



THE PADIKAVAL SYSTEM – A PRECURSOR TO THE MODERN POLICE SYSTEM IN THE PRINCELY STATE OF PUDUKKOTTAI

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ABSTRACT

Before the establishment of British influence in the Princely State of Tondaimans of Pudukkottai, Padikaval System was in operation throughout the State. Padikavalkars became a power to reckon with in their areas of control. Specifically in the non-Poligar tracts of the State they were highly independent, powerful and extraordinarily influential. A few of them even had their own fortifications and armed retainers and supported the cause of the Tondaimans of the Pudukkottai. At a lower level, the developmental process of becoming a little king probably included certain Kavalkars.

In political structure of the Tondaiman Kingdom, the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries was a collection of numerous domains, those of Kavalkars and warrior chiefs of various designation. In this paper, an attempt has been made to highlight some fundamental features of the Padikaval System as existed in the Princely State of Pudukkottai and also focus on the circumstances which paved the way for the eclipse of this system. A long-established system in the State reached its conclusion in the early years of the Nineteenth Century, primarily due to the indifference of the British towards the Kavalkars, who backed the Poligars in their fight against the imperialist British authority.



KEYWORDS: Padikaval, Desakaval, Kudikaval, Kavalkars, Kallars, Idayars, Princely State of Pudukkottai State, British, Criminal Tribes.

INTRODUCTION

In ancient times, there was no regular police system as in modern times. The people of the villages possessed a system to safeguard themselves from theft and other wrongdoings either by aliens or by the natives. That system in the Princely State of Pudukkottai was known as 'Padikaval system'. The Padikaval system was one in which a few persons were nominated by gentlemen's agreement as guards for policing duty to protect their agricultural crops and the property of the villagers. These guards known as 'Kavalkars' were employed from the warrior community in Pudukkottai region on account of their ability. This 'Padikaval' system existed in Tamil Country especially in Pudukkottai

region, as 'Kudikaval' system in Madurai District and 'Desakaval' system in Tirunelveli District. The Maravars and Kallars who constituted the Thevar community were engaged in *Kaval* duty in Pudukkottai, Tiruchirappalli, Madurai, Ramnanthapuram and Tirunelveli Districts.¹ Koravars in Salem District, Padayachis and Veppur Parayas in the Northern Districts of Tamil Nadu were engaged in the Kaval system. In Madurai, Ramnad, and Pudukkottai, the Kallars, a sub-caste of the Thevar Community, were employed for this *Kaval* duty.

This was because the people of other communities such as Idayars or Konars considered that the Kallars were from the martial clans and they were brave enough to face difficult situations and would be able to solve problems during and after theft. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that some of the Kallars were also engaged in robbery and such other anti-social activities as they felt that it was adventurous. The Kallars and Maravars often gained their political power as well as right to shares of the harvest and eventually their direct control over land by providing *Padikkaval* duties.²

Under these circumstances the Kallars were employed as *Kavalkars* (Guards) by the people of certain villages. The object of the system began to lose its importance due to the indiscipline and the negligence of their duty by *Kavalkars*. Besides this, the British also decided to control the obnoxious activities of the Kallars in the Pudukkottai region. Hence, the *Padikaval* system began to decline from the nineteen twenties. An attempt has been made in this paper to trace the characteristic features of *Padikaval* system in the Princely State of Pudukkottai, why it declined, and also the steps taken by the British Government to make the *Padikaval* system ineffective.

The word '*Padi*' means 'Village' and the word '*Kaval*' means 'Watch'. Hence, '*Padikaval*' means 'Guarding of Village' or 'Village Watch'. The people who were engaged in the work of watching the village were called as '*Kavalkars*' (Security guards). *Padikaval* means a system of watch and ward of a village by a set of people on payment annually by the residents of the villages.³ If *Kavalkars* failed to recover the stolen property, they had to reimburse it from their income.⁴ According to Mohamed Abdul Ghani the prevailing system was called *Padikaval* "under which the *Kavalkars* received fees and free lands for undertaking to protect the property of the villagers against theft or to restore an equivalent in value for anything lost".⁵

Method of Padikaval System

The system of *Padikaval* (protection) was based on patrolling. In a village supposed the *Kavalkars* were twelve in number, they divided themselves into two or three groups and did their patrolling of the village in rotation. However, they had collective responsibility of all incidents. The number of *Padikavalkars* in a village depended on the size of the village. But, generally, six to eight members were constituted and they engaged themselves in the *Kaval* system. One of them would act as the nominal head of the *Kavalkars* and he was responsible for theft or other such activity relating to the *Padikaval* system.⁶

Mode of Payment

The *Kavalkars* were provided with some *inam* (free) land in each village and also they received some amount of grains as fees during the harvest season for ensuring the safety of crops against petty thefts.⁷ They had the right to collect allowances and duties such as '*Mara*',⁸ '*Wartanah*',⁹ '*Moolvis*',¹⁰ '*Pagodas*'¹¹ and '*Fusugui*'¹² The collection might be either in kind or in *pagodas*.¹³ However, if a travelling bullock with merchandise crossed the *Padikaval* village, where a halt was made, the *Kavalkar* usually demanded the *Kaval* fees and those should be paid, if not, the bullock would certainly be lost.¹⁴

Working of the System

The *Kavalkars* of Pudukkottai region had their headquarters at prominent places to meet the exigencies of the situation.¹⁵ They had their main source of income through the *Padikaval* system. They had to protect the villagers and their properties from theft either by their fellow caste men or from

others. In course of time, the *Kaval* system extended throughout the State and to the borders of the neighbouring districts, and the *Kavalkars* who had migrated to the various parts of the district had become the hereditary *Kavalkars* of that area.¹⁶ Thereby, the *Padikaval* system extended throughout Pudukkottai State.

In a village, if anyone had lost their assets like goat, bullock etc., they reported to the head of the *Kavalkar* and asked him to recover it. Immediately, an agreement was signed between the victim and the Head *Kavalkar*, who usually dealt with the recovery of lost items. As per the provisions of the agreement, if the *Kavalkar* recovered the lost property, the owner of the property had to give certain percentage of value of the lost property to the *Kavalkar*. But, if the *Kavalkars* failed to recover it, they had to reimburse the original value of the stolen property from their income.¹⁷

The *Kaval* system functioned well so long as there was no complain of theft. Whenever a theft occurred in the village, the people expected the *Kavalkars* to restore the lost property. Sometimes, when the *Kavalkars* failed to discover the lost property, problems arose. In some cases, the *Kavalkars* refused to reimburse the original value of lost property as per the agreement. At this juncture, the issue became critical and faith in the *Kavalkars* and their system of work declined. Besides, when the victims started to pressurize the *Kavalkars* in desperation, the *Kavalkars* started threatening such people through various methods. For instance, they began to take the cattle away from their houses. They also set fire to the houses of victims or to their haystacks and even to their agricultural fields which were to be harvested.¹⁸

These activities of the *Kavalkars* hurt the villagers. The *Kavalkars*, who were pressurized, induced the other *Kavalkars* who were residing in the nearby villages to steal the property of the other castemen of the village which was under their *Kaval* System.¹⁹ Among the villagers, the Idayars were mostly the victims.²⁰ Since the Idayars had cattle as their property, cattle lifting with the connivance of the *Kavalkars* were quite common.²¹ As a result, the Idayars and other community people had to depend wholly upon Kallars who were supposed to be *Kavalkars*.

In order to recover their lost property, the Idayars and other castes approached the *Kavalkar* and agreed to give him a certain percentage of the value of the property, if it was recovered. As per the secret plan of the *Kavalkars* and their caste brethren from nearby villages the stolen property would be returned to the Idayars and the *Kavalkar* would share the agreed amount. This method was known as '*tuppu kooli*' or 'Clue Hire'.²² Though the victims knew this drama, they could not disclose it due to fear.

Anti - Kavalkar Movement

The suffering of Idayars in the hands of the *Kavalkar* system on various occasions reached its culmination. In a village, a *Kavalkar* had enticed a woman and her daughter from the Idayar community and kept both of them under his protection. The news of this incident spread widely. Immediately, the Idayars from this region gathered and held a meeting to wipe out the *Kavalkars* in that area.²³ The Idayars or Konars wanted to dominate the people in that area. Since the *Kaval* system of Kallars was a hindrance to their well-being and their domination, it was viewed that they invigorated their fellow Idayars to revolt against *Kaval* system. Further, it was also known that the *Kaval* system was a formidable challenge to the British Police system. Hence the British and irritated a few Christian Missionaries kept silence when riots took place between Kallars and Konars.²⁴ Besides, the villagers decided and took an oath to disband the Kallar *Kavalkar* system and to appoint *Kavalkars* or watchmen from among themselves.²⁵ They also regulated this *Kaval* system by extending mutual assistance to the nearby villages. As per this arrangement, every village was provided with a horn and the people were expected to blow the horn at the time of theft. On hearing this horn, every one in the nearby villages was required to hasten to this place to apprehend the thief. This alternate village *Kaval* system was at first successfully tried in this region.²⁶ Later on it was followed in some of the villages in this region. But

this system was found to be a success temporarily. Nevertheless, it was the first blow struck against the *Padikaval* system.²⁷

Collapse of Padikaval System

Among the various causes for the decline of the *Padikaval* system, the anti-*Kavalkar* movement in the Pudukkottai State was one. Obviously, the system was alright so long as nothing was stolen, and the services rendered by the *Kavalkars* were found satisfactory by the inhabitants of the villages. But, in the long run, it did not yield expected result. Whenever movable property was stolen or missed, the people expected that it was the bounden responsibility of the *Kavalkars* to recover and hand over the lost to them. When the *Kavalkars* failed to restore it, the people realized that they were tired of paying fees for the services not rendered by them.²⁸

As per the agreement between the *Kavalkar* and victims, the *Kavalkar* had to reimburse the equal value of the lost property. When the *Kavalkar* failed to oblige the agreement and decline to reimburse the amount of loss, the issue raised its ugly head. The villagers lost their faith in the *Padikaval* system. Again, when the villagers realised that all the thefts in the village took place only with the connivance of the *Kavalkars* by means of *Tuppukooli* method, they tried to get rid of the system and to find an alternative arrangement.²⁹

For a long period, the *Padikaval* system was a notable profession of the Kallars of this region. Since the earlier times, the Kallars who were part of the Kaval system and they were most efficient and honest and so the system was welcomed. In course of time, the successors of the *Kavalkars* were found incapable and incompetent when compared to their forefathers either to catch the thief or to recover stolen property. Hence, the system began to decline. Above all, the modern means of transport also had helped the thief, to escape. The *Kavalkars* found it difficult to catch thieves as their forefathers had been able to do.

The Poligars emerged as the most important loci of locality rule in the Tamil Country following the collapse of the great Chola Empire in the Thirteenth Century.³⁰ When the southern part of Tamil Country was under the authority of the Vijayanagara Empire, Viswavanatha Nayak became the Nayak of Madurai and it was he who accepted the Poligar system and reinvigorated it by which the territories were subdivided into many small divisions.³¹ Each division was entrusted to his trusted chieftains. Later on, they had to give protection to the pilgrims from robbery and murder. They instituted a new system of police called '*Desakaval*'³² as an alternative to *Padikaval*. Through *Desakaval*, a small band of people was constituted to enforce law and order. Thus, the *Padikaval* system became insignificant due to the introduction of the *Desakaval* system. As the British and the Tondaimans of Pudukkottai rose to prominence, they recognized the threat posed by the *Padikaval* system. Consequently, they promoted other subordinate groups, such as the Konars and Nadars, to take on kaval responsibilities similar to those held by the Kallars and Maravars. When riots took place between the Kallars and other communities occurred, the British established a number of police stations to make the *Kaval* system ineffective.³³

Abolition of Padikaval System

In 1801, after the Poligar revolts, the Tamil Country was annexed by the British Government and the Pudukkottai State continued to become a loyal State to the British.³⁴ From then onwards, the Kallars became continuous trouble creators to the authorities and even committed non-bailable crimes. Hence, the British wanted to put an end to the *kaval* system in this region through various measures. With an intention to nullify this *kaval* system, they began to monitor the activities of the Kallar *Kavalkars*. The Kallars were so active and dangerous with their *kaval* system that they were ready to sacrifice themselves for retaining their hereditary right.³⁵ So, the British planned to check the movement of the Kallars and keep them under surveillance. However, this setup failed to check the activities of Kallars as *Kavalkars*.³⁶

After being identified under section 3 of the Criminal Tribes Act of 1911, the Kallars were pronounced as the Criminal Tribes in 1914.³⁷ As a result, they were subject to section 10(b) of the Act, which dealt with notifying people of a change of abode. Later, under this Act, a few Kallars from different areas were also listed as Criminal Tribes.³⁸ Subsequently some Kallars of various regions were also notified as Criminal Tribes under this Act.³⁹ Later in 1917, section 10 (a) of the Act of 1911 was also applied which compelled every registered Kallar to report himself at fixed intervals and inform his place of residence, and any change or intended change of residence and any absence or intended absence from his residence.⁴⁰ As a result of the effective implementation of the counter measures, the *Kaval* system in general and *Padikaval* system in particular began to disappear.

The *Padikaval* system had functioned as quasi-police in early days. It was in operation from the time of the formation of the village community itself in Pudukkottai and it was empowered in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century. The path of the decline of this system was coincided with the influence of the British influence over the domain of the Tondaiman Kings of Pudukkottai in the Eighteenth Century.⁴¹ Further, due to the decline of the efficiency of *Kavalkars*, and incompetent successors, villages lost faith in the *Padikaval* system. In the long run, the law protectors *Kavalkars* became the law-breakers. They themselves started robbing, instigating their fellow castemen to steal items and property to take revenge on the victims. Consequently, the *Padikaval* system started to decline. At last, the British Authority put an end to the *kaval* system by initiating administrative and legislative measures.⁴² In 1802, the *Desakaval* system was abolished and in 1816 the *Kudikaval* system was also brought to an end. The indigenous *kaval* system was replaced by new police machineries established by the British. In 1859, the modern police system based on the British and Irish model was introduced.⁴³ Dr. S.Renukadevi state that as the Tondaiman Rulers and the Kallar Kavalkars belonged to the same community, bringing the aberrant Kallar Kavalkars and Kallar law-breakers under the administration of impartial justice seemed very difficult. Taking this main factor into consideration, the British imported their own system of police administration and the Tondaimans readily obliged.⁴⁴

Thus, the modernized police force was created and other police units of the Maharaja of Pudukkottai Kingdom were strengthened and the protection duties became the responsibility of the modern police officers who became powerful protection authority. So the traditional *Padikaval* system was relived from the *Kaval* system in the Princely State of Pudukkottai. The cooperation of the State and British police facilitated the tracking of the offenders and bringing them to the justice.

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10. 'Moolvis' is a small duty levied at fairs and weekly markets.
11. 'Pagadoa' is a gold coin which was equivalent to Rs.3.50 Naya Paise.
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