



Historical Geography Of The Princely State Of Pudukkottai

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Abstract:

Pudukkottai Kingdom has the distinction of being the only Princely State in Tamil Nadu, which functioned independently under the British Patronage. It enjoyed the unique tradition of democratic institutions evolved down the centuries. These institutions reflected the socio - political evolution of the State that was in many ways a microcosm of the Indian Sub-Continent. This evolution reflected the cataclysmic changes that were taking place in British India as a result of the National Movement. The Minto-Morley Reforms Act (1909) and the Montague - Chelmsford Reforms Act (1919), which saw the slow devolution of powers to the people of British India, had their impact on the small Princely State of Pudukkottai also. People developed a craving for participative rights in the Government and the Crown too was ready to satisfy this need.

The process of reforms, which started with the constitution of the Representative Assembly in 1902, culminated in the constitution of Pudukkottai Legislative Council in 1924. The Pudukkottai Legislative Council played an important role in the social, political and cultural history of the Pudukkottai State till the final merger with the Independent India in 1948.

The Kingdom of Tondaimans of Pudukkottai, the subject of the study was situated between 10°.7' and 11o.4' North Latitude, and between 78°.25' and 79°.12' East Longitude of the Indian Sub-Continent.1 The Kingdom was bounded in the North by the Trichinapoly District; in the South by Ramnad District; and in the East by the Tanjore District. By way of natural boundaries, Piranmalai in the South West of the Kingdom and the Sevalur Hills on the South, constituted the Scientific Frontier. The Kingdom comprised of an area of 1178 square miles (3058 kms) in the form of an Irregular Square with a length of 52 miles (84 kms), East to West, and with a breadth of 41 miles (66 kms) from North to South. Out of the five Native Kingdoms (States) of Travancore, Cochin, Pudukkottai, Salldur, Bangallapalli in the Madras Presidency, Pudukkottai occupied the third largest geographical area.2

When its boundaries were finally fixed in the early Nineteenth Century, Pudukkottai was about 1,130 square miles in size. In 1826, it had a population of 2,11,742. In 1871, the total population of Pudukkottai had risen to 3,16,695, averaging 229 people per square mile. Pudukkottai Town , situated roughly in the Centre of the Kingdom, was fifty-five kilometers South of Tanjore , fifty kilometers Southeast of Trichinapoly, and roughly one hundred kilometers North of Madurai.3

This Kingdom was one of the important princely states under the British Domain in India. Pudukkottai was the only Princely State in the Tamil Country to be permitted independent existence under

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the British Rule. In South India, Pudukkottai, Travancore, and Hyderabad States remained dependent and loyal towards the British. The Princely State of Pudukkottai cooperated with the British, and with the help of the British Officials, it became efficient in the field of administration and maintaining the law and order situation.

Pudukkottai was ruled by the Tondaimans under the British Paramountcy till it merged with the Union of India on March 3, 1948. It remained a Taluk in Tiruchinapoly District for some time, and it was declared the Fifteenth District in Tamil Nadu on January 14, 1974.⁴

The District Headquarters, Pudukkottai, is situated approximately at a distance of 380 kms. to the South West of Chennai City and located on the National Highway 45. This District is bounded by Tanjore and Trichinapoly Districts in the North West and East, Sivaganga and Ramanad Districts in the South, and Trichinapoly District in the West and by Tanjore District and Bay of Bengal in the East.

NOMENCLATURE OF PUDUKKOTTAI

'Pudu' is derived from a Tamil word, meaning, 'new' while Kottai is 'fort'. Pudukkottai therefore means 'New Fort'.⁵ The name is suggestive of dynastic and territorial conflicts and the founding of Kingdom on the remains of old ones. The erstwhile Pudukkottai Kingdom and the new Pudukkottai District have both borrowed the name from their Principal Town Headquarters. While no ancient fort exists in the Town now, the remains of fortifications at Tirumayam, Kilanilaipuram, Piranmalai, Porpanaikkottai and Varappur illustrate the toponymic evocations of the name, 'Pudukkottai'. Venkanna's Tondaimans Vamsavali explains that the present Town of Pudukkottai was the creation of Raghunatha Raya Tondaiman, the Founder of Pudukkottai's reigning line, after his installation in 1686.

Radhakrishna Ayyar's A General History of Pudukkottai State, reveals that a map drawn by a Jesuit Missionary in 1700, carries the name, 'Pudukkottai'. The author infers that Tondaiman, who built the Town in 1686, must have also fortified it within about ten years of his reign. It is also possible that the fortification did not enclose the entire settlement. Radhakrishna Aiyar further maintains that the fortifying wall "must have been demolished by Chanda Sahib or by Ananda Row, the Tanjore General, when he captured the Town in 1734". A corroborative observation is provided by the late Tamil Scholar, R.P.Sethu Pillai in his book on place names, "Oorum Perum"(Place and Name), that "Raghunatha, who inaugurated the Tondaiman Dynasty, built a new fort in the later half of the Seventeenth Century, and named it, 'Pudukkottai'.⁶

TOPOGRAPHY AND PEOPLE

According to the traditional geographical classification, as mentioned in Sangam Literature, the tract of Pudukkottai State was essentially a Mullai Region (jungle), with an admixture of Kurinchi (hills) regions here and there. The Tract degenerated into Palai (desert) land because of scarcity of rains. Regarding the flora and fauna of the Region, they were the same as one witnessed in the old Madurai and Ramnad Districts.⁷

Many rivers in the Kingdom are flooded during the rainy season. Pudukkottai is a relatively arid region. The Vellar, its major river, is dry for all the months. It becomes a catchment canal during the monsoon rains. The lack of any permanent source of water and the associated absence of alluvial agriculture, dominated the ecological regime of the entire area. As a result, Pudukkottai is an area of periodic scarcity and therefore of considerable risk and uncertainty. Frequent drought and occasional flooding are very common.

The River named, Vellar, is the lengthiest River in the Kingdom. Since the area was covered with jungle, it attracted the attention of pastoral tribes like hunters and shepherds, followed by the settlement of Vellalars.⁸ These Vellalars were divided into two groups known as Kanattu Vellalars and Konattu Vellalars. There were instances of conflicts between these two groups regarding land rights, which resulted in frequent deaths and destructions. The main object of the Konattu Vellalars seemed to have been to seize from the Kanattu Vellalars all the lands to the North of the Vellar. The bone of contention between them was in connection with lands, temples, tanks, temple honours and the right to use the waters of Vellar. The fights that resulted between the two sections of the Vellalars not only weakened the Vellalars themselves but also led to the settlement of the Maravas and Kallars in Pudukkottai.⁹ Thus, the conflicts among the Vellalars became the major reason for the rise of the Maravas and Kallars on the banks of the River Vellar. Thus Pudukkottai became a settlement of many groups of people.

The Region as a whole was most heavily populated by the low Caste Valaiyars and Pallars, majority of them were agricultural labourers and marginal producers. However, two-thirds of the northern State were dominated by Kallars who could claim dominance because of their generalized control of local



agrarian and symbolic resources. Although far less numerous, the Maravars were the second most powerful Caste in the State, at least until the Mid Nineteenth Century when the Chettiars, a Merchant Caste, began their meteoric economic rise under the Pax Britannica. There were also a significant number of Brahmins in the Kingdom, who arrived during the days of the Tondaimans who invited them to settle on land grants, Brahmadeyams. Brahmins later provided the vast majority of Civil Servants under the Tondaiman Raj.

GENESIS AND GROWTH OF PUDUKKOTTAI

Pudukkottai was built in the early Eighteenth Century. It became the Capital Town of the 'Little Kingdom'. The name of Pudukkottai for the Capital City of the Tondaimans first appeared on a map in 1700, drawn by Bouchet, the Jesuit Missionary of nearby Avur. The site had been important in previous times. In a Tamil Geography, composed in 1740, the Town was called the Town of the Tondaimans, and it was considered to be one of the four Principal Towns of the Pandya Country, the others being Madurai, Tirunelveli and Ramanad. It did not have fixed geographical boundaries but it was the area over which the Tondaiman Kings had political control at any given time. Until the end of the Eighteenth Century, the Region was simply called the 'Tondaiman's Country.' During the Medieval Period, Pudukkottai was never the seat of any major or lasting political system, though some middle level dynasties such as the Muttaraiyars were closely associated with the history of the area.

PALAYAM TO KINGDOM

Pudukkottai is neither a wet nor a dry zone but a 'mixed economy zone'. Pudukkottai shared many geographical features with other mixed economy zones. However, its central position between the Pandya and Chola Heartlands and the extensive nature of Kallar dominance in the region, gave it a far more important role in political history than any of the Palayams of Tamil Country. Pudukkottai was significantly larger than any of the Tirunelveli Palayams, and only slightly smaller in size than either Ramnad or Sivagangai. 10 Nicholas calls Pudukkottai a 'Little Kingdom' and the Tondaimans, 'Little Kings'. 11

KINGDOM TO DISTRICT

Ragunatha Raya Tondaiman (1686-1730) was the Tondaiman Ruler who built the Town of Pudukkottai, annexed the neighbouring Pollams and asserted his independence by 1711. He was the first ruler of the House of Tondaimans. In 1948, the Pudukkottai Kingdom was merged with the Indian Union. Ragunatha Raya Tondaiman (1686-1730) was the Tondaiman Ruler who built the Town of Pudukkottai, annexed the neighbouring Pollams and asserted his independence by 1711. He was the first ruler of the House of Tondaimans. In 1948, the Pudukkottai Kingdom was merged with the Indian Union. The total geographical area of the District was 4651 sq. kms. The District consists of 9 Taluks, which are further divided into 14 Development Blocks. There are 12 Urban Centers and about 765 Revenue Villages within the 14 Development Blocks of the District. As of 2001, the total population was 14.52 lakhs in the District, 71.96% were literate, and the urbanization level was 16.93%. Table 2.2 provides details on population and level of urbanization in every Taluk. 16.93 per cent of the population lived in the Urban Centers of the District, against 43.86 per cent in the State. The District accommodates only a small fraction of 0.9 per cent of the State Urban Population.

As per the 2001 Census, Pudukkottai District, with 16.93 per cent Urbanization, was ranked 26th out of the 30 Districts in the level of urbanization in the State. Also, there were 12 Urban Centers according to the 2001 Census in the District, and of them, only two were Municipalities, 8 Town Panchayats and 2 Census Towns, on the basis of their administrative status. All these Urban Centers accommodated a total urban population of 2,45,897 as per the 2001 Census.

Pudukkottai District is one of the Least Urbanized Districts of the State, and three of its Taluks, namely, Gandarvakkottai, Manamelkudi and Avudaiyar Koil are entirely rural. In the remaining six Taluks, Urbanization Level varies from 6.66 per cent in Alangudi to 65.79 per cent in Pudukkottai Taluk. The second highest in the Urbanization Level is 19.27 per cent in Aranthagi Taluk.

Of the 12 Urban Centers in the District, as of 2001 Census, Pudukkottai Town is the oldest as it was the Headquarters of the Rulers in the past. Four more Settlements were declared Urban only in 1931 and of which again one, viz. Alangudi Town, was declassified and another viz. Artanthangi was added in 1951. Alangudi was, however, promoted to Urban Category in 1961. Illuppur joined the Urban List in 1971, and Kiranur in 1981. There were accordingly 8 Towns in 1981 and Pudukkottai Village Panchayat as Town was added to the list in 1991. In 2001, five new towns, namely, Karambakkudi, Arimalam, Keeramangalam, Annasaval and Nathanpannai, were added while declassifying two, namely, Alagapuri and Kadiapatti.



The growth rates have been varying according to changes in population counts due to additions and omissions of areas, and also economic conditions. The growth rate of urbanization during 1991 – 2001 was 29.08 % as against 23.97% during the previous decade. The increase during 1991 –2001 was mainly due to net addition of settlements into the Urban List. Among the Towns, Pudukkottai Census Town registered 52 % growth whereas Pudukkottai Municipal Town recorded a nominal growth of about 10 % during 1991 –2001 as Alangudi declined by 1.3 % . Ponnamaravathi also grew by a marginal 2.6 percentage points during 1991 –2001. The density of urban population was 8413 in Pudukkottai Municipal Town.¹²

To conclude, the Tondaimans were able to manage the political affairs by virtue of their good relations with the British. The Colonial Administrators provided timely help to the Tondaimans when they needed it. The dominant caste favoured the functioning of the Local Administration. There was significant educational development in the Princely State of Pudukkottai under the Tondaimans. The Local Administration functioned effectively under the Tondaiman Rule in Pudukkottai Kingdom. Public Health Administration was taken care of in the Pudukkottai Kingdom. By imitating the colonial administrative methods, the Tondaiman Rulers destroyed the fabric of village set up. The Police System of the erstwhile Princely State of Pudukkottai was considerably influenced by the British.

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