

Ekoji's Conquest Of Tanjore

Dr. P. Suresh Kumar

Ph.D. in History

Pinakkal Vilai, Chitharal Post, Kanyakumari District - 629151

Abstract

The period during 1676-79 A.D was the most significant period in the history of Tanjore. During this period Tanjore witnessed a transfer of power from one dynasty to another. In order to establish the Maratha rule on a firm footing in Tanjore the beings worked for the reduction of local powers. They sought the alliance of one power or the others, frequently changed sides, intervened in the domestic troubles and palace intrigues and became undependable to all local powers. This paper seeks to highlight the defeat of Alagiri Nayak by Ekoji in the battle of Ayyampet and crowning of Changamaladas. The battle at Ayyampet was historically important for it vanquished one dynasty and enabled the Marathas to set up their rule on the ruins of the Nayak dynasty 1676 A.D.

Keywords: *Tanjore, Dynasty, Battle of Ayyampet, Defeat, Succession*

In the history of the Carnatic, Tanjore, by *virtue* of its political status and economic resources, had a significant role. After the disintegration of the Chole Empire, it came under the Rajas of Vijayanagar, the Nayaks and finally the Marathas in succession. The Marathas stepped in by 1676 A.D taking advantage of the Chaotic condition that prevailed under the Nayaks. Because of the fluctuations of fortune, its frontiers never remained constant. However, by 1730 the boundaries were settled around the delta of river Kaveri. It was bounded on the North by River Caleroon, separating it from Acrot. On the West it was bounded by the Kingdoms of Trichinopoly and Pudukottai and on the South by Ramnad. On the East the Bay of Bengal gave a natural boundary. The years 1676-79 A.D was the

most significant period in the history of Tanjore. During this period Tanjore witnessed a transfer of power from one dynasty to another. In order to establish the Maratha rule on a firm footing in Tanjore the Marathas worked for the reduction of local powers. They sought the alliance of one power or the others, frequently changed sides, intervened in the domestic troubles and palace intrigues and became undependable to all local powers. This self imposed policy of the Marathas and their inability to have independent diplomatic skill, dragged Tanjore into trouble for the coming years.

The conflict between Alagiri and Chokkanatha invited foreign intervention in Tanjore. The followers of the fallen Nayak understood the situation and hoped to regain their lost kingdom. They sought the support of the Bijapur Sultan. Adilshah, the Bijapur Sultan, considered it as an opportunity to expand his influence in the far South and hence directed his general Venkoji Alias Ekoji on an expedition to Tanjore. Ekoji defeated Alagiri Nayak in the battle of Ayyampet and crowned Changamaladas. The battle at Ayyampet was historically important for it vanquished one dynasty and enabled the Marathas to set up their rule on the ruins of the Nayak dynasty 1676 A.D. the establishment of Maratha rule in Tanjore stood a check to the expansionist policy of the Wallajahs and the Nayayets towards the far South. It also created a new set up in the administrative history of Tanjore.

The rule of Chengamaladas did not last long. The supporters of Changamaladas were not satisfied with his rule because he did not satisfy their ambitions. One such person was Ragunathapant. He advised Ekoji, who was then at Cumbakonam, to take an attempt on Tanjore. During this time Adilshah, the Bijapure Sultan was also dead. Making use of this opportunity, Ekoji occupied Tanjore in 1676 and thus established the Maratha rule in Tanjore. Then the hardy warriors of the Western ghats settled down on the plains of Tanjore. They had no serious opposition, but gained control of a wealthy people to rule over and obtained possession of a rich country to support them. However, as time went on, they sunk into luxury and easy living. Ekoji reorganised the administration with

the help of the officers be brought to Deccan. Ekoji sought to make himself beloved by the people. The justices and wisdom of his government began to heal the wounds of the preceding reign and to develop the natural resources of the country. By repairing the canals and tanks, he gave fertility to the vast fields which had been left unutilized for many years and the last harvest has surpassed all that was seen before.

In 1700, a war broke out between the King of Tanjore Shaji and Ranimangammal the Madurai queen. In this war, the Marathas allied with Setupati and attacked Tanjore. Tanjore was at the verge of defeat. But Bavaji alias Baloji bribed the enemy and obtained peace soon the Aurn of the events changed the course of the alliances. The dispute over the Kaveri water dragged Nandi Raja of Mysore and the King of Tanjore to a war. In this juncture Ranimangammal joined the side of Shaji. But luckily the dam gave way and a major war was averted. The Setupati of Ramnad could not tolerate the alliance of Trichinopoly and Tanjore. Hence, Kilanvan Setupati attacked Ranimangammal and routed her troops. He also captured Arantangi from Tanjore. Thus the shifting of alliance at the convenience of the local powers dragged them to a triangular contest. Shaji passed away in 1712.

Shahji's brother Sarfoji I succeeded him. He followed his great brother in all internal and external affairs of his kingdom. The intervention of Sarfoji in the internal affairs of Ramnad, seeking territorial gains started a long period of conflict between Tanjore and the Marathas and the other local powers. This self imposed policy and the lack of diplomatic skill dragged them into serious trouble. The end of the seventeenth century, the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, diverted his attention towards the South. The Maratha King Shahu extended his aid to his cousin Rajaram to route out the Mughals. However, Tanjore did not escape the degradation of Zulifirkhan, the Mughal General. He levied military contributions of 4 lakhs of rupees in 1691. In 1694, he further increased the demand and King Shahji paid it. In the same year Madurai and Tanjore formed an alliance against the design of Chikkadeva Raya, the Mysore King. With a view of taking

vengeance, the King of Mysore constructed a dam across River Kavery and exposed the lands of the allies to drought and famine, but due to torrential rain the dam gave way. In the contest between Madurai and Ramnad, the 1698, King Shahji assisted by Kilavan Setupati of Ramnad in return for Pattukottai, broke his earlier alliance. Narasappayya, the Madura General, attacked the combined forces. With a view to weakening Ramnad, King Shahji revived his alliance with Madura and betrayed Setupati. In 1709, the Setupati of Ramnad attacked him and inflicted a crushing defeat. Shahji sued for peace, but the capture of the fort of Arantangi from Tanjore ended the war.

The Kingdoms which lay to the South of Tanjore (Ramnad and Pudukottai) were weak. Madurai offered the Marathas no scope of expansion in the South King Sarfoji I (1712-1728) intervened in the affairs of Ramnad and started a long period of struggle with that Marava State. About 1724, two rival claimants for the Kingdom of Ramnad, Tanda Tevan and Bhavani Sankarah, contested for the throne of Ramnad on the death of Vijaya Regunata. Sarfoji I, took up the cause of Bhavani Sankaran and Madurai fought on the side of Tanda Tevar. In the battle that ensued, the allies killed Tanda Tevar and routed the Madurai forces. As a reward to his service, Sarfoji I, received a part of the Marava territory, soon Sarfoji I joined the side of Katta Tevar, uncle of Tanda Tevar with a view to get more territory. Sarfoji I exthroned Katta Tevar and added more territories to his country.

The accession of Tukkoji (1728-1736), the Marathas followed a more aggressive policy towards the Marava country. Tukkoji decided to reduce the Marava territory. With the motive of engrossing the whole of Ramnad, he championed the cause of Bavani Sankaran, then a prisoner at Tanjore. In 1734, the Tanjore forces advanced into the Marava country and captured most of the states and besieged Tirumayam where the Tondaiman of Pudukottai took his last stand. Hearing this, the Setupati of Ramnad sent his troops for the aid of Tondaiman. But in the meanwhile the forces of Chanda Sahib, the commander of the Carnatic

Nawab threatened Tanjore and hence withdrew and intercepted the forces of Chand Sahip and defeated it.

On the death of Tukkoji, there was succession issue that disrupted the smooth functioning of the administration. Overcoming the opposition, Pratap Singh took over the administration his rule was an important period in the history of Carnatic. It was during his period a civil war broke out in the country. Following the civil war, first Carnatic war broke out. These wars converted Tanjore into the cocopit of the Carnatic. The difference between the Wallajahs and Neveyats were settled in Tanjore. The political and commercial rivalry between the French and the English were settled in the soil of Tanjore. In all these contests, Tanjore was unnecessarily dragged into the war. Pratap Singh used all his energy, men and materials to safeguard the interest of Tanjore. He used all the diplomatic tactic to withstand the pressure of the enemies. But the finance of the country was going had to worse. Hence Pratap Singh used all his energy, men and materials to safeguard the interest of Tanjore. He used all the diplomatic tactics to withstand the pressure of the enemies. But the finance of the country was going had to worse. Hence Pratap Singh succumbed to the pressure of the English. On feeling sad, growing weak and much worried in mind the reputed king breathed his last in 1763. His death quickened the process of occupation of Tanjore by British by forcing many treaties on the successors of Pratap Singh and swallowed the Whole Kingdom.

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