direct control of Central Government of India.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF PONDICHERRY
The parts of Cuddalore district of Tamilnadu state are in the West, South and North of Pondicherry and the Bay of Bengal lies in its East (3).

RIVERS
There are eight rivers in Pondicherry region and their names are Gingee River, Ariyankuppam, Sunnambaru, Pampaiyaru, kuruvaiyaru, Pennar, Malattaru and Upparu. Among them Gingee River is the source for the fertility of Pondicherry and the tail end of this river is known as Ariyankuppam River. The same Gingee River is known as Sankaraparani River at Villiyanur and its ancient names are Varahanadi and Tondi. Sunnambaru is a tributary of Gingee River and merges with sea near Tavalakuppam region (4).

Though these rivers become dry in summer season, they are with full of water during monsoon and because of which Pondicherry happens to be a fertile region (5).
THE CLIMATE OF PONDICHERY

The climatic condition of Pondicherry is a balanced one being neither too hot nor too cold. The summer season of this area is from May to August. Due to Northeast monsoon, Pondicherry records a rainfall of 75-100cm. Every year during October – December months. Even in summer, there is some amount of rain in the months of May – July because of South – West monsoon.

PONDICHERY AND ITS VARIOUS NAMES

Views of Periplus

Periplus and Tolemy in their travelogues did make a mention about Pondicherry (7). During the first century of Christian era Periplus traveled in the East Coast of India, and his document speaks about various places and harbours in the peninsular India. A few of them are Dimirica, Kamara, Sopatma, Poduke, etc. (8).

The historians are of the opinion that Dimirica is the variation of Tamilakam / Tamilnadu, Kamara is the changed form of Kaveripoopattinam, Sopatma is that of Marakkanam and Poduke is nothing but Puducherry, the original Tamil name of Pondicherry (9).

Tolemy’s view

Tolemy in his travelogue mentions a place what is known as Poduka Emporium. Emporium is supposed to be a port where the ships are anchored. Poduka Emporium, according to the scholars, therefore refers to Puducherry. He also mentions about Kaveripoopattinam harbour as Kaberisu emporium (10).

Puducherry is known by several names on the basis of mythology, folk traditions, history and literature. They are Poduke, Poduka, Agatheeswaram, Vedapuram, Vedapuri, Shanmugapuram, Pudeshiyira, Pudeshery, Puducherry, Puduvai, Pondisherry and Pondicherry (11). Many of these names were popular at one time or other. At present the Tamil name Puducherry, its westernized form Pondicherry and their shortened forms
Puduvai and Pondy are familiar and very much in vogue. All these four names, therefore, are synonyms and mean one and the same place, namely, Puducherry.

**Puducherry / Pondicherry**

Puducherry, otherwise known as Poduke by foreigners, was a tiny coastal hamlet in the midst of Villiyanur, Bahoor, Tirubhuvanai and according to historians, it was under the Tondaimandalam rule. This place was unknown to outside world till the arrival of the French. In the year 1664 the French East India Company established their commercial center at Puducherry and hence the place was developed. Puducherry was also under the control of Danish and Dutch rulers for sometime and it was known by them as 'Polesere' and 'Pudeshayira' respectively (12). When the French rulers had postal contact with their capital city Paris, they misspelt 'POUDUCHERI' by replacing the alphabet 'U' into 'N' and pronounced as Pondisheri (13). While the two Karnataka battles were fought between British and French rulers, the name Pondicherry was used. This is how Pondicherry came into being especially among the non-Tamils.

**Vedapuram**

There is no historical reference about Pondicherry during Pallava and Chola period; however some facts are available about the places like Bahoor, Tirubhuvanai, Tiruvandarkoil, Mutharaiyarpalayam, etc. During later Chola period, Tirubhuvanai was known as Tirubhuvamadevi Chaturvedimangalam and Bahoor as Alagiya Chola Chaturvedimangalam. It is assumed that Puducherry might have had contact with these places and known as Vedapuram or Vedapuri. During Nayak’s period also, though Villiyanur and Olukarai had some historical references, Puducherry remained to be unpopular. Only after the arrival of the French, the history of Puducherry has come to light (14).

**Poduke on the basis of historical references**

The references made by foreigners help us to know something about Poduke. According to them, pepper was exported through ships from Poduke harbour. A.H.Warmington refers to Poduke as Podus (15).
Let us now discuss something on the nominal origin of Poduke. In 'Sangam literature', there are two words viz. Puduvai and Podukkam. The former one is used in the sense of Pudumai (novelty), pudiyavan (a new person) and pudaikkol (welcome novelty). Puduvai may be considered as the nominal root of Poduke. Thillaivanam is also of the opinion that Puducherry is the derivative of Poduke (16).

In Kalittogai (Poem 88), a Sangam literature, the following line, “puLLikkaLvan punal ceer Podukkam” contains the word 'Podukkam' which means a coastal region. It also means a lodging place or a hideout. Periplus too mentioned that Poduke had been a place to anchor the ships. The word Podukkam, therefore, can be considered as the root of Poduke. The word Podukk, when suffixed with -am, changes into Podukkam. Further the word Podukku is changed into Podukke like āngu > ānge and īngu > īnge. Thillaivanam considers that the Greek traders who visited Arikkamedu region might have pronounced the word Podukkam as Poduke and Poduka (17).

There is another view that the present day Olukarai (Ulavarkarai) which was known in olden days as Agasteeswaram is the ancient name of Puducherry. It seems that there was a big Shiva temple known as Agasteeswaramudaiyar Koil and hence the place was called Agasteeswaram (18).

It is also believed that sage Agasthiyar came to the above said temple worshipped the Lord Shiva and developed Tamil language (19). Since Agasthiyar worshipped in the place, it was known to be Agasteeswaram. Mythologically, Agasthiyar stayed in south Potikai and promoted the Tamil language. As the sage came to Agasteeswaram and stayed for sometime, this place was also known as Potikai. This is the perception of Murugesan (20).

According to Pattinappalai, another Sangam classic, the Chola king Karikalan conquered Potikai by defeating its rulers Poduvars. There could be a possibility that the region ruled by Poduvars might have been known as Poduke.
From the Sambakoil temple inscription, it has been recently found out that the above said Agasteeswaram / Olukarai was known as Melaicherry and its nearby coastal region as Keelaicherry. It appears that the heavy flood of Sangaraparani River had disturbed Olukarai area and people migrated to Keelaicherry to establish a new residential colony known to be Puducherry (21). As Madurai and Uraiyur had outskirt extensions, Puduke could have also had one and the same might be the present Puducherry. This is again the view of Murugesan.

Thillaivanam’s view that the coastal region Podukku might have been initially spelt as Podeuke / Poduka by the Greeks, Pondisherry by the French and finally Pondicherry by the British seems to be acceptable. Today the same town, however, is also known as Puducherry and colloquially as Picherry.

THE ANTIQUITY OF PONDICHERRY

Only the archaeological evidences are helpful for us to establish the antiquity of Pondicherry. Fosheac has found out an axe considered to be of pre-historic age in a graveyard at Pakkamudaiyanpet near Pondicherry. Professor Doubroy, Fosho, Martin Lever Gasel and Dulieu Delaphone are supposed to be the pioneers in exposing the history of Pondicherry to outside world. Doubroy and Fr. Fosho have studied the excavations of Arikamedu situated south of Pondicherry and proved beyond doubt that the Greeks had commercial interaction in this area between 50AD and 200AD.

Martin Lever confirmed the views of Doubroy by his research work and perusal with the bangles, coins, inscriptions and other evidences obtained from the excavations in the same region. He also deciphered the Brahmi inscriptions found in the broken pieces of earthenware. Thillaivanam says that the far like utensils used to store wine and liquor, about which a reference is made in Sangam literature Akanaanuru, are to be seen among the excavated articles (22).
Arikkamedu
Arikkamedu is an ancient place situated in Ariyankuppam river basin at Kakkaithopu area located on Veerampattinam road near Pondicherry. The excavations conducted during 18th century by Doubroy revealed the antiquity of this place. Further research work conducted in 1940s by Martin Lever has exposed several historical facts. During this research a precious gem resembled to the one fixed in the crown of the Roman emperor was found out and later the same was sent to Hanoi the capital city of Vietnam (23).

The inscriptions on the 'Rowletet' pots found in the excavation are proved to be written in Tamil alphabets of that period. There are several evidences to confirm the presence of Greek settlements and gem factories in Arikkamedu region. The liquor containers in different shapes have also been discovered in the same area.

The coins minted by Satavahana kings of Andhrapradesh were also found in the place of excavation. Nilakanta Sastry feels that the above said dynasty ruled parts of South India even before Sangam age (24). Also the coins of Korkaipandiyan of 3rd century AD too are found out in the same area.

The age-old earthen urns in plenty have been spotted at Bahoor, Surrukkeni, Muthivaiyarpalayam, Kiloormangalam, Korimedu and other places in and around Pondicherry. These urns contain metal objects, human skulls, skeletons, teeth and bones from which it can be ascertained that the history and antiquity of Pondicherry regions go back to the first century AD.

TERRITORIAL AREA OF PONDICHERRY
During the French rule this territory included the regions of Chandranahoor, Masulippattinam, Karaikal, Mahe, Enam besides Pondicherry. The first two places have later been merged with West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh respectively, and hence the present territory consists of the remaining four places. During the French rule and even now each region is divided into several communes for smooth administration.
Pondicherry region consists of seven communes viz. Ulavarkarai, Villiyanur, Mannadippattu, Nettappakkam, Ariyankuppam, Bahoor, Mudaliyarpet besides Pondicherry municipality. Karaikal area has five communes of Tirunallaru, Niravi, Nedungadu, Kottucherry, Tirumalairayanpattinam and Karaikal municipal town. Mahe and Enam function as two separate municipal administrations.

POPULATION
As per 1991 census, the population of this union territory is 789,416 that includes 398,324 male and 391,092 female. The region wise population is as follows: Pondicherry - 590,000, Karaikal - 145,715, Enam - 20,297 and Mahe - 33,404 (25). The density of urban population per Sq.Km. is 3712 and that of rural area per Sq.Km. is 582, which indicate that the urbanites are much more than the rural folk (26).

LANGUAGES
The Arikkamedu excavations reveal beyond doubt that Tamil was the language of the mass since time immemorial. Later Sanskrit was intruded and institutions to propagate this language were established at different places like Bahoor, Tirubhuvanai, Vedapuri, etc. Villiyanur temple inscription in Telugu language speaks about the domination of Vijayanagar Empire in this region (27).

Due to the Western impact, the study of French and English has been encouraged. In spite of all these external influence, Tamil still continues to be the language of the vast majority of the people. At present all the five languages viz. Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, English and French are accepted as the official languages of this union territory of Pondicherry.
Footnote:

2. Thillaivanam, S., putuvai maanila varalaaRu. pp. 5-7
4. Murugesan, C.S., putuvai maanila varalaaRu. pp8
5. Ibid. pp9
6. Ibid. pp13
7. Thillaivanam, S., putuvai maanila varalaaRu. pp10
8. Thillaivanam, S., arikkanmeetu akazaayvu pp23
9. Ibid. pp23
10. Ibid. pp24
11. Thillaivanam, S., puduvai maanila varalaaRu. pp11
12. Ibid. pp9
13. Ibid. pp9
14. Ibid. pp. 9-10
16. Thillaivanam, S., putuvai maanila varalaaRu. pp11
17. Ibid. pp12
18. Murugesan, C.S., putuvai maanila varalaaRu. pp25
19. Ibid. pp25
20. Ibid. pp25
21. Ibid. pp27
22. Thillaivanam, S., putucreeri maanila varalaaRu. pp19
23. Ibid. pp20
24. Nilakanta Sastry. tennintiya varalaaRu. pp201
25. ---------- Manorama Year Book (1993) pp20
27. Murugesan, C.S., putuvai maanila varalaaRu.