



TONDAIMANS AND THEIR RULE IN THE PRINCELY STATE OF PUDUKKOTTAI

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ABSTRACT:

The ancestors of the Pudukkottai ruling branch of the Tondaimans migrated from the Tondaimandalam region, the northernmost areas of the ancient Tamil kingdoms. They arrived with the Vijayanagar army fighting in the region in the early Seventeenth Century. It is likely that one of them was granted land by the local chieftain Pallavarayar and settled in the Karanmbakudi and Ambukkivil regions, becoming the chieftain of the area. He is later recognized as the ancestor of the Tondaiman ruling dynasty. According to legendary accounts found in the Telugu poem Tondaiman Vamsavali, written in 1750 by the Tondaiman court poet Venganna, the Pudukkottai Tondaimans belonged to Indira Vamsa, and the first chieftain to settle in Ambukkivil was named Pacchai Tondaiman. The inhabitants of the region belonged to the Kallar caste, known as the Tondaimans, and initially settled in the village of Ambukkivil. Towards the end of the Sixteenth Century, various areas of the Pudukkottai region were ruled by the Madurai and Tanjore Nayaks, the Ramanad Sethupatis, the Marungapuri and Manaparai Zamindars, and the Pudukkottai Pallavarayars. The Tondaimans most likely inherited the legacy of the Pallavarayars.



The Principality of Pudukkottai was established in 1750 by Vijiaya Rangunatha Tondaiman (1730-1769) through the unification of the Pudukkottai and Kolathur regions. The early rulers of the Tondaiman dynasty, through protectorate rights and kinship networks, laid the foundations of the Pudukkottai kingdom, which lasted until 1948. The state covered an area of 1,178 square miles (93,056 km²). Its greatest length in the east-west direction was 52 miles (84 km), and its greatest width in the north-south direction was 41 miles (66 km). It ranked third in importance among the five native states that had direct political ties to the Colonial Madras Government. As the only Tamil State on the peninsula, Pudukkottai remained the sole representative of the glorious era of the old Tamil kingdoms.

Key Words: Pudukkottai, Tondiaman, Darbar, Poligar, British, Kallar, Seshiah Sastri, S.Satyamurthi, Nawab, Arcot, Madras, Sirkil, Code.

Introduction:

As the Muhammadan rule of the Nawabs of Arcot began to wane in the face of the emerging British power, which was fiercely contested by the French¹, the Tondaiman chief readily aligned himself with the British cause and had since remained an adversary to their enemies and an ally to their friends. They were regarded as the third highest of the poligars of the Tamil Country, among the seventy-two who participated in the protection of the Madurai Fort under the rule of the Tirumalai Nayak in the mid-Seventeenth Century.² The Kallar caste Kings of Pudukkottai who formed a little kingdom in the Tamil Country which was then incorporated into the British Empire as a Native State.³ Under the Madras Presidency, there were five Princely States- Travancore, Cochin, Pudukkottai, Banganapalli and Sandur. The Pudukkottai Samasthanam was ruled by the Tondaiman Dynasty.⁴

Vijaya Rangunatha Tondaiman (1730-1769), Raya Rangunatha Tondaiman (1769-1789), and Raya Vijaya Rangunatha Tondaiman (1789-1807) actively engaged in the 'Carnatic wars'⁵, 'Anglo-Mysore wars'⁶, and Poligar wars⁷ by siding with the British. In recognition of their loyalty, the British granted them the tract of Kilanilai.⁸ Blackburne, the Resident at Tanjore and a capable administrator, acted as the guardian of the Rajah, Vijaya Rangunatha Tondaiman (1807-1825), who was only ten years old at the time.⁹ In 1812, the capital town of Pudukkottai was reconstructed following a fire outbreak. The attempt to evict certain *amarakarars* (militia members) from their lands by Anantaiya, the *Karyasia*, in 1814 was unsuccessful.¹⁰ In 1817, the Rajah was endowed with full powers.

Rangunatha Tondaiman, the subsequent ruler (1825-1839), was conferred the title 'His Excellency' in 1830.¹¹ He kept a reserve stock of paddy for public distribution. He showed a sincere interest in the welfare of ordinary citizens. His administration initiated the practice of adhering to British regulations that were appropriate for the local conditions of the state. The subsequent ruler, Raya Ramachandra Tondaiman, was a minor. So the Government was run by the *Foujdar*, *Sirkil* and other state high officials.¹² The British resident, Balley, submitted a negative report regarding the administration of the Pudukkottai state. A significant incident during his reign was the riots incited by Venkanna Servaikarar.¹³ As a result of these disturbances, the British intervened, diminishing the state's authority to a mere semblance.¹⁴ Moreover, there was a stalemate in the administration due to the animosity between the Rajah, the *Sirkil*, and the *Carbar*. The political agent, A.Hathaway, observed Brahmin dominance in the administration and emphasized the need to appoint non-Brahmins in the future.¹⁵ The political agent, Lee Moris, proposed in 1875 to relieve the Rajah of all administrative powers, but this suggestion was not accepted by the Madras Government.¹⁶

Land revenue formed the main source of the income of the State. Courts were established, and the Civil Procedure Code was adopted in 1859. Simultaneously, the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code were executed in 1868. In 1876, the Stamp Act and the registration of conveyance of immovable property were introduced. That same year, an Act for the establishment of a people's force was enacted.

In 1878, Seshiah Sastri was appointed as '*Sirkil*'. He is recognized as the architect of the 'Modern Pudukkottai State'. He expanded the town, constructed public buildings, and restored water tanks. He implemented measures to eliminate corruption in public offices and successfully increased the treasury's revenue.¹⁷ In 1856, the title, 'His Excellency' that had been granted to the Rajah was revoked, but it was reinstated as 'His Highness' in 1870.¹⁸ Seshiah Sastri's enthusiasm for the resumption of *imams* and the abolition of the Amani system which involved sharing crops between the state and the peasantry had significant long-term effects.¹⁹

At the time of Martanda Bairava Tondaiman's accession in 1886, he was merely eleven years old. During the Rajah's minority, Seshiah Sastri served as the 'Diwan Regent'. He retired upon the conclusion of the Regency in 1894, and was succeeded by R. Vedantacharlu as Diwan.²⁰ There were thirty-six water tanks in the town, of which thirteen were designated for drinking water.

The primary source of drinking water pond, Pudukkulam, was situated at the southeast end of the town. In 1902, an assembly of 30 nominated representatives was established. Following the recommendations of the Law Committee formed in 1904, an assembly comprising thirteen elected

members and seventeen nominated members was constituted on July 23rd, 1907. By 1916, the number of elected members increased from thirteen to twenty-five.

In 1908, drinking water taps were installed at the main street intersections. In 1915, with the introduction of a jewel filter, water was pumped to the northeast end, supplying the town's residents. Rainwater from the Machuvadi areat, located to the north of the State, flowed into the tanks, and any excess water was collected at the southern Kattupudukkulam for agricultural use on the southern side of the tank. Water conservation and careful usage were prioritized.

According to K.R. Venkatarama Ayyar, the administration of Vedantacharu was marked by a lack of control and weakness in financial management.²¹ The Rajah participated in the coronation of King George-V. The visit of Their Imperial Majesties allowed for the opportunity to remit certain minor taxes.²² During the Silver Jubilee of the Rajah, several benefits were granted, including the remission of the Village Karnam's Cess, commonly referred to as *kanakku vari*, which amounted to twenty-five thousand rupees for a duration of three years. Additionally, the Mohurteba tax on household trades and occupations, totaling five thousand rupees, along with a tax on bangle makers, also received remission. Throughout the First World War, the Princely State of Pudukkottai and its citizens generously contributed ²³ to the Allied cause.²⁴ The marriage of the Rajah to an Australian woman, Molly Fink in 1915, was not well received by the people. Although British and Indian public opinion agreed that such a marriage would not be considered orthodox and that any children born from it would have no right to the throne, Marthanda requested to abdicate in exchange for a pension following the alleged poisoning attempt in Pudukkottai and her prolonged stay in Australia.²⁵ Nicholas B. Dirks pointed out the irony of this situation; for the British had sought to distance the raja from zenana influence through his European education, thus paving the way for this marriage that separated the monarch from his state.²⁶ To appease the people, the Darbar offered the remission of *kanakku vari* and allocated one lakh rupees each for improvements in towns and villages. Facing an unfavourable situation, the Rajah chose to reside outside of India. The generous allowance of twenty lakhs of rupees from the state's surplus fund, along with another one lakh sixty thousand rupees from the marriage fund, was not appreciated by the public. In the Rajah's absence, the State was administered by Vijaya Regunatha Durai Raja as regent and Kunhunni Menon as the Diwan. In October 1923, the State came under the direct control of the Government of India through an agent to the Governor-General, with its headquarters located in Trivandrum.²⁷

The Rajah's choice to permanently live outside of India was met with astonishment in the State. The arrival of Sydney Tondaiman introduced another succession issue. The people was concerned that the British would select Sydney Tondaiman to govern their *Dharma Samasthanam*.²⁸ S.Satyamurthi, the political activist and a freedom fighter, urged the citizens not to recognize Sydney Tondaiman as their Rajah.²⁹ The local media, including *Janamithran* and *Desauliyan*, fueled anti-Rajah sentiments.³⁰ Satyamurthi asserted that Sydney Tondaiman was not a Hindu and therefore should not be permitted to rule the Hindu State. The Darbar launched prosecution against him and it issued a proclamation banning Satyamurthi from entering the State boundary.³¹ The Tamil version of his speech on this matter was published by *Desauliyan*, leading to the editor's exile from the State. Martanda Bairava Tondaiman passed away at the age of 53, in Paris on May 28th, 1928.³²

The Secretary of State for India informed Martanda Bairava Tondaiman that his son Sydney Tondiaman would not be recognized as the rightful heir for the throne of Pudukkottai. In 1928 A.D., the British government ultimately appointed Rajagopala Tondaiman, the cousin of Martanda Bairava Tondaiman (1928-1947) from the western palace Jahir as the ruler.³³ Since the new Raja was a minor, the administration was managed by Regent Sahib Vijaya Ragnatha Durai Raja. In 1929, a council of administration was established, comprising the British Administrator, the Diwan, and the Chief Justice as ex-officio members. On November 17th, 1931, the Council was abolished. B.G. Holdsworth became the Administrator in November 18, 1931 and he served till January 2nd, 1934. The direct participation of I.C.S. officials in the administration of Pudukkottai continued till the last British official Tottenham.³⁴ He passed away on December 13th, 1946. A spontaneous crowd, consisting of farmers, merchants, lawyers, clerks, students, and the king himself, from all over the Kingdom of Pudukkottai, accompanied

his coffin to the small cemetery of the town's protestant church.³⁵ The present-day Gandhi Park was originally named after him, as was a dam built at Kadayakkudi for irrigation purposes.³⁶ Satyamurthi, the freedom fighter, was labeled a seditionist due to his efforts to highlight the ruler's deficiencies.³⁷ The tranquility of the state was disrupted by the Andakulam riots, where the Kallars and Muslims clashed over agricultural waste. The Kannangudi dacoity was succeeded by town riots on July 15th, 1931³⁸, resulting in damage to public property amounting to Rupees Twenty-Two Thousand Six Hundred and Twenty-Four. These disturbances were suppressed with the assistance of the British military. The Darbar was unable to implement significant changes that would negatively impact the state's finances.³⁹

The severe economic depression and the Second World War resulted in immense hardships, including inflation, escalating prices, and a black market within the state. The Darbar was not particularly proactive regarding social reforms, such as allowing temple entry for the Harijans, promoting women's upliftment, or abolishing the Devadasi system. Throughout these tumultuous years, Sir Alexander Tottenham⁴⁰ managed the state with strict discipline, maintaining vigilance over the Indian freedom movement. Political activist Muthuswamy Vallatharasu championed the merger of the princely state of Pudukkottai with the Indian Union. The State willingly merged with the Indian Union in 1948.⁴¹

Land revenue was considered very important for running the State. Courts were established. The Civil Procedure Code was executed in 1859. The Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code came into practice in 1868. In 1876, the Stamp Act and the registration of immovable property conveyances were introduced. That same year, legislation for the establishment of a police force was enacted.⁴² In 1902, the Representative Assembly consisting of thirty nominated representatives was created.⁴³ Based on the recommendations of the Law Committee formed in 1904, an assembly with thirteen elected members and seventeen nominated members was established on July 23rd, 1907. By 1916, the number of elected members increased from thirteen to twenty-five.⁴⁴

The Legislative Council of Pudukkottai, presided over by the Dewan of the State, was established on September 29th, 1924. Out of the fifty members of the Council, thirty-five were elected, with one seat reserved for a woman and another for an Adi-Dravida.⁴⁵ A jail had already existed at Thirumayam fort since 1810, and a town jail was constructed in 1830. In 1889, a large new jail was built, and the Madras Jail Code was implemented in 1895.⁴⁶

Dewan Raghavaiah, who had a strong interest in the conservation of ancient monuments enacted a law in 1930 and raised municipal taxes in 1931. This decision led to significant public dissatisfaction.⁴⁷ On July 15th, 1931, riots erupted in the town, resulting in the looting of public offices. The jail was breached, the state treasury was vandalized, and the residences of Dewan Bahadur Raghavaiah and police officials were attacked. The Punjabi regiment from Tiruchirappalli intervened to suppress the riots and restore order. To avert the recurrence of such disturbances, a trained police force was established under Hume.⁴⁸

The Tondaimans maintained a military force since 1752, comprising 3,000 soldiers and 1,500 horses. However, by the Twentieth Century, the cavalry had dwindled to nineteen, while the infantry numbered 110, in addition to a state band of twenty-seven members.⁴⁹ A fully operational municipality was formed in 1912, and an eight-member council, including two elected representatives, took office in 1913. Subsequently, the town was divided into twelve wards. One elected representative was designated for each ward, in addition to three ex-officio members and one nominated non-official. The ex-officio members included the Chief Medical Officer, the state engineer, and the state *vakil* (lawyer).⁵⁰

Education was prioritized above all else. The first school was founded in 1813 by Vijayaragunatha Tondaiman. By 1848, numerous village schools had been established, along with thirteen missionary schools. In the same year, the State set up an English school. A number of vernacular schools were initiated in 1857, and the first group of students took the Matriculation examinations of the Madras University in 1880. To cater to the matriculates, a college was established in 1880.⁵¹ Free and compulsory elementary education was implemented in the State starting March 1st, 1908.⁵²

Sri Seshiah Sastri played a key role in founding the Marthanda Industrial School of Arts and Engineering in 1891. The industrial schools were initiated in Pudukkottai. However, the institutions at Thirumaiyan, Keeranur, and Alangudi were unsuccessful and were shut down in 1909. Recognizing the significance of vocational education, Sri Vijayaragunatha Dorairaja opened a school for agriculture in 1896, which included a dairy farm. Although this school was closed in 1899, it was reopened in 1911.⁵³

For the Sowrashtta a community in the State, a dyeing and weaving school was established in 1910 for the benefit of that community people at Thiruvapur⁵⁴ in 1910. A music school was started and musical instruments were provided. But the effort did not yield the expected result due to a lack of interest.

The introduction of the road transport system led to enhancements in transport facilities. Railway lines were constructed, and rail transport commenced on Tiruchirappali- Pudukkottai section on April 17th, 1929 and Pudukkottai-Manamadurai on July 1st, 1930.⁵⁵ The Tondaimans were deeply religious, with all Saivite and Vaishnavite temples being actively maintained.⁵⁶ Mostly the Tondaimans followed the Hindu faith but they showed their religious tolerance. The Muslims constructed the Darga of Hazrat Shah Parhezi Auila in Pudukkottai in the early Eighteenth Century.⁵⁷ In 1905, the Protestants of the Swedish Mission established a church⁵⁸, followed by the Catholics of Pudukkottai who built another church in 1911.⁵⁹ Individuals of various religious backgrounds coexisted in harmony and friendship. Naturally, there were instances of conversions to different faiths.

The Public Offices building, featuring two towers that rose to 102 feet, along with the Rajah's College, the town hall, three hospitals catering to both men and women, the new palace designed and constructed by Nilakanta Sastri, and the state museum founded in 1909⁶⁰, are significant landmarks of the town.

Household establishments were essential for the succession of leadership and the ritual ceremonies that represented the unique status of the ruler. Consequently, most state administrations maintained either a formal or informal department dedicated to household affairs. This department had a wide array of responsibilities, including the management and construction of forts, palaces, and hunting lodges, as well as overseeing the zenana of the ruler's female relatives. It also organized private ceremonies, such as life cycle rituals associated with birth, marriage, and death, and managed public events, particularly visits from imperial patrons. British officials often viewed this department as a source of intrigue and corruption. It is ironic that the colonial government was highly critical of princely spending on both public and private life ceremonies. These rituals were crucial for reinforcing and extending princely claims to authority within their states, among their clan members, and with fellow princes, thus playing a vital role in the preservation of princely authority. The expenditures of Raja Ramachandra Tondaiman of Pudukkottai required approval from the local British authorities. For instance, they rejected a request for Rs.10,000 for his puberty rites in 1867 but approved Rs.20,000 in 1870 for the ruler to participate in a reception for the Duke of Edinburgh.⁵⁶

To conclude, the Tondaiman rulers were able to attain legitimacy by adhering to established norms of royal conduct. Following models documented as early as the *Arthashastra*, the Tondaimans of Pudukkottai facilitated the resolution of disputes among castes and various social and religious groups. The Tondaimans played a significant role in resolving caste disputes, thereby securing political power in defining caste boundaries. The British census further solidified a hierarchy among castes and addressed the claims of caste groups to specific statuses. This activity was not confined to Hindu groups. The Tondaiman rulers of the Eighteenth Century employed every possible strategy to harmonize diverse interest groups and associated valuable allies and client communities with their regimes.

Further south, in 1803, an example emerged of how timely assistance to the British created anomalies in the treaty map. When the British took over the administrative authority of their former ally, the Nawab of Arcot, in 1801, they asserted sovereignty over his minor vassals, the poligars. The implementation of the Permanent Settlement in the Madras Presidency legally changed the poligars as zamindars. The zamindars were given much rights in the increase of land production but were compelled to pay regular taxes to the British. In this respect, the only poligar from the Tamil Country

was able to escape from this bounden duty was Tondaiman of Pudukkottai. He had provided military aid from 1751 until his final campaign against Mysore and had very little need for supplies. The absence of a treaty or *sanad* defining the status of Pudukkottai illustrated the accidental process of the inclusion of Indian political units into the British treaty map. When the Tondaimans in Pudukkottai requested certain honors bestowed upon them by the Nawab, the British allowed them to bring, along with a white umbrella and golden chubdar staffs—symbols of Hindu sovereignty—a fort and land that the Raja of Tanjore had seized years earlier. The British demanded an elephant annually as a token of respect for their rule, but the Tondaiman ruler avoided this tribute until he was exempted in 1839. In this way, the British demonstrated their willingness to utilize both local honours and imported treaties, particularly when dealing with states considered insignificant.

Far to the south, in 1803, an instance emerged demonstrating how prompt support to the British led to irregularities in the treaty map. When the British took over the administrative authority of their long-time ally, the Nawab of Carnatic, at Arcot in 1801, they asserted control over his minor tributaries, known as poligars. The Permanent Settlement of 1803 in the Madras Presidency converted these poligars into zamindars, granting them significant rights over agricultural produce while imposing regular revenue responsibilities to the British. The sole Tamil poligar to evade this transformation was located in Pudukkottai. He had provided both military support and essential supplies from 1751 until their final campaigns against Mysore. The absence of any treaty or *sanad* that defined the status of Pudukkottai highlighted the erratic process of integrating Indian political entities into the British treaty framework. When Pudukkottai requested certain honors previously granted by the Nawab, the British permitted him to possess a white umbrella and gold chubdar sticks—Hindu symbols of sovereignty carried before him—along with a fort and a distinct territory that had been seized by the Rajah of Tanjore years earlier. The British required one elephant annually as a token of homage for this arrangement, but the Tondaiman ruler managed to avoid this tribute until it was waived in 1839. Consequently, the British displayed a readiness to engage in the local currency of honors as well as their imported form of treaties, particularly when states were considered insignificant.

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