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## POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURY TANJORE KINGDOM

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**Abstract:-**The paper attempts to highlight the political developments happened in Tanjore Kingdom in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. In the Sixteenth Century the Nayak rule prevailed in Tanjore while the Maratha Rule prevailed in the Seventeenth Century. The Nayaks, the representatives of the Vijayanagar Rulers began to consolidate their position in the wake of the decline of the Vijayanagar Empire. They rule of the Nayaks of Tanjore began with Sevappa Nayak in 1532 and reached its crescendo with Ragunatha Nayak in 1634. The Nayaks waged a number of wars to protect and to expand their kingdom. The Kingdom of Tanjore, known for its glorious civilization, extent of its empire, liberality of its administration, industrious activities of its people and fertility of its soil, had a cherished history during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century. In 1676, the Marathas established their sway over the Tanjore Kingdom. The Marathas established their capital in the temple city of Tanjore, the seat of power of the imperial Cholas in the past

**Keywords:**Nayak, Tanjore, Nawab, Setupati, Maratha.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Significance of Tanjore Kingdom

For several decades since, the frontiers of the Kingdom remained unsteady, at times projecting claims on Trichinopoly, Arcot and Mysore. The Tanjore Kingdom stretched like a net from the small port-town of Tranquebar to various parts on the east coast of South India, the so-called Coromandel Coast. This 20-30 km wide coastal strip with its fertile soil and crossed by wide-bedded rivers flowing into the Bay of Bengal presented favourable conditions for agriculture and enabled two harvests annually. The Tanjore region gets much of its agrarian significance from the river Cauvery and its numerous branches.<sup>1</sup>The climatic conditions on the south east coast of India, the succession of dry seasons and monsoon rain, the natural system of rivers, irrigation facilities and water tanks created the necessary foundations for a settled cultivation of land. The main crop of the region was rice; its production and processing influenced all spheres of social life. As the primary crop rice was a significant economic factor; in addition, it had important ritual functions as a component of religious symbolism in the temple and in the households. Textile production was important and its importance was, for a while, significantly enhanced by the increased demand from Europe in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup>Among other things, calico, a stiff white cotton cloth, was produced.

#### Trade Activity

Along with Bengal, the Malabar region and Gujarat, the Coromandel Coast was one of the most important trade regions of India. However, in most of the coastal cities, as was the case in Tranquebar, the large deep sea ships could not dock directly in the harbor but had to berth up to four miles into the sea. From there the goods were transported to the coast by Indian merchants, representatives of the Karaiyar caste, in coastal boats.<sup>3</sup> It was only in port-towns such as Cuddalore, Porto Novo or Karaikal which lay at the estuaries of large rivers that ships could dock directly in the harbour. The main export of the Kingdom of Tanjore was rice, which was transported from Tanjore to Ceylon, the Malabar Coast and Bengal, among other places. Besides this, the port of Nagapattinam was a base for trade with South East Asia.

### **Population**

At the end of the Seventeenth Century the Kingdom of Tanjore is estimated to have had about one million inhabitants.<sup>9</sup> Hindus constituted over 90 per cent of the population, more than 5 per cent were Muslims. Catholics made up perhaps 2 per cent of the population. In contrast to other Tamil regions there was a relatively higher representation of Brahmins on account of the historical migration from North India into the heartland of the Chola dynasty (approx. 6-7 per cent). Besides them, the Vanniar (agricultural workers) with roughly 30 per cent and the Vellalars ('farmers') with 17-18 per cent were the largest caste groups. In addition, there were roughly 15 per cent Paraiyār.<sup>10</sup>

### **Historical Vicissitudes**

Historically speaking, the territory of the Hindu Kingdom of Tanjore encompassed the heartland of the earlier Chola Empire. After the downfall of this empire, which had, at one time, extended to Ceylon and South East Asia, the Kingdom of Vijayanagar became its successor in 1336. The rulers of Vijayanagar sent out several military leaders to conquer South India. Following upon such conquests these leaders were installed as Nayak to administer the newly won territories. They were responsible for maintaining law and order as well as for collecting taxes. In addition, they were obliged to maintain an army to support the incumbent ruler of Vijayanagar in his wars, especially against the Muslim rulers in the north. The domains of the Nayak contained smaller administrative units, which were managed by so-called Palaiyakkarar, local military chiefs. On the one hand, there were often conflicts between the Palaiyakkarar and the Nayak regarding the ownership of land and the question of power. On the other hand, the Palaiyakkarar maintained troops, which they had to place at the disposal of the Nayak whenever required.<sup>11</sup>

### **Consolidation of Nayak Rule**

The downfall of the Vijayanagar Empire began after its defeat in the Battle of Talikota in 1565. The growing weakness of the central power in Vijayanagar was paralleled by the consolidation of power of the Nayaks as local regents at the periphery of the empire who were able to establish their sovereign dominions in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the dynasty of the Nayaks of Tanjore began with Sevappa Nayak in 1532 (ruled 1532-80) and reached its zenith with Raghunatha Nayak (1600-34). Through innumerable wars against his neighbours, especially against the Muslim States of North India and the Nayaks of Madurai, but also against the Portuguese colonial rulers, Raghunatha Nayak tried in vain to salvage the remains of the collapsing empire and to establish the supremacy of Tanjore over the other Nayaks.<sup>13</sup> The rule of the Nayaks in Tanjore came to an end in the second half of the Seventeenth Century. Vijayaraghava Nayak (1634-73), son of Raghunatha Nayak, was the last ruler of the Nayak dynasty. On the whole, this period shaped the Tanjore country both economically and culturally since most of these Hindu (Vaishnava) rulers had cultural, literary and scientific interests and were comparatively tolerant and open in religious matters. Music, architecture, sculpture and painting flourished.

### **Ekoji, the First Maratha Raja of Tanjore**

The rule of the Nayaks in Tanjore ended as a result of Vijayaraghava Nayak's military conflicts with Chokkanatha Nayak (1659-1682) of Madurai and a simultaneous attack on Tanjore in 1674 by Muslim armies from North India. The Tanjore country was conquered by Madurai and placed under the administrative rule of a referee. He was replaced in 1674 with a descendant of the Nayaks of Tanjore with the help of the Marathas under their leader Ekoji Bhonsle (around 1630-84), who, after initial conquests in South India, began to display an interest in developments there. A year later, Ekoji himself became the ruler of Tanjore and established the Maratha dynasty of the Raja of Tanjore. After a victory in the battle of Valigandpura on 16 November 1677, Ekoji finally broke free of his brother Shivaji (1630-80) and had himself crowned as the first Raja of Tanjore in 1678.<sup>14</sup> As a result of administrative reforms the Tanjore country was divided into initially six and later seven districts: the central district Tanjore and the six districts Mayavaram, Kumbakonam, Tiruvadi, Vallam, Mannarkudi, Pattukottai.

### **Tanjore and Political Map of South India**

The subsequent history of the Kingdom of Tanjore is embedded in far-reaching changes in the political map of South India after the decline of the Mughal Empire. Several independent or semi-independent kingdoms consolidated their power. The Mughal Empire, established in 1526, lost its position as the dominating empire after the death of the last emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707). The influence of the once powerful central force diminished and was replaced by the consolidation of peripheral provincial administrations, limiting, in effect, the power of the Mughals in the Eighteenth Century to Delhi. Local representatives of the Mughals sometimes safeguarded their factual independence by recognizing the nominal authority of the Delhi Emperors. In the south of the sub-continent the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Nawab of Arcot with the Carnatic Kingdom and the rulers of Mysore and Travancore, among others, created their own spheres of influence which, at the beginning of the Eighteenth Century, were under the administrative control of Mughal Governors. In the course of the Eighteenth Century these unstable constellations of power faltered and, with the weakening of the imperial centre, the shifting equations of power

between the provinces were put to the test. Tanjore Kingdom was also affected by this.

#### **Martatha Relation with Neighbouring Native States**

After Ekoji's death his brother Shahji II (1684-1712) ruled the Kingdom. Nominally, these Maratha Rulers, like the Nayaks of Tanjore since 1658, were dependent on the Mughal Rulers in Delhi<sup>16</sup> and had to make annual payments of tribute to their representatives.<sup>17</sup> The wars against Madurai, that had already begun under the Nayaks, continued. With support from the Tondaiman ruler of Pudukkottai, Madurai went to war against Tanjore and against the Setupati Ruler of Ramnad in 1700. Although Tanjore suffered a military defeat, the Raja succeeded in signing a treaty of peace. As a result of the war, the Setupati became independent in 1702 and in return for the support he handed over Fort Arantangi and its surrounding territories to Tanjore. In 1709 Tanjore supported Madurai against the Setupati, suffered a military defeat and had to return the territories to him. This war took place during a period of famine in the Setupati's region, which lasted till about 1713. During this time many starving people fled to Tanjore and Madurai.<sup>18</sup>

In 1712 Serfoji I (1712-28) took over the reins of government. In alliance with Madurai he tried to gain territories in the framework of the wars of succession in Ramnad from 1724 onwards. In the course of these conflicts, which continued till 1729, the Setupati of Ramnad lost a large amount of territory. All the territory north of Pambar fell to Tanjore. Two-fifths of the remaining territory went to the hitherto independent state of the Raja of Sivaganga.<sup>19</sup> By 1720 Tanjore had also recaptured Arantangi that had been occupied in the interim period by Pudukkottai.

At the beginning of his rule Tuljaji I (1728-36) was successful in neutralizing the pressure applied by the Nizam of Hyderabad at the northern boundaries of his kingdom. He was thus free to support the declining kingdom of Madurai. His attempt in 1733 to defeat the Setupati of Ramnad was unsuccessful. A subsequent joint attack by Tanjore and Madurai against Pudukkottai was repulsed with help from Ramnad. The victors were then able to convince the Nawab of Arcot and Madurai to attack Tanjore. Tuljaji I was only able to broker a peace with the promise of considerable funds. After wars of succession and civil wars the Kingdom of Madurai became a part of the kingdom of the Nawab of Arcot / Carnatic in 1736. The Nawab was a vassal of the Nizam of Hyderabad and a representative of the Mughals. With his accession to the throne the rule of the Nayaks in Madurai came to an end.<sup>20</sup>

After the death of Tuljaji I in 1736 there was a three-year interregnum in Tanjore, in the course of which the country sank into chaos and battles were fought between pretenders to the throne. During this time the Nawab of Arcot occupied the Tanjore Country and plundered it. In 1739 the new Raja of Tanjore, Pratap Singh (1739-63), had to hand over the port-town of Karaikal to the French in return for their help. In 1740 the Marathas descended on South India and thus saved Tanjore from an attack by the Nawab of Arcot on account of unpaid tributes. After the Marathas left, the Nawab himself appeared at the head of a large army and laid siege to Tanjore. With a payment of 7, 00,000 rupees Pratap Singh was able to make the Nawab lift the siege. In the 1740s the battles for the former territories of the Madurai Nayaks influenced the political situation in Tanjore. In 1740-41 the Nawab of Arcot suffered several defeats and his state faced disintegration because of the intrusion of the Marathas in the battles for Madurai. Using differences among the Marathas as well as among the pretenders to the title of Nawab, the Nizam of Hyderabad, Asaf Jah, intervened and, in 1743, restored the Kingdom of Arcot to its earlier extent. From the second half of the eighteenth century the developments in Tanjore were marked by the increasing rivalry between the British, the French and the Muslim elites of South India.<sup>21</sup>

Historical Developments witnessed in Tanjore Kingdom revolved around its fertility in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. To gain the fortunes, the Nayaks in the Sixteenth Century and the Marathas in the Seventeenth Century waged innumerable wars with neighbouring native states. The Nayaks of Tanjore waged wars against the Nayaks of Madurai and the Marathas of Tanjore did the same against the Nawabs of the Arcot. Both the Nayaks and the Maratha Rulers of Tanjore wanted to assert their independent authority which often resulted in wars. Venkaji ascended the Maratha throne in early 1676. The Marathas succeeded to the throne at a time when momentous changes took place in the political chess board of the Carnatic and when the two European powers fought tooth and nail for extension of their influence and preservation of their interests. Dynastic revolutions, the enmity and rancor of rival claimants to the throne backed by the grasping European powers and intense warfare consumed the whole of South India.

#### **END NOTES**

1. Rajayyan, K., A History of British Diplomacy in Tanjore, Rao and Raghavan, Mysore, 1969, p.9.
2. Arasaratnam defines the boundaries of the Coromandel Coast with Ganjam in the north, Ceylon in the south and the Bay of Madura and Tuticorin. Arasaratnam, S., 'Coromandel Revisited : problems, and issues in Indian Maritime history', in Indian Economic and Social History Review, 26(1), 1989, pp.101-110.
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4. Swaminathan, V., Land, People and the Struggle : The Thanjavur Peasantry Under British Rule, 1799-1947, Rajapalayam, 2007, p.12.
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6. Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, Nijhoff, The Hague, 1962.; Arasaratnam, S., *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650-1740*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1986; Das Gupta, Ashin Das and Michael Naylor Pearson, (eds.), *India and the Indian Ocean 1500--1800*, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, New York, 1987, p.56.
7. *Neue Hallesche Berichte*, (NHB) 11. St., 1420 (description of 1743); the missionaries called these boats 'Sellingin'.
8. Arasaratnam, S., 'Factors in the rise, growth and decline of Coromandel ports circa 1650-1720', in Arasaratnam, S., *Maritime Trade, Society and European Influence in Southern Asia 1600-1800*, Variorum, Aldershot, 1995, p.72.
9. For South India at the beginning of the Seventeenth Century, Sanjay Subrahmanyam postulates a figure of 22 to 30 million inhabitants, concentrated mainly in the coastal area. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500-1650*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p.15. If one scales down the census figures of 1881 (2.13 million in Tanjore and 31.7 million in the entire Madras Presidency) and those of 1822 (13.5 million for the entire Presidency), one arrives at a figure of roughly one million inhabitants for the period around 1800. The devastating wars, especially in the second half of the Eighteenth Century, led to high population losses which Michael Mann estimates at around 400,000 inhabitants (40 per cent of the population). From this it is known that the population of Tanjore at the beginning of the Eighteenth Century was probably also around one million or a little less. . Maclean, C.D., *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency, Vol.I*. Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1996, 490f.
10. This calculation is based on the census of 1881. Maclean, C.D., *Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency, Vol. II*, p.126.
11. Rajayyan, K., *History of Madurai (1736-1801)*, Madurai University, Madurai, 1974, p.31f.
12. Subrahmanian, N., *Social and Cultural History of Tamilnad (A.D 1336AD 1984)*, Ennes Publications, Udumalpet. 1994, pp.54-55..
13. Vriddagirisani, V., *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, Annamalainagar, 1942, p.26..
14. Majumdar, R.C. (ed.), *The Mughal Empire*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1984, p. 272.
15. Today Mayiladuthurai.
16. Irfan Habib, *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire: Political and Economic Maps with Detailed Notes, Bibliography and Index*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996, p.65; Vriddhagirisani, V., *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, p. 165f.
17. The King of Tanjore is sovereign insofar as he has to pay a sizeable tribute every year to the Great Mogul—a payment that is said to amount to 3,33,333 Reichstaler annually. The Diwan, as the general of the Great Mogul, who administers the Mogul district adjacent to the Tanjore Kingdom further north on this coast, demands this payment annually.
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20. Rajayyan, K., *History of Madurai*, p.33f.
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