

## Poligars In Tirunelveli Region

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### ABSTRACT

Tamil Nadu the Southern most part of India played a remarkable role in the freedom struggle. The freedom fighters in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries became the pioneers and the earliest torch-bearers of freedom struggle. They were none other than Pulithevar, Khan Sahib, Kattabomman, Oomathurai and Marudhu brothers

**Keywords:** torch-bearers, sovereign, coalition, Proclamation, native chieftains

### INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the Palayam was an epoch making event which directed the course of the history of the Southern district in general and Tinnevely in particular. The emergence of auxiliary powers in Tamil Nadu was not the product of monarchical weakness but they simply co-existed along with major powers. The native chieftains otherwise known as Poligars played an auxiliary role since the days of the Pandya Kingdom. The Pandyas who were defeated in the fourteenth century by Muslim invaders were again able to reestablish their dynastic rule. With the decline of the Pandyas, the establishment of the Nayak rule defined the duties and responsibilities of the chieftains. Many of the Poligars were drawn from the ranks of the Telugu Nayak military leaders. Others belonged to the Maravar community, a traditional warrior community in the Tamil Country. Viswanatha and Ariyanath organized the whole country for effective administration. One of the important measures were taken by them, the organization of the district into 'Palayam' or Pollams which later under the British, played a vital role both for and against the British administration. Palayakaran (Poligars) was in charge of each Palayams.

The Nayak period witnessed rise of a political order called the Poligari System similar in character to the "Nayankara system". Palayam in Tamil and Palamu in Telugu literally meant an armed camp. The duties of the Poligars in regard to the payment of tribute, the sovereign, administration of Justice in their districts and maintenance of troops for the service of the king corresponded with those of the feudal barons of Medieval Europe, but differed considerably from these of the Jagirdars and the Zamindars of Mughal India. The Nayaks divided the area into Palayams for the collection of taxes and for security purposes. The Palayams were put under local chiefs, most of them were Nayaks and Maravas spread their domain and the Arcot. Among the important Palayams were Ramanathapuram, Sivaganga, Wodayarpalayam, Ariyalur and Panchalamkurichi

Poligars divided themselves into Pro- British group. Ettappa Kayak of Ettayapuram headed the former group while Veera Pandya Kattabomman of Panchalamkurichi was prominent among the latter group.

#### The Eastern and Western Poligars in Tirunelveli

Certain circumstances helped the Palayakkars to organize themselves against the company. The Dutch fearing danger to their commercial activities in the district due to growing East India Company's influence there, offered help to the rebel Poligars of Tirunelveli. Hyder Ali and the French also were in a position to aid the Poligars. These factors contributed to the formation of hostile coalitions, the eastern and western Poligars. While Kattabomman led the coalition of the eastern Poligars and the Dutch, Pulithevar led the coalition of the western counter parts were helped by Hyder Ali and the French

The provincial Eastern Poligars were the chiefs of Panchalamkurichi, Ettayapuram, and Kulattur, mailmandai, Kudalkudi, Nagalapuram, Sattur and Kolarpatti. The important western Poligars were the chiefs of Nelkattan Seval, Sivagiri, Wadagara, Singampatti, Uthumalai and Surandai. All these Palayams were in the area now Tirunelveli district

### **Tirunelveli - The capital of Southern Poligars**

The Poligars of the far South were acting as petty rulers of the region with Tirunelveli as capital during 18<sup>th</sup> century and before. The year 1781 witnessed an important change in the history of their rule when the British East India Company signed a treaty with Nawab Mohammad Ali of the Carnatic. The treaty entitled the East India Company to collect whole revenues of Tinnevely region.

After this treaty the East India Company declared its supremacy in the Carnatic region utilizing the weakness of the Nawabs. The treaty finally resulted in the cessation of Poligars rule in the Tinnevely region where they had been resisting the influence of the British in the political area. However the whole confrontation between the East India Company and the Poligars of Tinnevely region resulted in the Poligar rebellion. With the British asserting their power by force of arms, the Poligars as a political force became irrelevant.

The British formed the Southern Poligars and a separate collectorate was created for the Southern Poligars in 1790. Their duties to the Nawab entitled the Poligars to maintain their armed strength and their obligation to the Collector entitled them to hold possession of their respective Palayams. This helped the Poligars to retain their influence in the region.

### **Prominent Poligars in Tirunelveli region**

The Poligars in South India stood against the supremacy of the company administration. Among them, the most famous was Marudhu Pandyan, the Poligars of Sivagangai who organized the South Indian confederacy.

Pulithevar remains one of the illustrious figures in the history of the Poligars. He was exceptionally heroic and the first Poligar to take arms against the British in the South. Nelkattumseval was the head quarters of Pulithevar. Pulithevar may be regarded as the first South Indian ruler who sowed seed by his gallant resistance to expel the foreigners from the soil even before Kattabomman revolt of 1799, South Indian revolt of 1800 and Sepoy Mutiny of 1857.

Varaguna of Sivagiri, Pulithevar, and Veera Pandya Kattabomman of Panchalamkurichi and Marudhu Pandyan of Sivaganga played an important role in protesting the Collectors authority. They revolted and defied the British rule in the region during 1795-1799. Veera Pandya Kattabomman was the master mind for the formation of the Southern Poligars confederacy. He was hanged to death in a tamarind tree at the old Kayathar fort. The death of Kattabomman brought an end to the revolt of Poligars in Tinnevely region.

Aftermath of this, the Company took bold measures and consolidated its authority in the region. The Treaty of Carnatic in 1801 completely stopped the interference of the Nawab in the affairs of the Southern Poligars. The Government also nullified the post of Amuldar in Tinnevely region at the end of the Nawab rule. Thus the whole Tinnevely region came under the rule of the Company from 1801. Edward Clive, the Governor of Madras issued a proclamation on December 1<sup>st</sup> 1801. It granted general amnesty to all the surviving chieftains who extended their support to the rebellion and abolished the Palayam. After that the Zamindari system was implemented which promised to honour the rights of property, wages and customs of the inhabitants. After in 1801, the Poligars were in no mood to rebel. They became the Zamindars, the renters of the land subject to the payment of fixed revenue to the British offer. In 1803 the implementation of the Zamindars system was completed and the Poligars were transformed into a class of Zamindars

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