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MADURAI COUNTRY, MADURAI TEMPLE AND MADURAI FORT IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY- A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Madurai Country was ruled by the Nawab of Carnatic in the Eighteenth Century. At that times, the invaders made the Madurai Fort and Madurai Temples especially Meenakshi Sundaeswarar Temple and Koodal Azhagar Temples as their target of attack. At one occasion, the idols of these temples were safely sheltered at Manamaduri. It was to escape from the attack of the invaders. Any how, the invaders like Kuku Sahib of Mysore, Mayana and Haidar Ali plundered the Madurai City and taken away its wealth. Even the structures of the temples were destroyed. The rise of Yusuf Khan (Khan Sahib) saved the situation from the invaders and the temple lands were restored to the seven temples in Madurai. Almost law and order was restored. After the execution of Yusuf Khan, the administration over the Madurai Country gradually passed into the hands of British since 1781. At last, the British through the Carnatic Treaty of 1801, brought the entire Carnatic Subha including Madurai Country under their direct administration. Madurai was made one of the districts of the Madras Presidency



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KEYWORDS: Madurai, British, French, Nayak, Nawab, Arcot, Carnatic, Temple, Fort, Country, Treaty, Kingdom, Chanda Saheb, Yusuf Khan

INTRODUCTION

The interval between the end of the Nayak Kingdom and the cession of Madurai to the British in 1801 A.D. is a chequered period in the history of Madurai. For a major part of this period about 60 years, Madurai was under the nominal rule Nawabs of Carnatic.

After the death of Minakshi in about 1739-1740 A.D. the Nayak Kingdom of Madurai came to an end and for a few years Chanda Sahib was all-powerful in the Madurai Country. Chanda Saheb strengthened the defences of Trichinopoly. He appointed his two brothers Buda Saheb and Saduck Saheb, as the governors of Madurai Dindigul respectively. The Madurai Sthalavaralaru says that on that Chanda Saheb and Budda Saheb had taken the fort of Dindigul, Bangaru Tirumala Nayak's son Vijayakumara Mutthu Tirumala Nayak and the Setupati vassal Dalavay Servaikarar, along with the stalattar and attendants left Madurai for Manamadurai in 1739 taking with them the Gods Minakshi Sundaeswara and Koodal Azhagar. The Setupati made provisions for the pujas and for the shelter of the temple servants. For a period of two ears they remained under his protection.¹

Meanwhile Bangaru Tirumala and the king of Tanjore who had suffered defeat at the hands of Chanda Saheb, asked the Marathas for help. The Marathas came to the south with a large army under the command of Raghoji Bhonsle, early in 1740, and defeated and killed the Nawab of Arcot in the pass of Damalceruvu in North Arcot.

Then they retired for a time. At the end of the same year, the Marathas suddenly reappeared and besieged Chanda Saheb in Trichinopoly. They defeated and killed his two brothers who advanced to his aid from Madurai and Dindigul.² After three months Chanda Saheb surrendered and was taken captive to Satara, Setting aside the claims of Bangaru Tirumala, the Marathas left Morari Rao of Gooty the governor in charge of the conquered kingdom. Morari Rao remained there for a bout two years till about 1743 when the Nizam re-established his control over the Carnatic, Thus between 1740 and 1743 there was a brief Maratha interlude in the history of Madurai. The Madurai Sthalavaralgru says that Morari Rao sent Appaji Nayak to Madurai with 2000 horses. To restore temple worship in Madurai, Appaji Nayak went to Vanaraviramadurai to bring back the idols which had remained in the safe custody of the Setupati. In 1741 he returned to Madurai along with the temple servants and restored the pujas festivals and villages as of old.

In August 1743 the Marathas retired from the south and by March 1744 the Nizam of Hyderabad had reasserted his control over the Carnatic and had appointed Anwar-ud-din Khan as the Nawab of Arcot. The whole of Madurai also came under the sway of the Nawab of Arcot who ruled the country with the help of his two sons, Mahfuz Khan and Muhammad Ali. The Madurai Sthalavaralaru says that the brothers ruled Madurai for a period of ten years.

In 1748 Anwar-ud-din Khan, the Nawab of Arcot, was killed in battle of Ambur. His son Muhammad Ali and Chanda Saheb were rival claimants to throne and the fierce contest which broke out between them is commonly known as the Carnatic Wars. Madurai did not play any part in these wars. But Muhammad Ali who had many followers in the Madurai Country was a British protégé, as a result which the Carnatic Wars led to an increasing influence of the British in the Madurai Country.

In 1751 Alam Khan, the brother-in-law of one Mayana and a former employee of Chanda Saheb, marched through the country of the Tondaimans, took possession of the fort of Madurai, and for a year ruled as far as the Tiruvadi Rajya (Travancore). He acknowledged Chanda Saheb as his sovereign. The loss of Madurai Country was a serious one to Muhammad Ali since it constituted more than one half of his dominions. Hence he sent Captain Cope in 1751 to recover the city of Madurai.

The defences of Madurai were underestimated by the British and by the Nawab of Arcot. For three months from February to April, Captain Cope, though ill-equipped, made a brave attempt to scale the walls where his army had made a breach. The attackers, however, found that the damages were quickly repaired and the defence put up in such a vigorous manner and with such ingenuity that they had to abandon the attempt.³

After ruling for a year, Alam Khan went to Trichinopoly leaving his relation Mayana as the Governor of Madurai, and one Nabhi Khan in charge of Tirunelveli. With regard to the events from 1751 to 1753, the Madurai Sthalavaralaru gives a detailed description. Mayana sold the Madurai fort to the Mysoreans and left for Tirumohur. Then Kuku Saheb of Mysore entered the Madurai fort in 1752. On hearing this, Vellaiyan Servaikkarakar, the Setupati's vasal talakarittam (commander) and Tandavaraya Pillai, the vasal pradhani of Udaiya Tevar (Zamindar of Sivagangai), came with a large army and besieged Madurai. After holding out for a few months, Kuku Saheb handed over the fort to the Setupati as a result of arbitration and left for Dindigul.⁴ Then Vellaiyan Servaikkarakar and Tandavaraya Pillai entered the fort of Madurai, opened up the temples, and restored worship and services. Since Kuku had slaughtered cows, cut down trees and done other such brutal acts during the siege, they ordered the necessary purificatory ceremonies to be done to the seven temples. Since the kingdom was without a ruler they sent for Bangaru Tirumala's son Vijayakumara Muthu Tirumala who had taken refuge in Vellaikkurichi, had him crowned king in 1752 in the sanctum of the Goddess Meenakshi and invested with the scepter. Vijayakumara ruled for eighteen months. Then Mayana, Mahadimiya and Nabhi Khan drove out the ruler to Vellaikkurichi and captured Madurai fort and country. As usual they captured the temple lands, destroyed the trade of the merchants, the gardens and the tanks. Kuku Saheb

and Vellaiyan Servaikkarakam camped at Panaiyur for six months and besieged the fort. However, Mayana drove them off and killed both of them in the affray. Thus Mayana remained in possession of Madurai fort and country till 1754.

Early in 1755 Muhammad Ali sent Col. Heron on an military expedition against Madurai to reduce the country to obedience. Yusuf Khan, one of the Company's officers, was in charge of 2000 sepoy. Since Mayana who had neglected the defences Madurai had already fled for refuge to the temple of Kovilkudi (Tirumohur), the sepoy under Yusuf Khan easily entered the city of Madurai. Col. Heron pursued Mayana who, however, managed to escape from Kovilkudi. Heron made the mistake of plundering the temple for which he paid dearly in an attack by the Kallars as he was passing through the Nattam pass, 20 miles away from Madurai.⁵

Before leaving Madurai, Col. Heron placed Mahfuz Khan, elder brother of Muhammad Ali, in charge of the administration of Madurai, But Mahfuz Khan proved a total failure as a ruler and there were many risings. When Barukkudilla, a relation of Mahfuz Khan, was in charge of Madurai⁶ a Muslim fakir attempted to erect a flag staff on top of the Rayagopura. The temple Officials, the city merchants and all the people gathered together and tried to persuade him to give up these activities but the fakir refused to get down from the gopura. Then temple officials closed the gates of the four gopuras and remained outside the temple.⁷

In 1756 Yusuf Khan was sent to the south to restore order. He reached Madurai in April and found that the garrison, the defences and the stores were in greatest disorder.⁸ By July of the same year things seemed tranquil enough and Yusuf Khan went to Tirunelveli and Mahfuz Khan proceeded to Madurai. As soon as he reached Madurai his cavalry force, headed by the governor of the town, surrounded his house and demanded their arrears of pay. The brother of Muhamad Barki who was the son-in-law of Nabi Khan, entered the fort with 2,000 Kallars. . Hearing these, Yusuf Khan marched to Madurai, and encamped near Tirupparankunram. Since he felt that his army was not strong enough to storm the place he sent for Captain Caillaud who was at Trichinopoly to come to his aid. Caillaud tried negotiations with the rebels but failed.

Then a desultory war began. In May 1757 Captain Caillaud made an attempt at scaling the walls but was unsuccessful. The enemy who was alerted began to shower on the whole party arrows, stones, lances and the shot of fire-arms. Caillaud ordered the retreat but in July renewed the attack at the same place. The few who managed to scramble up the breach to the rampart were immediately tumbled down dead or mortally wounded. Those who mounted afterwards came down without getting to the top. Besides the shower of other annoyance, the enemy had prepared bags and pipkins filled with mere powder, to which they set fire as they tossed them down on the heads of the assailants and the scorch of the explosion was inevitable and intolerable.⁹ At last, Caillaud ordered the retreat Caillaud's own opinion about the affair is summed up in his remark thus : "made a breach, attacked it and got a damnable drubbing."¹⁰

Eventually there were negotiations and on the 8th September the City of Madurai was given up to Caillaud on his paying the rebel Rs. 1,70,000 which was sanctioned by the Madras Government.¹¹

The capture of Madurai did not lead to the complete restoration of order. There was the question of the efficient administration of the province. Disturbances still continued in many parts of the Madurai Country. At this time Haidar Ali of Mysore who invaded the Madurai Country, towards the end of 1757, marched from Dindigul and took the fort of Solavandan, He spent several days under the walls of the city of Madurai but did not attack it since he found it to be much stronger than he had expected. He plundered the Madurai Country round about. Then he was beaten back by Yusuf Khan.

Yusuf Khan made arrangements for the restoration of the temple lands to the seven temples. Purificatory ceremonies performed and pujas and services were restored. Around 12,000 pon was given for the annual expenses of the temple. The fakir's nisan was pulled down and he was driven beyond the walls of the town.

Yusuf Khan was able to reduce the country and restore some semblance of order but whenever he was absent there was disorder and anarchy. In April 1759 Yusuf Khan was sent back to the Madurai Country. Both Madurai and Tirunelveli were rented out to him for an annual sum of Rs, 5 lakhs. Soon he

reduced the kallars and the Poligars¹² and restored order. Yusuf Khan was appointed the renter of Madurai contrary to the wishes of the Nawab of Arcot. The British repeatedly tried to persuade the Nawab to confirm Yusuf Khan in the rentership but the Nawab Muhamad Ali was highly reluctant and unwilling to continue Yusuf Khan in the management of the Madurai country. In January 1762 the Nawab agreed to let Yusuf Khan have the rentership for nine lakhs, Though the British informed Yusuf Khan that he should pay the rents to Nawab he continued to make the payments to the British since he distrusted the Nawab and did not like the position of being a servant of the Nawab.

Shortly afterwards Yusuf Khan threw off his allegiance to the British and the Nawab and began to collect troops. In February the British first heard of Yusuf Khan's public declaration that allied with the French. He had also hoisted French colours on his forts and hauled down the British colours.¹³

In August 1763 a strong force was sent by the British under Preston to put down the rebellious Yusuf Khan. After taking the forts of Tiruvadavur and Tirumohur, Preston came in sight of Madurai on the 28th August 1763 and found Yusuf Khan's army outside the walls and the French colours as well as those of Yusuf Khan flying over the walls.¹⁴

In September the British began their siege of the fort of Madurai. Col. Monson who attacked Madurai in 1763 A.D. was repulsed in his first attempt at reconnoitering. Besides, the cavalry and Kallars of Yusuf Khan made it difficult to approach near enough to the town to begin the siege works. The great extent of glacis and esplanade made it impossible for the British to fix their camp nearer than three miles. Nor could they ground for the trenches closer than 12 or 1500 yards.¹⁵ But when they cut trenches and began operations they had to cross a ditch which Monson, after repeated reconnoitering, thought was impossible to cross. So in October he withdrew his forces from Madurai. Thus ended the first siege of Madurai, undertaken in almost absolute ignorance of the difficulties of the undertaking and though the failure was attributed to lack of ammunition there was no basis for it. Indeed, the ability and strength of Yusuf Khan was grievously underrated.¹⁶

The siege of Madurai was recommenced by Major Campbell in February 1764. Yusuf Khan had made great additions to the fort and had outposts to a considerable distance. Though the British made many attempts to breach the walls and scale them they were repulsed every time and while the siege was thus hanging on, Marchand, the French Commander under Yusuf Khan, rebelled and treacherously handed over the brave Muslim General into the hands of the British on the night of 14th October 1764 and on 15th October 1764, Yusuf Khan was hanged.¹⁷ Thus ended the protracted siege of Madurai and treachery succeeded over valour.

After the death of Yusuf Khan the revenue administration of Madurai was carried on for about six years by one Abiral Khan Sahib. Thereafter a number of persons successively administered the Madurai country till the final cession to the British 1801. In 1781 A.D. the revenues of the district of Madurai were assigned to the British by the Nawab of Arcot and a "Receiver of Revenue" was appointed. The first Receiver sent to Madurai was George Proctor who was virtually the first Collector.¹⁸ In 1783 he was succeeded by Eyles Irwin.¹⁹

In order to restore order before efficient administration could be carried on, Colonel Fullarton undertook an expedition against Madurai Country in 1783 A.D. He subdued the Poligars of Melur and Sivangangai and then went to Tirunelveli where most of the fighting took place.²⁰

In 1785 the assignment of the revenues was given back to the Nawab of Arcot²¹ but again resumed by the British in 1790. A Board of Assumed Revenue was set up and Collectors were appointed for the various districts.²² Alexander McLeod became the Collector of Dindigul in 1790. The collector of Dindigul was appointed Collector of the whole region after the acquisition of the Madurai District.²³ In 1792, according to the terms of the Treaty of Mangalore which concluded the Third Mysore War, the province of Dindigul was ceded to the British.²⁴

In 1801 when a junior member of the family, named Azim-ud-Doula was raised to the Nawabship of Arcot, the British entered into an agreement with him. By this he handed over to the British in perpetuity the sole and exclusive administration of the Civil and Military Governments of all the territories and dependencies of the Carnatic. In this way, the whole of the Madurai District, along with the rest of the Carnatic was ceded to the British and the British established their power in

Madurai.²⁵ In 1801, the Government issued an order which paved the way for the appointment of Hurdis, the Collector of the whole reorganized Madurai District.²⁶

Thus Madurai Country gained a special significance in the Eighteenth Century Tamil Nadu. The fertility of the Madurai Country and the wealth of its temples attracted the Maratha, Muslim and British invaders. As the fort of Madurai was impregnable, the invaders suffered much to scale the walls of the fort. Even though Yusuf Khan was the commander of the British, he checked the plundering activities of the invaders from Mysore. He even restored the temple lands and properties to the concerned temples. However, he was unable to tackle the onward march of the British and he sacrificed his life for the treachery of his commander Marchand. The suppression of the rebels and poligars, the British were able to assume their power in Madurai Country and when they started their administration they changed the Madurai Country as Madurai District.

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