



PATHWAYS TO THE DAWN OF THE COLLECTORATE OF TIRUNELVELI

Dr. K. Padmapriya

ABSTRACT:

The advent of the Europeans in the Tamil soil marked a struggle for supremacy among the European Powers. In the struggle, the contest between the French and British was remarkable. These powers involved in the Carnatic and Mysore Wars in the Tamil region. At last, the British were able to win the contest with the assistance of the Nawab of the Carnatic. The southern Poligars as the Hindu military chieftains hated the rule of Muslim Nawab. So they refused to pay their peshcush to the Central Authority. As the Nawab incurred heavy debts in the wake of the Carnatic Wars, they entrusted the Southern Poligar region to the British. It ensured a long tussle between the rebellious poligars and the British since the second half of the Eighteenth Century. To control and crush the rebellious poligars, an effective collectorate under the able collector was felt needful. So the Collectorate of Southern Poligar Peshcush in the beginning and Collectorate of Tirunelveli in later was dawned.



KEYWORDS: Tirunelveli, Collectorate, Southern Poligars, Ramanthapuram, Lushington, Nawab of Carnatic, Carnatic Treaty.

INTRODUCTION

The year 1781 marked a turning point in the annals of Tirunelveli. The Nawab Mohamed Ali and the British signed a Carnatic Treaty. Under this treaty, the British obtained the right to collect all revenues from the Tirunelveli region. The British appointed a Revenue Assignment Committee, composed of six British members, who distributed the revenues to the rentiers and the *peshcush* to the poligars. The British requested funds from the Nawab and rentiers for their territorial expansion and meeting the expenditure of the Carnatic Wars.¹

The British established the South Poligar Region and, under the 1781 Carnatic Treaty, appointed George Proctor as 'Receiver of the Assigned Revenue'.² He was a senior member of the Committee of the Assigned Revenue and also a member of the Madras Audit Department. In this position, he effectively became the first revenue collector of Tirunelveli³, and Colonel Nixon and Captain Eidington were appointed to provide military assistance. The Committee of the Assigned Revenue leased the revenue collection of the Tirunelveli region to the highest bidder. Since the assignment period was five years, the British sought to extract maximum benefits from landowners and renters. Despite the shortcomings, the 'assignment period' offered the British the opportunity to control the administration of the Tirunelveli region.⁴

The Nawab of Arcot lost his power and control to the British. The Poligars, forced by the oppressive tax policy, refused to meet the British revenue demands. Colonel Fullerton succeeded, to a certain extent, in subduing the Poligars.⁵ This alienated them from the Nawab of Arcot.

Meanwhile, Mohammed Ali attempted to revoke the cession. He informed Warren Hastings, the Governor-General of Bengal, of his revenue deficit. When Hastings was , the Governor –General , Macartney the Governor of Madras was not willing to return Tirunelveli to the Nawab but Hastings directed Macartney to return Tirunelveli region again to the Nawab. Following Macartney's order, in 1785, Irwin ceded the Tirunelveli region to the Nawab's '*Amuldars*'.⁶

Once again, through Proclamation, the British East India Company legally assumed authority over the region in 1792.⁷ This incident known as 'Assumption' made the British Authority in a concrete position in Tirunelveli region.⁸ In the same year another Carnatic Treaty was signed which approved the authority of both the Nawab and the British over the Poligar region. Therefore, the Poligars were under the control of dual lords.⁹ Under this dual system of control, the Poligars of the Tirunelveli region were required to pay a certain amount of *peshcush* to the British Collector. They were also required to attend the Nawab's durbar for traditional ceremonies, perform military service, and keep vigil in the village.¹⁰ This allowed the Poligars to retain their Pollams (Palayams) without restriction from either the Nawab of Carnatic or the Collector of Southern Poligar Peshcush.¹¹ Under this agreement, the Board of Revenue appointed Benjamin Torin as collector for the South Poligar region. Torin was supposed to collect revenue from the thirty-four Southern Poligars and the British -controlled *sircar* territory at Tirunelveli.¹²

The Nawab's native officials, such as the *Amuldars* and *Faujders*, led the southern Poligars to believe that the 1792 Carnatic Treaty was merely a temporary measure.¹³ Consequently, the Poligars despised the Collector, who insisted on the immediate payment of a fixed *peshcush*, for which he threatened them with capital punishment.¹⁴ It is true that by this time, the Madras government was looking beyond the Nawab to the Poligars, and began to assume that the southern Poligars were plunderers of the *sicar* revenue.¹⁵ This aggressive attitude of the British led to the Poligar revolts. Among the Poligars who played an important role were Varaguna of Sivagiri and Virapandya Kattabomman of Panjalamkurichi.¹⁶ They rebelled against British authority between 1795 and 1799. However, the British, by virtue of their armed superiority, were able to easily crush this native resistance.¹⁷

Under these circumstances, S.R. Lushington was appointed Collector of Tirunelveli . He assumed office in January 1799 in Ramanathapuram. Acting on his recommendations, the Madras Government sent a powerful military force under Major Bannerman, who attempted to arrest Virapandya Kattabomman, who had formed the Southern Poligar confederation. On October 16, 1799, Kattabomman was hanged at Kayatar.¹⁸ The British took effective measures to consolidate their authority in the rebellious Tirunelveli region.¹⁹

The Treaty of Carnatic of 1801 abolished the authority of the Nawab's rule and recognized the British power in the Carnatic region. The British Government abolished the office of *Amuldar* in Tirunelveli. The need arose for a revenue officer to represent the British . Therefore, the Madras Government ordered S.R. Lushington to move from Ramanathapuram to Tirunelveli. Lushington assumed the post of Collector at Tirunelveli on August 8, 1801.²⁰

By 1801, the Tirunelveli region was completely under British rule. Lushington's role as Collector was originally to collect the *peshcush*. He was given the title 'Receiver of the Assumed Revenue'. In August 8, 1801, Lushington became the full-fledged Collector of Tirunelveli.²¹ He had control of the district's police and prisons. In addition to land revenue and judicial matters, the Collector was responsible for all matters affecting the welfare of the population, such as public works, forestry, sanitation, and education.²² The Poligar rebellions in the south created a critical situation that necessitated the creation of a new Collectorate in Tirunelveli.²³

To conclude, the Collectorate of Tirunelveli was established primarily to suppress the rebellious the Marava and Nayak Poligars and collect land taxes from the them and, later, from the surviving Zamin Estates of the Zamindars by introducing the Zamindari System since 1803 . The process of the collectorate formation commenced in 1781 and ended in 1801.S.R. Lushington earned the name as the first collector of Tirunelveli and at the same time the Collectorate of Southern Poligar Peshcush at Ramanthapuram was abolished . The pollams of Ramanthapuram region were assigned to the Collectorates of Tirunelveli and Madurai . The present collectorate of Ramanthapuram was formed only in 1910.

End Notes and References

1. Rajayyan, K., *History of Madurai, 1736-1801*, Madurai: Madurai University, 1974, p. 286.
2. Caldwell, Bishop, R., *A History of Tinnevely*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1982, p.114
3. Tirunelveli was maintained as Tinnevely in British documents and general usage at that time.
4. Charles Oakelay in Council, 30 January 1793, *Letter to Court of Directors, Political Despatches to England*, Vol. 2, p. 110.
5. Pillai.K.K., *Studies in the History of India with Special Reference to Tamil Nadu*, Madras: Author, 1979, p. 625.
6. William Meadows in Council, 7 August 1790, letter to Board of Assumed Revenue, Proceedings of the Board of Assumed Revenue, Vol. I, p. 19.
7. Rajayyan, K., 'Taxation in Carnatic' in *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. LIII, Pts.I-III, Trivandrum: 1980, p.30.
8. Kumarasami, Selvamuthu, L., 'Formation and Eclipse of the First Collectorate of Ramanathapuram in Tamil Nadu' in *Shodhak*, Vol.32,Jaipur: May-August 2003, p.82.
9. Kumarasami, Selvamuthu, L., *The British Expansion and Internal Resistance in Tirunelveli, 1755-1801*, Ph.D. Thesis, Tirunelveli: Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, 1997, p.221.
10. Hobart in Council, 10 May 1735, letter to Mohammed Ali, Military Country Correspondence, Vol. 46, p. 55.
11. Ibid., 20 September 1794. Political Despatches to England. Vol. 2, pp. 316-318.
12. Rajayyan, K., *Rise and Fall of the Poligars of Tamilnadu*, Madras : University of Madras, 1974, pp.76-79; Fifth Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company, Vol.I, London: J. Higginbotham, 1812, pp.862-910; Muruganantham, C., *Tirunelveli Under the Rule of the Nawabs of Arcot, 1744-1801*, Ph.D. Thesis , Chennai : University of Madras , 2018, pp.2-3
13. Chanderi .S.B., *Civil Disturbances During the British Rule in India 1765 - 1857*, Calcutta: The World Press, 1939, pp. 54-56.
14. Pate, H.R., *Tirunelveli District Gazetteer*, Vol.I Madras : Government Press, 1917, p. 81.
15. Papers Relating to the Treaty with the Nawab of Carnatic, 1802-1870, Madras, p. 8.
16. Edward Clive in Council, August 1801, Political Consultations, Vol. 4, pp. 1050- 1058.
17. Jeyaraj, Varghese , *Zamindari System in Tamil Nadu-Madurai*, Chennai : Pavai Publications, 2009, pp.20-22.
18. Ayyar, Padmanabha, V.S., *A Short Account of Tirunelveli District*, Tinnevely: Palamcottah Printing Press, 1933,p.11.
19. Treaty of Carnatic, 31 July 1801, Secret Consultations, Vol. 13, pp. 786-796.
20. Lushington ,S.R, Settlement Report to the Board of Revenue, 28 May 1802, Madras, p.10.
21. Pate, H.R., *op.cit*, p.318.
22. Warner, W.L., *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. IV, (Administrative.) Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907, pp. 50-56.
23. William Bentinck in Council, letter to the Court of Directors, 16 October 1804, Revenue Despatch from England, Vol.3., pp. 242-246.