

EARLY FRENCH SETTLEMENT IN PONDICHERRY

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Abstract: The union territory of 'Pondicherry' Comprises of four regions namely 'Pondicherry, who were the last to settle in pondicherry. However the Genius of the Frenchmen enabled them to cope up with the European rivals. Francois Martin is often acclaimed as the founder of Pondicherry. But even before his arrival, Pondicherry was a famous cloth centre and also had a good port. The English records mention that the pindaris, after the capture of Gingee, had plundered the cloth port of Pondicherry in 1648. His perseverance, his gentleness with the natives, his fair dealing all contributed to the real foundation of the settlement at Pondicherry. The fruits of his excellent rule were fully realized in the time of his successors.

Key words : 'Pondicherry', Europe, Francois Martin

Introduction

The French were the last comers of the Europeans and the French East India Company was started in 1664. The French East India Company was a government Company and famous rulers of French like Louis XIV and the French finance ministers, Jean Colbert and others made a series of efforts to establish and develop its trade in India because other European settlers used to sell the Indian Pepper and spices in Europe. Their early wars ended in failure and fiasco and after their settlement in Pondicherry in 1674, the French Governor and his associates wages wars with the British which was so powerful on the coromandal coast.

Sources

The study is made out of Primary sources collected from Archives and Pondicherry Archives, Besides some important libraries, the connemera Public Library, University of Madras Library, University of Pondicherry Library, Manual of Administration of the Madras Presidency by C.D. Maclean, 1885, Vol-I & II. The formation of French East India Company and the settlement of Pondicherry in 1674 are also explained.

Early French settlement in Pondicherry

The French were the last settlers on the coromandal coast and they could find it very difficult to make their settlement because the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British made their holdings on the coromandal coast.¹

The peaceful and prosperous reign of Hendry IV opened out a new prospect. On June 1, 1604 a company was established under the king's letters patent, granting it an exclusive trade for fifteen years.² In 1616 it fitted out two ships under the command of De Nets, and only naval officer, but it did not bear any fruits. Encouraged by the result of this first effort, the company equipped another expedition of three ships in 1619

under the command of Beaulieu. This expedition reached the island of Sumatra. In 1642, Richelieu, the Finance Minister made some efforts of the voyage. The first French vessel equipped by the French India Company reached Madagascar in the summer of 1642.³

Louis XIV, the king of France, issued an edict which was to form the basic constitution of the company on August 27, 1664. The Capital of the Company was divided into 15,000 shares of 1000 lives each.⁴ The Company was granted the exclusive privilege of trade in the East for fifty years and was to be managed by a general chamber of twenty one directors. It also received a perpetual grant of Madagascar and the neighbouring islands, on condition of promoting Christianity there. The king was to pay it a bounty of fifty lives on every ton of goods exported from the country.⁵

In South India, the French made a series of efforts to establish its supremacy by means of wars and diplomacy. It made an attempt to establish its rule on St. Thome by means of wars. The French occupation of Santhome lasted a little over two years.⁶ It divided itself into two active, sieges, separated by three months of passivity. A lot of confusion was confronted in Santhome by the French, the Dutch and the English. In 1669, the French obtained permission from the King of Golconda to establish a trading depot at Masulipatnam. From Masulipatnam only the French attacked the Santhome territory. The Dutch and the English were struggling against the French in all the directions. The place Santhome was the bone of contention. After a long struggle, Santhome became a bone of Contention.⁷

The settlement of the French in Pondicherry in 1674 is an important event in the History of India. After making a number of wars with other European settlers in India, the French finally made Pondicherry the capital and important place in India. Gova for the Portuguese, Fort. St. George for the British and Pondicherry became the headquarter of the French settlement in India.⁸ The early Tamil literature mentions two territorial divisions in the northern part of the Tamil country namely Aruvanadu and Aruvavatalainadu.¹⁸ This Aruvanadu covered the region between the Gadilam and Ponnaiyar in which were included the Pondicherry territory besides Marakkanam and Tindivanam in the South Arcot District. Pallava King Nripatungavarman had mentioned about the territory Pondicherry.⁹

After the fall of the Cholas, the Pandyas took the lead and Pondicherry territory became a part and parcel of its rule. The famous rulers, Sundara Panya, Kulasekara Pandya had established their rule in Karaikal also. During the reign of Pandyas the Muslim rulers in the north invaded the territory of Pondicherry.¹⁰ Then Muslims established their supremacy in South India and followed the policy of attacks and annexation.

The ruler of the Sangama dynasty of Vijayanager Mallikarjuna Raya (1147 - 1465) and Virupeska (1465 - 1485) rulers extend their sovereignty over Pondicherry territory.¹¹

The Muslim army was however driven back and order was restored in the devastated region. After the fall of the Vijayanagar rule, Pondicherry became a bone of contention among the European settlers and the native rulers who made many attempts to defeat the French force in wars.¹²

Among the French settlers Francois Martin was considered an important personality in the matter of establishing Pondicherry. In 1665, he joined as an under merchant in the French East India Company.

Appreciating his service, M. De La Faye, the Director of the French East India Company promoted him to the rank of merchant. At Surat he tried his best to improve the trading activities of the factory. 13

Francois Martin landed Pondicherry with sixty French men on 15th January 1674. Baron succeeded Lespondary as the Director of the Pondicherry Factory. On the death of Caron, Baron went to Surat to assume charge as the Director General of French Commerce in India. Then Francois Martin became the director of the Pondicherry factory of 5th May 1675.14

Francois Martin was considered as the father of Pondicherry because he laid the foundation for its establishment. On July 17, news arrived at Pondicherry of a treaty signed between Sher Khan and Shivaji by which the former ceded all the territories under his jurisdiction.15 ON the same day, two Maratha officers arrived at Pondicherry for administration of the French colony. In spite of Maratha depredations all around and the collection of forced levies from the inhabitants of Pondicherry, when the French ship 'La Vierge' called in at the Port in 1680, it was able to secure cargo worth Rs.50,000 consisting mostly of textile goods.16

Francois Martin was appointed as the Director of the Company which might trade and he left Surat for Pondicherry on May 1, 1688. Then M. Pilavoine became the Director of the Surat factory. Francois Martin devoted himself to the task of consolidation as well as expanding the French settlements in India. He strove hard to improve the trading activities of the company even in the face of famine, pestilence and war. On July 15, 1688, his envoy Collande secured from the ruler of Tanjore the village of Kaveripatnam and the settlement was founded there in December.17 The European powers particularly the Dutch and the English wanted to destroy the existence of the French by means of wars. Both of them made conducts with the native powers to curb and curtail the position and status of the French were in a rather safe, if not in a strong position.

Francois entertained the idea of allying with the Raja of Tanjore and even advocated to the home authorities to attack the Dutch at the Cape of Good Hope and at Batavia. He dreamt of establishing the commercial and political supremacy of the French in India. In his letter to Delagny, Francois Martin said that the enemies, the English and the Dutch, were in their last stage of weakness and to attack and to Vanquish them, was almost a certainly.18

Francois Martin began to evince keen interest in improving the trade and in strengthening the defences of Pondicherry. But that time, Pondicherry had become an important city and Francois Martin had silver coins of half-panams, and double panams minted there in 1700. The amount 10,000 pagodas in gold were also minted by the Company in 1706. In appreciation of his services in India, Martin was granted the order of St. Lazarus and Mount Carmel.19

The Nawab denoted Oz hukarai, Murungappakkam, Olandai, Pakkamudiyampet and Kavuvadikkuppam. Pondicherry was now a sizable establishment with 700 Europeans and 30,000 Indians of whom 2,000 were Christians. In the meanwhile, trade in Surat was under decline and Frenchmen were subjected to harassment by their creditors on land and the pirates at sea. Pondicherry at the same time grew to become a

flourishing trading centre.²⁰ This prompted the issue of Edit Royal of February in 1701 which transferred the Conseil Souverain from Surat to Pondicherry with Francois Martin as its president.²¹

In 1703, Dawood Khan, the first Nawab of the Carnatic, granted the French a small village called kalapet, which was to supply timber from the forests surrounding it for construction of houses. Francois Martin constructed a great fort called Fort St. Louis following plan of the famous Vauban for the Tournai fort.²⁵ Father Tachard declared that the fort was going to be one day the stronghold of Christian religion and the foundation of the French empire in India. The opening ceremony of the fort on August 25, 1706 was the last public function attended by the first French Governor of Pondicherry, Francois Martin. He died at the age of 72 on December 31, 1706.²²

In 1752 Yanam and Masulipatnam, which the French had two years before seized, were definitely ceded by the Nizam, together with a large extent of territory. Two Governors-General of the French establishments in India, Dumas and Dupleix, contributed greatly from 1735 to 1754 to the prosperity of these possessions.²⁷ The town of Pondicherry, the Government of which was confided to the same officer in 1740, was equally indebted to him. It was under his Government that the French possessions and power in the East Indies attained their greatest extent.²³

After the establishment of Pondicherry in 1674, religion and social set up grew rapidly in Pondicherry. Different things of Christian faith found its settlement in Pondicherry.²⁴ The Charter of 1664 had bestowed the Royal French Indian Company perpetual concessions over Madagascar and the neighbouring islands on condition that it should promote the Catholic faith in these areas. Thus the company was inclined towards evangelical work right from its inception.²⁵

The Jesuits arrived in Pondicherry in 1675 and by 15th August 1692, they had established a church in Pondicherry with a centre attached to it where students from Bengal, Madras, Philippines, Surat and Ispahan were brought to learn Latin Philosophy and Theology.³¹ British and Dutch administration in South India paved the way for the development of Christianity in Pondicherry.²⁶

During the 18th Century Pondicherry followed the policy of wars in South India and it considered English as its potential enemy. In order to expand its territory in South India it made alliance with the native ruling families and attacked the English.²⁷ It conducted three Carnatic wars with the English and Dupleix became the Master of the Carnatic wars.²⁸

Conclusion

The French were the Last European settlers in India particularly in South India. The French formed the French East India Company in 1664 and it was a government Company formed by Louis XIV, the famous ruler of French. European settlers in India the French finally made Pondicherry as the Capital in 1674 and important place in India.

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