CHAPTER THREE

POLITICAL CONDITIONS OF TAMIL SOCIETY

Introduction

The third chapter narrates the political conditions of the Tamil society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as revealed by the Jesuit Letters. The political condition during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Tamil Nadu was very complex and confusing in its nature. There were too many powers vying with one another to declare independence by taking advantage of the weakness of the nayakdoms. After Mangammal¹ the Nayakdom of Madurai began to deteriorate and decline. The Marathas were knocking at the doors of the Nayakdom of Tanjore. The Maravas and Tondamans prepared themselves to assert their suzerainty. The Nawabs of Arcot and Karnataka had an eye upon the troubled politics of Tamil Nadu and wanted to establish their rule. The European powers one after another were occupying the east coast.

The missionaries who lived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were aware of the political situation in Tamil Nadu and have left more information about the political conflicts among the major powers as well as civil wars within the kingdoms. Also the rule by the three Nayaks, the Marathas, their life styles, extravagancy and the sufferings of the people have also been portrayed by them in their letters. Except Rani Mangammal, her successors did not undertake any welfare measures for the people.

As the missionaries witnessed the political events and the reign of the rulers, their letters open new avenues in this sphere. New information and

¹ Mangammal was the Queen of Madurai Nayakdom from 1689 to 1706. The Jesuit Letters describe her as Rani Mangammal.
minute details are added to the knowledge of the historians by the missionaries of these two centuries through their letters.

The letters deal with succession of women as rulers, the political and other achievements of Rani Mangammal, rule of Tanjore by the Marathas, the political struggles between the two kingdoms of Madurai and Tanjore, the interference of the Maravas and the Tondaman, the poor administration and extravagant life of the rulers of that period.

**Brief History of Three Nayakdoms**

A brief history of the Nayaks and the Marathas is very essential before entering into the political condition as revealed by the missionaries in their Annual Letters. On the decline of the Rayas (kings) of Vijayanagar and on the ruins of the Hoysalas of Dwarasamudra, the Sultans of Madurai and the Pandyas of Tenkasi, there emerged several Telugu powers in the Tamil country. Among them the most powerful were the Nayaks of Cinji (Senji), Tanjore and Madurai.²

The Nayakship of Senji was established in 1526 and Vaiyappa Nayak became the first Nayak. The forces of Bijapur defeated the last ruler and occupied Senji in 1649. As a result Senji Nayakship came to an end. The Nayakship of Tanjore came into existence in 1532. Sevappa Nayak became the founder of the Nayak line at Tanjore.³ During the reign of Vijayaranga Nayak, the forces of Bijapur and Madurai ravaged Tanjore, as a result of which the inhabitants suffered terribly. Ultimately, the Nayak himself died in a battle against the Madurai army. The last ruler of the dynasty was Chendamaladesi (Sengamaladas) from whom the Marathas usurped the throne in 1676. This

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marks the beginning of Maratha rule in Tanjore, inaugurated by Venkaji or Ekoji, the Maratha general of Bijapur.⁴

Krishna Deva Raya in the last year of his reign organised the Nayakship of Madurai in 1529. Beginning with Visvanatha Nayak, Madurai experienced the rule of numerous Nayaks. The pattern that is perceptible in their administration as in case of other Nayaks was that they relied upon oppressive exaction for mobilisation of resources and squandered them away on concubines, priests and troops. They maintained large harems, fed Brahmins, kept inefficient armies but neglected the interests of the people. Tirumalai Nayak was the most influential ruler among the Nayaks of Madurai.

The successors of Tirumalai Nayak were Muthu Virappa Nayak II, Chokkanatha Nayak and Muthu Virappa Nayak III. Their rule was a period of wars and disorders. Chokkanatha Nayak occupied Tanjore but in his wars against Mysore and the Maravas, he suffered reverses. The period that followed was marked by a steady decline of the Nayaks. In 1736 Chanda Sahib deposed the last ruler Queen Minakshi and occupied the kingdom. The Nayaks escaped to Sivaganga, where they languished and vanished.⁵

In 1565 the combined forces of the Bahmini Sultanates of Bijapur, Golkonda, Ahmadnagar and Bidar defeated the army of Vijayanagar Empire in a decisive battle near Talikota. The Nayak powers of the Tamil country sent their forces to the aid of the Empire but only shared the defeat. This gave a serious blow to the prestige of the empire and quickened the process of disintegration.⁶

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The fall of the Nayak powers synchronized with more attempts of external intervention. While the Brahminical order left the Tamil population degraded and divided the absence of any major powers made the country vulnerable to foreign conquests. In their bid to gain advantages in factional conflicts, the local powers themselves invited foreign interventions. As a result they played into the hands of the invading armies. Accordingly, the Bahmini Sultans, the Marathas and the Mughals moved their forces into the Tamil country and converted it into an area of conflict. While the forces of Bahmini Sultanates made frequent inroads, the Marathas acquired possession of Tanjore and Senji. The Mughals who came in their trail occupied Arcot, wrested Senji from the Marathas and finally by 1736 took possession of Madurai. The Mughal conquests resulted in the rise of the Nawabship of Arcot. These internal disorders prepared the ground for the establishment of European influence. The Europeans came as merchants but found it necessary to rely on politics and force for promoting their trade and influence.\(^7\)

**Annual Letters on Madurai Nayaks**

The Annual Letters of Fathers Francis Laynes, Antony Dias, Augustin Capelli, Louis Noel de Bourzes, Constantine Joseph Beschi and Joseph Vieyra furnish information about the Nayaks of Madurai. The political struggles and the governance of Rani Mangammal, Muthu Virappa Nayaka III, Vijayaranga Chokkanatha and Queen Minakshi are described in the letters.

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\(^7\) Rajayyan, K., *op.cit.*, p. 231.
Women’s Succession to the Throne

Though women were considered very low in the Tamil society, the Jesuit Letters reveal that women were called upon to rule the kingdom in the absence of male succession to the throne. Rani Mangammal and Minakshi have governed the Nayakdom of Madurai. Rani Mangammal seemed to be an outstanding personality whose administration has been highly appreciated by the missionaries. Laynes in his Annual Letter of 1701 to his Superior General Fr. Thrysus Gonsalves  speaks about the achievements of Rani Mangammal.

Achievements of Rani Mangammal

Rani Mangammal, the wife of Chokkanatha Nayak ruled Madurai from 1689 to 1706. Muthu Virappa Nayak III was her son. Muthu Virappa died in 1689 leaving a devoted wife Muthammal behind him.

According to Laynes, Rani Mangammal was a woman of great courage and strength. At the death of her son Muthu Virappa Nayak III, she constituted herself as guardian and tutor of her grandson Vijayaranga Chokkanatha who was still a child, and took up the reins of the government with such resolution that all the efforts of her deceased husband’s relatives to usurp the throne were in vain. She governed the state to the satisfaction of her vassals, and had been very lucky through her reign, for she also conquered and brought into subjugation several feudatory princes who refused to pay tribute and do homage to her.

She defeated thrice in the open field the king of Tanjore (Shahji, Maratha ruler). Thereafter she could easily become the supreme ruler of the whole of

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8 Fr. Thrysus Gonsalves was the thirteen Father General who served the Society of Jesus from 1687 to 1705. Jesuit -Year Book of the Society of Jesus, 2017.
that kingdom. For in that last rout the enemies fled with such terror and
disorder that they were cut into three battalions and unable to help one another.
Had the Madurai general on that occasion attacked the capital of Tanjore at
whose gates the troops of Rani Mangammal had already arrived, he would
certainly have captured the fortress with the king who had sought shelter
within its walls. Instead of this, when he (Madurai general) was at the gates of
the town, he held a council of war and treaty of peace with the Tanjore
ambassadors. After paying a bribe of 40,000 patacas\textsuperscript{10} to the general’s father
an ambitious and greedy man and an indemnity of 3,00,000 patacas to the
queen of Madurai, they obtained a peace which was no less glorious for
Rani Mangammal than disgraceful for Shaji the king of Tanjore.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{Rani Mangammal and Kilavan Sethupathi}

Rani Mangammal was proud of her victory and sought to bring low the
pride of the Marava prince her feudatory. Kilavan Sethupathi was the
contemporary ruler of Rani Mangammal and ruled the Marava country from
1671 to 1710.\textsuperscript{12}

According to the Annual Letter of Laynes, the Marava prince who
annexed territories fraudulently from Madurai and Tanjore, had become very
powerful and he was in a position to take the field with an army of 30,000
men. Relying on his forces, he not only paid no tribute for several years, but
with an utter lack of respect and gallantry he mocked on the queen and her
Brahmin General Dalavoy Narasappiah. His coarse jokes were to recoil on him
and cost him and his subjects many lives with torrents of blood and would no

\begin{footnotes}
\item[10] Patacas is the monetary term in Portuguese which means Peso.
\end{footnotes}
doubt ultimately caused his ruin. Rani Mangammal was disgusted with the ribaldry and stupid jokes of the Marava ruler had determined to end his arrogance.\textsuperscript{13}

In order to carry out her plan and bring it to a successful end, Rani Mangammal made alliances with the king of Tanjore and made great preparations to conquer the Maravas and began that war of conquest at the beginning of 1702.\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Condition of Madurai after Rani Mangammal}

After the reign of Rani Mangammal, the Madurai Nayakdom started deteriorating and people suffered untold miseries. The political chaos and confusion prevailed in the Tamil country have been narrated by Fr. Antony Dias in his Annual Letter of 1708. He says “we lived in the tumult of war for while the Mughal army was going about plundering; the Madurean (Madurai Nayak) waged war against Tanjore and in their attempt to prevent the annual siege of the Fort of Tiruchinopoly (Trichy), they (Madureans) pitched their camp near Calpaleam (Calpalayam)\textsuperscript{*}.” \textsuperscript{15}

When Rani Mangammal was still ruling, some predicted that the rule of her grandson Vijayaranga Chokkanatha would prove disastrous and the disasters marked the beginning of the new reign or the sudden inundations which spread devastation far and wide or the famine and the war or other calamities which were stupidly or maliciously ascribed to the king.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13} Fr. Laynes, \textit{op.cit.}, 1701, pp. 519-521.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{*} Calpaleam or Calpalaym is situated near Manachanallur in Trichy district. Palayam is the last unit of Vijayanagar Empire.
\textsuperscript{15} Fr. Antony Dias, \textit{Annual Letters of Madura Mission Vol. IV(1709-1757)} 1708, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}
Madurai Nayak under Vijayaranga Chokkanatha

Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayak of Madurai was the grandson of Rani Mangammal and son of Muthuvirappa Nayaka III. Vijayaranga Chokkanatha was seventeen years old when he ascended the throne at the death of Rani Mangammal and he ruled from 1706 to 1731.\(^{17}\)

As soon as Vijayaranga Chokkanatha assumed power he was influenced by a noble man. He (Vijayaranga Chokkanatha) sought his own interest rather than the welfare of the state. He handed over to the Rajah Tondaman\(^{18}\) a mighty warrior and a relative of the Marava king, many forts depending on the fortress of Trichy which was the seat of the ruler of Madurai and the metropolis of the whole kingdom. These forts were situated toward the Marava frontier.\(^{19}\)

Fr. Antony Dias does not mention the name of the Tondaman. This particular Annual Letter is dated 1708. This date is useful to find out both the Marava king as well as the Tondaman. Kilvan Sethupathi was the ruler of the Marava kingdom and the Tondaman was Ragunatha. It is important to mention that Ragunatha Tondaman was employed by Rani Mangammal as one of her military chiefs.

Kilavan Sethupathi of Ramnadu employed Ragunatha Tondaman in his government for some time and later carved out a small principality for him to rule over. He became the first Tondaman of Pudukkottai.\(^{20}\)

According to Fr. Augustin Capelli, “Chinna Mapillai Nayak who stood second to the king of Vijayaranga Chokkanatha had for nearly three years kept

\(^{17}\) Subramanian, N. *op.cit.*, p. 11.
\(^{18}\) Rajah Tndaman refers to Ragunatha Tondaman who ruled Pudukkottai from 1686 to 1730.
\(^{19}\) Ibid. p. 13.
\(^{20}\) Subramanian, N. *op.cit.*, p. 74.
him in a state of madness by means of black magic and he oppressed the whole kingdom by the extrusion of excessive taxes. But at the beginning of his reigning period he had finally to pay for his wickedness, for the king had him beheaded and the people began to breathe freely again.21

**Inefficiency and Vices of Vijayaranga Chokkanatha**

The Jesuit missionaries while informing the political strife in various kingdoms, are also mention the atrocities committed by the respective rulers. People suffered in the hands of the Marathas of Tanjore, the Nayaks of Madurai, the Maravas of Ramnadu, the Tondamans of Pudukkottai and the Muslim rulers. The misgovernance of the rulers and the sufferings of the ruled are found in the Annual Letters.

Fr. Louis Noel de Bourzes in his letter dated 1712 speaks about Vijayaranga Chokkanatha, King of Madurai who was more concerned about his harem than about his kingdom and that he bestowed less care on his government than on his dancing girls.22 The Madurai king’s physical and his mental health was exhausted by the outrageous and unheard of atrocities in which he indulged so that he seemed to have nothing of a king, except those suspicions which went to accompany unworthy rulers. Some of his courtiers had deserted him to seek refuge in various places, chief among those being the Brahmin commander of the army who held the first rank next to the king. Others were said to plot against him, some being really guilty while the guilt of others was that the king who was afraid of them.23

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Several times the king had sent assassins to kill the Brahmin who was the head of the faction but the latter who never went out without a sword and a shield had not only escaped the royal ambushes but by slaying his would be murderer had proved himself a warrior. Nor did the king’s cruel suspicions spared the princes of his own blood, some of whom were arrested for no other crime except that had not the king got rid of them, they might have been raised the throne. So neither the king trusted his nobles nor did they trust him with the result that greater confusion could be seen in the administration.\textsuperscript{24}

The Annual Letter of 1716 by Fr. Bourzes throws light on the laziness of the Nayak of Madurai of his time. He did not mention the name of the Nayak but it was Vijayaranga Chokkanatha who was the contemporary of Bourzes. The missionary says that the Nayak who ruled this city and the whole kingdom of Madurai left aside the cares of government, thought only of dreams and dances in which the king himself joined the comedians played his part dressed as a woman. In order to make some gain out of this profession he invited to his performances, rich spectators and then in imitation of beggars in the midst of laughter as a reward for his well performed role, he extorted by begging enormous sums of money. Indeed he himself spent large sums in these plays chiefly to pay the choir masters, most of them were Brahmins. When this king was wholly plunged in his dramatic tragedy, the Muslim soldiers became masters.

Bourzes also narrates about the interference of Tondaman (Ragunatha) in the Madurai Nayakdom. According to the missionary the Ragunatha Tondaman was a feudatory prince of the Nayak. Inside as well as outside the

\textsuperscript{24} Fr. Louis Noel de Bourzes, \textit{op.cit.}, 1712, pp. 42 - 45.
town he did what he pleased and almost acted as if he were the king. Disorder had already reached such limits when the Nayak chose as his minister a certain Govindapayen, a Brahmin and a man of resolution who seeing the kingdom oppressed by the Muslims and the Tondaman, called the troops from Marava territory subjected the Muslims or put them to flight; as for Tondaman he told him to retain what he had and be satisfied with it and then turned him out of the court.  

Succession of Minakshi

Vijayaranga Chokkanatha died without male issue and was succeeded by his wife Minakshi, who unlike Mangammal, who was throughout only a regent, ruled the country in her own right as a queen. Minakshi adopted Vijayakumara Muthu Tirumalai Nayak, the son of one Bangaru Tirumalai, a descendant in a collateral branch of the Nayak family; her brother Venkata Perumal Nayak supported her. But Bangaru Tirumalai and his secretary Venkatacharya conspired to overthrow Minakshi and seized power for the first conspirator. Minakshi with the help of Tukkoji of Tanjore survived the crisis. The situation was bad enough to attract the attention of Safdar Ali, the prince of Arcot and Chanda Saheb his brother-in-law who marched into Trichy with a view to reducing Maduari and Tanjore if they failed to pay up their tribute promptly. This situation has been elaborately narrated in the Annual Letters of Fr. Joseph Vieyra written in 1732.

Two brothers of the queen seized power and after having made the Brahmins who under the late king had been at the head of affairs confess threw them into prison or exiled them. To avenge themselves the Brahmins under the

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26 Subramanian, N., op.cit., pp.31 - 32.
pretext of justice drew to their side a cousin of the dead king who was wandering outside the kingdom and giving him the hope of becoming king called him back from his exile. All the feudal lords took his side. They began by laying traps within the fortress of Trichy and they would have succeeded in transferring the crown from the queen to the exiled cousin but the conspiracy was discovered in good time and the conspirators fled.  

**Fate of Senji and Vellore**

Laynes briefly summarises the closing years of the Nayakdom of Senji. He gives information regarding the two cities namely Vellore and Senji which were once under the control of the Vijayanagar Empire and then annexed by the Nayaks. Shivaji, the Maratha ruler occupied the same cities in 1676 and later they were captured by Daud Khan in 1698.

The accounts about the political condition of the two cities are given below by Fr. Laynes:

“In ancient times both Senji and Vellore were subject to the Emperor of Vijayanagar and were part of his empire. But the empire was about to decline and in the course of 160 years, passed through a series of vicissitude, wars and other calamities under government which whether Muslims or Hindus were always tyrannical. Finally the great Shivaji took possession of these two kingdoms without any other right than that of his sword but as whatever is acquired through injustice is easily lost. After 40 years his sons were stripped of their possessions by the Great Mughal and there remained in that family as direct descendant only a nephew of the Shivaji who through the mercy of the Great Mughal’s Viceroy lived in the fortified citadel of Vellore. It is said however that Da-ud-khan(Daud Khan), the Viceroy of Senji had decided to lay siege to Vellore and put an end to the name of Shivaji. Although the king of Tanjore belonged to a branch of that house he was not considered as a ‘Shivaji’ either because he was not his direct descendant or

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27 Fr. Joseph Vieyra, *op.cit.*, 1732, pp. 262-263.
because he was tributary of the Mughal to whom he paid every year one million patacas."28

The inhabitants of Senji and Vellore thought that once they had become the subjects of the Mughal, they would after so many years of sufferings and imprisonment be allowed to breathe. But they were mistaken. For the government was in the hands of the viceroys, and the emperor being far away was not aware of the injustice committed by these governors. Everyone governed and commanded as he pleased and if any governor showed any justice, he was moved to it more by self-interest than by the mercy and love with which governors should administer their vassals."29

**Robbery and Murder in Senji and Vellore**

The carelessness of the rulers paved the way for robbery and murder in the Tamil country. The letter of Laynes speaks about an insecure condition of the people, particularly in the Nayakdom of Senji after its decline. It was very dangerous to travel in these parts and when people were obliged to do so, they went with large companions and by round about ways. In spite of these precautions, murders and robberies occurred at every step. The Mughal viceroys did not do anything to punish the murderers or catch the thieves. Their only pre occupation was to fill up their purses and to spend the three years of their administration amidst pleasures and amusements, caring neither for the cultivation of the land, nor for the welfare of the subjects nor for the good name of the emperors. The robbers had twice resolved to pillage the village of Nallamanayakanpatti.30

The Annual Letters related to the Nayaks of Madurai throw light on the reign of last three Nayaks namely, Rani Mangammal, her grandson Vjayaranga

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28 Fr. Laynes, *op. cit.*, pp. 521 - 523
30 Nallamanayakanpatti is situated near Dindigul.
Chokkanatha and his wife Minakshi. They ruled Madurai exactly for half a century. Though women were not accorded due respect and honour both at home and in the society, the administration of women have been narrated in the letters. Rani Mangammal has been described as a courageous woman.

It is true she did not commit sati when her husband Chokkanatha Nayak passed away saying that she had to take care of her son. She also discouraged her daughter-in-law from performing sati but she had declined. Rani Mangammal became the regent and tutor of her grandson.

Her war with the Marava ruler portrays her as a powerful woman who could not accept the defiance of her authority by anyone. She was diplomatic and made alliance with the ruler of Tanjore when she fought against the Marava ruler. She took advantage of the uncordial relationship between the kingdoms of the Maravas and the Marathas.

The declaration of war on Tanjore by Rani Mangammal also has been mentioned by the missionaries. The letters says that the misguidance of the Brahmin general resulted in concluding a peace treaty. Yet it is considered a glorious victory for Rani Mangammal and a disgrace to Shahji.

The inefficient reign of Vijayaranga Chokkanatha resulted in the creation of a new principality of Tondamans of Pudukottai by Rajah Tondaman with the help of his relative Kilavan Sethupathi, the Marava ruler. Rajah Tondaman served in the Madurai army during the period of both Rani Mangammal and Vijayaranga Chokkanatha. Tondaman took advantage of the inefficiency and cowardice of Vijayaranga Chokkanatha and occupied the fortress of Trichy. The creation of the new kingdom strengthened the hands
of the Maravas because the Tondamans also belonged to the same Marava caste.

Vijayaranga Chokkanatha sowed the seeds for the deterioration of the Madurai Nayakdom which was founded 210 years ago. Chinna Mapillai Nayak who acted as the king systematically swindled the people through excessive taxes. So people were unhappy. He developed a quarrel with his Brahmin minister who caused a civil war within the royal court. The king lost his trust on the nobles and vice versa. Vijayaranga Chokkanatha’s ultimate aim was to enjoy with comedians. The Annual Letter says that when the king was involved in dramatic tragedy, the Muslim soldiers were nearing the Madurai Nayakdom.

Minakshi, the wife of Vijayaranga Chokkanatha and the last ruler of the Madurai Nayakdom rang the death knell to the same kingdom. She voluntarily created two factions in the court.

During her reigning period, her brothers, nobles and the Brahmins created a political crisis taking advantage of her inefficiency. This provided a good opportunity to the Nawab of Arcot to dethrone the queen and enter the Nayakdom of Madurai. Minakshi would have adopted the administrative skill of Mangammal. The Madurai Nayakship which was created in 1529 and reached its heights during the reign of Tirumalai Nayak came to an end in 1739 during the reign of Minakshi.

The fate of the two cities of Senji and Vellore after the fall of Senji Nayakship has been described by Laynes. The cities were captured by the Marathas and then by the Mughals. The missionary narrates the condition that prevailed before and after the annexation of Senji and Vellore by the Mughals.
People were imprisoned unnecessarily. They were denied justice. The emperor was far away and the governors took advantage of it and acted according to their whims and fancy.

**Annual Letters Related to Shahji**

According to Laynes, Tanjore was formerly under the Nayak of Madurai. But fortunes changed with events. Shahji, the Maratha prince, nephew of great Shivaji who governed that kingdom.\(^{31}\) Ekoji\(^ {32}\) had three sons namely Shahji, Serfoji and Tukkoji. These three sons succeeded to the throne one after another in the order of seniority.

Laynes speaks about the personality of Shaji in the following manner:

“He was far from resembling his ancestors either by his valour or by moral virtues. But he was not devoid of ambition. He was unwarlike and effeminate. Having delegated his power to a Brahmin, his minister, he spent his days and most of his nights watching dances and listening to the singing of women whom he procured for that purpose at great expense and sometimes through violence.\(^ {33}\)

Shahji had no heir and he offered great sacrifices and solemn offerings to the gods to obtain a successor to the royal family. Sometimes in a hopeless condition he told in a rather ungraceful oracle, that if he wished to have children, he must first cut off the nose of his queen. Although without heirs he has bent on ruining his subjects and stamping out all justice and his only ambition was to amass treasures and buried them in the ground.\(^ {34}\)

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32 Ekoji or Venkaji was the first Maratha ruler of Tanjore.
The Annual Letter of Laynes describes Shahji as a man of greediness and a miser. The following account depicts the two natures of Shahji. According to Laynes, Shahji was a man of insatiable greed. He is said to have already buried sixty millions. He was very moderate and (self-disciplined) in his food. He seemed to feed only on the sight of gold and silvers, deeming both those metals were sweeter than the most palatable dishes. It would seem that the daily expense of his table does not exceed one sixth of a cruzado.\textsuperscript{35} The fuel for the kitchen is brought to the palace and carefully checked so that no greater quantity may be consumed on one day than on the other, and if such this happened, the majordomo\textsuperscript{36} has to pay for the excess.\textsuperscript{37}

Although Shahji delighted in seeing comedies, watching dances and hearing songs, he gave orders that the dresses of the dancing girls be made of the cheapest cloth and their jewels of paste. He thus enjoyed his pleasures at little cost and his passion for the sex was not so strong as to overcome his greed. One day while the king was talking with his courtiers, the governor of a province either to flatter him or because he needed his protection for the success of some of his affairs, presented him with a richly harnessed Arab horse. At the sight of the animal, the king enquired from his courtiers what was its value. He was told that it was worth 3,000 cruzados. He was quite pleased and told the governor that the latter might keep his horse which was well set and of good breed and instead give him the value in cash. Such was the depth of meanness to which a slave of greed will sink; gold and silver were his masters and though he was a king he would follow the promptings of his

\textsuperscript{35} Old Portuguese coin of gold equal to 400 reis- a silver coin.
\textsuperscript{36} A senior servant who manages a large house.
\textsuperscript{37} Fr. Laynes, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 520.
passion without any regard for royal magnanimity. This trait would suffice to depict the miserable condition of the kingdom of Tanjore.  

**Last Days of Shahji**  

According to Fr. Augustine Capellai, Shahji the son of Ekoji died of most shameful diseases. Although he had about 100 wives or concubines, he got no son to succeed him. Yet the people were so blinded by superstitions that they were not ashamed to please among the gods that man when he was dead, whom when he was alive, they hated to an incredible degree. The government was taken by his brother who though younger surpassed him in cruelty. His name was Sarvosi (Serfoji I) and his impiety and greed for money were such that the crimes of his brother were thrown in the shades. He was succeeded by his brother Tukkoji who ruled Tanjore from 1728 to 1736.  

**Reign of Tukkoji (1728 – 1739)**  

Tukkoji, the Maratha ruler of Tanjore was known for his avarice. The way he collected taxes from the people has been compared to the booty taken from conquered enemies. He was ready to commit all sorts of crimes. He filled the royal coffers not with gold but with the sweat and blood of the poor. He was not a shepherd who is content with shearing his sheep; but he was a hangman who did not hesitate to skin them.  

He was hated and detested by the people so much so that the children themselves did not pronounce his name without cursing it. Tukkoji suppressed all the heads of the towns and provinces and took everything in his hands. By doing this, he gave an impression that he did not want his subjects to be

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oppressed by the governors. In reality, Tukkoji wanted to bring the governors under his control because they were like sponges soaked with people’s blood.

Tukkoji summoned the land owner of each village. He lent them money if they were in need of it. He promised to give them considerable portion of the future harvest. With full of joy they said that a golden age had returned. But scarcely was the harvest ready, the king with an art whose secret he alone possessed, upset and mixed up everything so that the landowners had even to sell the part due to them and most of them and sell even their bullocks. The result of this excessive thirst for gold was that nobody dared to trust the king.\(^{40}\)

**Maratha – Marava Relationship**

The Jesuit letters from Tamil country speak at length about the war between the Marathas of Tanjore and the Maravas of Ramnadu and Sivagangai. Kattaya Tevar alias Kumara MuthuVijaya Raguana Rupathi (1726 -1735) the Marava ruler and Serfoji I, the Maratha ruler fought vigorously in 1728.

The particular letter related to the war says that Serfoji I who was responsible for making Bhavani Sankara the Marava king raised arms against the former as he did not fulfill his promise. In Ramnadu, Kattaya Tevar became Sethupathi in 1729. Tukkoji tried to overthrow Kattaya Tevar and appointed Bahavani Sankara as the king which infuriated the former and the Marava territory witnessed scourge of war.

According to the letter of Vieyra, Tukkoji wanted to secure the Marava crown for his son. And there was no doubt that he would have succeeded because KattayaTevar had neither his arms nor soldiers. If he had not been

warned by letters from a prince called Pandaram,\textsuperscript{41} tributary to the king of Tanjore to defend himself by all means possible and had not thus been encouraged to hope. He therefore resolved to await the enemy in the fortress of Ramanathapuram capital of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{42}

The enemy began the siege of the town by devastating with fire and sword its surroundings then he brought forward the army. But he soon had to repent for the artillery which the Maravas knew well how to handle caused great havoc in the ranks of its army. The courage of defending warriors was so much blunted that they did not dare to come within the reach of the guns and the siege dragged on and much longer than they thought. Finally what caused the ruin of the Tanjore was the barbarous cruelty of the king’s son who suspecting that Pandaram was planning ambushes treacherously killed him and his body was dragged by the feet through the public places of the town. The auxiliary troops indignant at such an act of barbarity, not only left the army, but joined those of the son of the dead prince and cut the roads leading to the Tanjore Kingdom and vigorously besieged the army on all sides.\textsuperscript{43}

The relief troops, the convoys of arms, supplies and everything else which were faithfully sent to the Tanjore army were everywhere, intercepted, and so the army became a prey to hunger, thirst and sickness and was reduced to extremity. They now began to think more of taking to flight than to pursue the siege. But escape was impossible for the Maravas who were elated by their success had not only shut all the passages with troops, ditches and thorns

\textsuperscript{41} Pandaram was one of the chieftains who owed allegiance to Tukkoji but advised Sethupathi to resist the aggression.

\textsuperscript{42} Fr. Vieyra, \emph{Annual Letters of Madura Mission Vol. IV (1709 - 1757)}, 1732, p. 265.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 265 - 266.
but became bolder they made against the army and by their incursions they remarked even the Tanjore lands.\textsuperscript{44}

The army was doomed to perish miserably if Kattaya Tevar remembering the military axion had not himself opened a way for them. Thus it is said that the king of Tanjore by this shameful flight of army and the death of his soldiers and by the loss of the third part of the Marava Kingdom which he had with the consent of Kattaya Tevar previously appropriated without glory, became an object of execration received the punishment of his perfidy. This was a glorious victory for Kattaya Tevar.\textsuperscript{45}

**Maratha – Tondaman Relationship**

Vieyra speaks about the strained relationship that existed between Tukkoji the Maratha ruler and Vijaya Rugunatha Raya, the Tondaman of Pudukottai. The letter dated 1734 portrays the involvement of the Madurai Nayak, the Marava Ruler and the Mughals also. The letter is not written coherently. In the beginning of the letter, Vieyra says that Ananda Rao, the war general of the Maratha ruler commanded the joined armies of Tanjore and Madurai. The Jesuit missionaries witnessed the ravages of the Tondamans on Madurai and Tanjore.

The same letter mentions an agreement that took place between Ananda Rao and the Mughals. According to the missionary, the king of Tanjore who had through his Brahmin Prime Minister Ananda Rao paid back to the Mughals a heavy sum which he had borrowed from them. They had occupied the whole territory between the Coleroon and the Cauvery which was rich in rice fields up to the walls of the fortress of Trichy. Then he did his utmost to

\textsuperscript{44} Fr. Vieyra., *op.cit.*, pp. 265 - 266.
\textsuperscript{45} *Ibid.*
have the guard of the fortress confided to him while the queen (Minakshi) went to Madurai for her coronation. He tried hard to persuade her to take this step so that he might find a favourable opportunity to get hold of the citadel. But disappointed in this, he urged the queen and her councillors to chastise by arms.

Once again the letter narrates another war between Tanjore and Pudukottai and the involvement of the Maravas. According to Vieyra, “the Tondaman prince was guilty in the civil war of having sided with the king and he willingly offered himself carry out the enterprise. But he had no other purpose in this war than to take possession of their territories which bordered on the Tanjore kingdom to the south of it and thus to offer a safe way for an invasion of the Maravas. So at the head of an army reinforced by the queen’s troops attacked the princes and in a few days without a fight but not without a suspicion of treachery, he put the princes to flight and seized almost the whole of their estates.”

According to the Annual Letter the Tondaman seems to be on the side of the queen of Madurai. The civil war referred to here is the civil war which took place between two factions in Madurai Nayakdom. Tukkoji supported the two brothers of Minakshi and Tondaman was in favour of Bangaru Tirumalai, the cousin of Vijayaranga Chokkanatha, the predecessor and husband of Minakshi.46

As said earlier the letter has lost its flow of continuity and gives a picture of the defeat of Tondaman in the hands of Tanjore first and the Maravas coming to the rescue of Tondaman.

46 Ramaswamy N.S., Political History of Carnatic under the Nawabs, Carnatic, 1984, pp. 48 - 50
Vieyra says, “There remained to them (Tondamans) only one fortress, the strongest one called Tirumayam, for it was built on sheer rock. The Maravas seeing that they also were threatened rushed to the assistance of the prince of Tondaman but being without cavalry they hid themselves in the surrounding forests avoiding battle during the day but attacking the camp during the night and they caused much harm to the Tanjorians. Moreover some detachment of Maravas got at night inside the fortress and heartened the besieged army. Meanwhile the commander of the queen’s army having become aware of the duplicity and perfidies of the Tanjorians broke off the alliance concluded with them and drew back their army.\textsuperscript{47}

But the Brahmin now by force of arms, by promises, by ambushes or through underground passages carried on the siege but all in vain and he was always repulsed with great loss to him. The siege had been lasting for some months when the arrival of the Mughals on the frontiers of Tanjore forced the Brahmin to lead his decimated army back home, there to receive the punishment of his cruelty.\textsuperscript{48}

The reign of a few Maratha rulers has been brought out elaborately in the Annual Letters. Shahji the second ruler of Maratha kingdom has been described as a man without any moral virtues. He entrusted everything in the hands of the Brahmins and spent the days and nights in the company of women. As a consequence, the people were denied of good governance and justice. Secondly, the Brahmins took the upper hand in the social hierarchy as well as in the political scenario. The king and the kingdom existed for the

\textsuperscript{47} Fr. Joseph Vieyra, \textit{op.cit.}, 1734, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid.}
Brahmins who controlled polity, society, economy and religion. The Brahmins increased their wealth day by day.

Shahji had developed a peculiar character which has been highlighted in the Annual Letter by the missionaries. He had combined in himself two traits of greediness and miserliness simultaneously. He intended to acquire more wealth and had a passion to bury them in the earth. Secondly, he was very calculative in spending money even on fuel for the kitchen. He had possessed another twin characters of maximum enjoyment but at a lower cost. Being the immediate successor of Ekoji, the first ruler of the Maratha kingdom, he would have strengthened his power.

Instead of continuing his war with Mangammal, he allowed his Brahmin general to bribe the queen, her army general and general’s father. Laynes and Bourzes have made strong observations against Shahji. Laynes ends his Annual Letter saying Shahji had no regard for royal magnanimity. He had stamped out all justice in the country. He further says that this trait is enough to explain the miserable condition of Tanjore. This plight of the people is discussed under economic conditions. Bourzes has compared Shahji with Nero the Roman Emperor of first century and calls the former Tanjore Nero Shahji. Not only Shahji, other rulers of Tanjore also were alien to the Tamils.

The character of Tukkoji has been described in the Annual Letters. Like Shahji, Tukkoji also amassed wealth. He pretended that he controlled all the heads of the towns and provinces. In fact both the rulers and the governors sucked the blood of the people by exacting more money. He summoned all the land owners and lent them money to promote cultivation. Neither the land owners nor the farmers were allowed to enjoy the fruits of their hard labour.
The entire kingdom was under the reel of crushing poverty and even the land owners sold their bullocks. He was cursed by all including children.

The Maratha rulers were unable to provide a good administration to their subjects. But they interfered in the internal affairs of Marava Kingdom. Serfoji I went to the extreme of crowning the ruler of the Marava Kingdom. Tukkoji wanted to secure the Marava throne for his son. It resulted in a war between the two kingdoms and the worst sufferer was Tukkoji. Because of the misguidance of his own chieftain called Pandaram, the Tanjore army experienced hardships. The Maravas emerged victorious in the war.

Vieyra speaks about the multi cornerd battles in his Annual Letter dated 1734. According to him, the Mughals, the Marathas, the Maravas, Minakshi and the Tondamans were involved in this battle. Once again Tukkoji was responsible for the whole affair and he was misguided by his Brahmin general Ananda Rao. A huge amount of money was transacted between Tukkoji and the Mughals. The same Mughals reached Madurai, interfered in the civil war and occupied the Nayakdom of Madurai.

The Jesuit missionaries have mentioned about a few places in their letters. They are Malayadipatti⁴⁹, Elakurichi⁵⁰, Conampatti⁵¹ and Vadugarpatti.⁵² The last section of the third chapter furnish some information related to these places.

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⁴⁹ Malayadipatti is located in Trichy District. Malayadipatti rock-cut temples are situated on granite hillocks, south if the Malayadipatti village, also known as Thiru Valattur Malai.
⁵⁰ Elakurichi is situated at present in Ariyalur District.
⁵¹ Conampatti is situated near Uthamapalayam.
⁵² Vadugarpatti is situated in Theni District.
Malayadipatti

The younger brother of the prince of Malayadipatti (name not mentioned) was burning to rule and after having in vain tried by his intrigues to suppress the prince, fled to the court of another prince who had some quarrels with his brother and promised his help to fight his enemy. This prince accepted the proposal and soon after during the night attacked the neighbouring fort and captured it.

Rapine devastation and massacres then followed one another from both sides. For these barbarians called Tottiers have a way proper to them of waging war: they never fought openly but like robbers they came out only at night, pillaged villages and burnt them down, and when they caught hold of a man, whoever he be, of whatever condition, even a stranger, they killed them on the spot and carried away the head for which they received the premium promised by the prince. Revenge added to this barbarity for as many men as have been put to death in a prince domain must be massacred in the latter’s land such was the law of relation. That was why there was safety nowhere: all the men left their wives and children at home whom even in the midst of so much cruelty were not harmed and the men went and hid in woods.\(^{53}\)

Elakurichi

Beschi was in charge of Elakurichi and Conampatti. Both were invaded by Mughal army. The king of Tanjore moved by ambition invaded the surrounding kingdom. These called to their assistance the Mughal troops and those of Madurai, who invaded the Tanjore kingdom. The king of Tanjore summoned together all his forces and put at their head a Brahmin. The

\(^{53}\) Fr. Joseph Vieyra, *op.cit.*, 1733, p.11.
Brahmin although an octogenarian came to meet the Mughal army and fortifying his camp with ditches and retrenchments, cut all access to the city of Tanjore. Not satisfied with this he harassed the enemy by nocturnal attacks. So the Mughal commander unable to bear any more adaucity of this Brahmin sallied forth from his camp with his troops on the enemy. The Brahmin, relying on his defences and the safety of the place was not afraid of anything of the kind. On hearing of the arrival of the Mughals, he led his army to battle and mounted on an elephant hurling darts with his own hand and attacked the enemy.  

At the encounter he received three wounds and so losing his courage, alighted from the elephant and dashed off so rapidly and so shamefully that he did not feel safe even in the heart of the Tanjore fortress. The entire army followed in the step of its general and turned its back to the enemy, who pursued them, killed a great number of them and captured great many more. The Mughals entered the camp which was crammed with riches and to crown all, they took away the elephant, the horses the money and everything of value. After that the Mughal cavalry was free to loot the country and there was only ruin everywhere.

Conampatti

It was the place of Kallar community. It belonged to the Tanjore territory. The Mughals were planning to avenge the defeat perpetrated on them by the Kallars and with that purpose to destroy their villages. But the Kallars under the cover of their forests attacked the enemy with such dare and courage that after a day’s fight in which a great number of Mughals perished.

54 Fr. Vieyra, op.cit., 1734, p. 20.
55 Ibid., 21.
were obliged to ignominiously retreat without having even had sight of the village. It was surely hard to believe that fifty men alone should have been able to check and stop an army without one of them having been wounded or killed. The Kallars attributed it to the protection of the gods meanwhile through the Tanjore king had succeeded in pleading with the Mughals and buying peace with a huge sum of money. It was the only fruit he (Tukkoji)\textsuperscript{56} derived from his revolt, namely the loss of his prestige, and a blood-letting of his coffers.\textsuperscript{57}

As for the turbulent and redoubtable old Brahmin,\textsuperscript{58} he miserably perished in the thores of atrocious pains caused by the gangrene of a wound in which poison is believed to have played a part, a just chastisement of the cruel author of so many revolutions.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{Vadugarpatti}

This place was devastated by the cruelty of the Mughal army when it was entering the Tanjore Kingdom. The soldiers exasperated by the famine which gripped the south laid hands on everything they could find. But it was chiefly the church of Vadugarpatti and the house of the missionary which bore the brunt of their fury. The Mughal camp had been pitched close to the village and they looted the village.\textsuperscript{60}

\textbf{Tranquebar}

The Jesuit missionaries have mentioned about the settlements of the European powers. Bertrand in his letter of 1838 from Trichy has written about

\textsuperscript{56} Fr. Vieyra refers Tukkoji who ruled from 1728 to 1736. This particular letter is dated 1734.
\textsuperscript{57} Fr. Vieyra, \textit{op.cit.}, 1734, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{58} The old Brahmin mentioned here is Ananda Rao. N. Subramanian confirms this and says that Ananda Rao valiantly fought but fell in battle and was killed by a poisoned arrow.
\textsuperscript{59} Fr. Vieyra, \textit{op.cit.}, 1734, p. 21
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 22 - 23.
Tranquebar. This belonged to the fort of the Dutch. The population of the city was nearly twelve thousand. A fort by name Dansper protected this city. In Tranquebar European houses were located. Their streets were like streets in Europe and only the Dutch could live here.  

**Karaikkal**

Cauvery river flowed through in Karaikkal. A harbour was located here. The European ships arrived here to export rice to their countries.  

**The Condition of Indian Rulers under the British Regime**

According to Garnier, in India there were petty kings who ruled small areas. During the British rule, they ruled without any authority. Though they had cavalry, elephantry and military no power was granted to them. They were not considered in the taxation system. But they got five thousand rupees from the British government and from this they gave salary to their workers.

**Conclusion**

The Annual Letters of Fathers Laynes, Dias, Augustine, Bourzes, Beschi and Vieyra furnish information about the decline of the three Nayakdoms of Senji, Tanjore and Madurai. The missionaries are very elaborate in narrating the untold miseries experienced by people under the rulers of Shahji, Tukkoji and Vijayaranga Chokkanatha. The influence of the Brahmins in Tanjore and Madurai ruined the kingdoms. The special mention of places like Malayadipatti, Elakurichi, Conampatti and Vadugarpatti also speak about the plight of the missionaries as well as the people for these were the places where the missionaries had their residential areas and were targeted by the warring powers.

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